

CHAPTER 6



COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

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OVERVIEW

The beginning tools laid out in this section are communication, listening, and guides for productive meetings. Listening to what others have to say and clearly telling them what we discern to be God's message are key ingredients to being an effective Lay Leader. The following papers give, in some detail, factors in which we believe to be important in these areas.

You will have ample opportunity to be involved in meetings. That's an understatement! Helping them to be thorough but brief, with meaningful outcomes is another vital role of the Lay Leader.

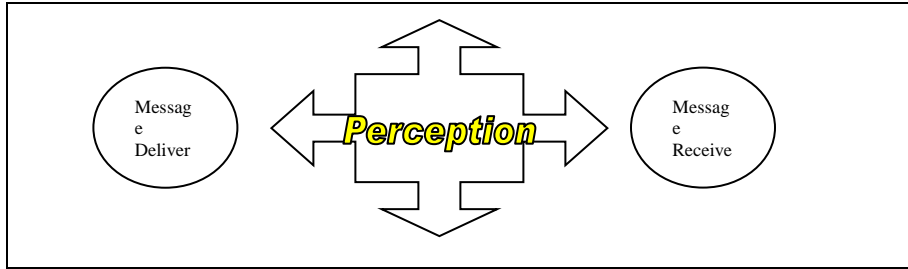
Effective Communication

Lay Leaders, by virtue of their job description in the Book of Discipline, must become excellent communicators to be effective in their positions. The good news is, most Lay Leaders were recommended for their position because of their recognized communication and leadership skills, in addition to their desire to be of greater service in their Church.

Today's society focuses on efficiency, productivity and results. This focus challenges our ability to communicate effectively because communication, by necessity, requires the building of relationships between the persons communicating. By shifting our focus from efficient to effective communication, we acknowledge that the time spent on both internal and external communications is necessary and worthwhile in establishing these relationships, which in turn will encourage and support the ministry of the entire Church. (1)

I. Three Components of Communication

Effective communication occurs when the message intended by the Deliverer is understood in like manner by the Recipient and appropriate action or response is initiated. Communication includes three components; 1.) Message Delivery, 2.) Message Receipt and 3.) Perception. If either the delivery of the message or the receipt of the message is missing, communication has not taken place.



Perception is the frame of reference through which the message is delivered/received. It is how both the Message Deliverer and the Message Receiver see the world, and greatly impacts our feelings, beliefs and behavior. Perception is most often the root of communication problems. (2)

Acquiring the attitudes and behaviors listed below can be used by any communicator to solve almost all perception problems. (3)

Attitudes:

1. Assume good faith. Agree you will not question the sincerity of the speaker/listener.
2. Care about the relationship. Seek to understand the point of view of all parties involved.
3. Be open to being influenced and the opportunity of being changed.

Behaviors:

1. Listen to understand
2. Speak to be understood
3. Start dialogue from a common point of reference or point of agreement and move slowly to areas of disagreement. (3)

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1. Best Communications: Effective Communications, BBest.Com. Pg. 1
 2. Principal Centered Leadership; Covey, Stephen; copyright 1991; pg. 109.
 3. Ibid. pg. 110

II. Common Types of Communication

There are a variety of communication types, however, the four listed below are most often recognized and used in the settings for which the Lay Leader will be involved.

Common Types of Communication

1. Listening
2. Speaking
3. Writing
4. Visualization

A. Listening Communication

One of the most important facets of effective communications is good listening. Good listening requires putting aside your own personal needs and refraining from evaluating or judging the speaker. There are different levels of listening attentiveness, ranging from total listening to total non-listening. Several categories of listening are identified below (4).

Categories of Listening (5)

- a. Attentive Listening – Listening without interrupting or passing of judgment. Allowing others the right to talk.
- b. Active Listening – Responding to the message being delivered by reflecting to the Message Deliverer and other participants what you heard being said, or your perception of what the Message Deliverer is feeling. Becoming a mirror by reflecting content, i.e. paraphrasing what you heard.
- c. Empathetic Listening – Using the attentive and active listening skills of a. and b. when others have a problem that doesn't directly involve you, but for which you wish to be caring and helpful. Empathetic listening avoids trying to solve the speaker's problems, but seeks to help the speaker identify the solution for their problem themselves.
- d. Non-Defensive Listening – Using the attentive & active listening skills of a. and b. to get other to express their upset ness to you so you can get them to refocus on the issues rather than their feelings. Non-defensive listening seeks to 'clear the air', and then move beyond feelings to specific examples and actions for resolution.

Example – Use of the four types of listening skills:

Speaker – “You are not being fair.”

Attentive Listener: “Let's talk about it.”

Active Listener: “You think my decision is unfair, what specifically is unfair?”

Empathetic Listener: “Sounds like you are really upset with me.”

Non-Defensive Listener: “Sounds like you are really upset with me. What specific aspect of my decision do you think is unfair?”

Listening roadblocks discount others' opinions, needs and feelings, often causing an escalation rather than a diffusion of personal feelings and emotions. When roadblocks to active/attentive listening are first initiated, the leader should redirect the discussion through the use of appropriate positive listening questions and/or statements.(6)

Roadblocks to Effective Listening

- a. Paralleling: Telling your experience instead of listening to others.
- b. Giving Advice: Moralizing (starts out trying to be helpful, ends up nagging)
- c. Inappropriate Questioning: Draws focus away from the issue of discussion and adds irrelevant issues/facts.
- d. Judgmental: Jumping to conclusions and inferences
- e. Defensive: Focus becomes finger pointing and finding fault.

We have been taught to speak, we need to learn to listen and understand. We need to believe in and seek avenues to establish win-win solutions by focusing on needs and interests over wants and positions. (7)

B. Oral Communication – Speaking

Speaking is necessary to be able to communicate your thoughts and ideas. The ability to speak publicly is not innate, it is a learned skill and practice is required to be an effective speaker. If you have a fear of or difficulty in speaking in front of a group, joining Toastmaster's, taking a public speaking class or practicing in front of a mirror will help you gain the experience you need.

Three Components of Public/Oral Speaking: (8)

- **Verbal – Words spoken, Content of message**
- **Vocal Tone - Tone and loudness of voice**
- **Visual – Facial expression, posture and body movements**

Choose your words carefully to obtain the greatest degree of understanding. Remember, your desire is to gain something from the audience you are addressing, so speak their language clearly and concisely. Your tone and the loudness of your voice should be appropriate to the size of audience and the subject. Speaking in a small, intimate group requires a informal, friendly tone of limited intensity. Speaking before a larger group without a microphone would require a stronger voice tone. Always use words for which there is a common understanding, and, if new terminology is required, explain it in the simplest terms possible.

Facial expressions, hand gestures, and body language speak louder to your audience than your words. If your goal is to enlist support, encourage participation, and gain understanding, it is essential the participants feel confident their views will be valued,

given proper respect and consideration. As you hope to influence them, it is important that your audience sees that you are also open to being influenced by their input.

6. Are you listening? United Methodist Board of Laity Material. Effective Listening Skills. Pg. 20.

7. Best Communications: Effective Communications, BBest.Com. Pg. 1

8. Iowa State Dept. of Education; Effective Communications; Chapter 40; pg. 2

Dos & Don'ts of Oral Speaking (9)

DO:

1. Use good grammar
2. Use readily understandable vocabulary – Do not seek to overwhelm but to share and create understanding
3. Distinguish fact versus personal opinion.
4. Use visuals – These are guides, use words or phrases on the slides, not full sentences – Keep them simple.
5. Take your presentation seriously – determine specific message goals, prioritize, organize & practice
6. Face the audience & maintain eye contact.
7. Remember the 'KISS' principle – Keep It Simple and Straight Forward
8. Make the subject interesting if possible – Passion adds dimension
9. Dress appropriately
10. Involve the audience if possible
11. Speak up – make sure you can be heard in the back of the room
12. Make sure visuals are readable from the back of the room

DON'T

1. Read from notes
2. Memorize your presentation – forgetting one word can throw your entire presentation off
3. Play with an object – in your hands or with keys in your pocket
4. Use slang, jargon or offensive illustrations

Remember the first set of rules for public speaking:

<p>1st Set of Rules of Public Speaking:</p> <hr/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Tell them what you are going to tell them.➤ Tell them about it.➤ Tell them what you have told them.

The second sets of rules for public speaking are equally important:

2nd Set of Rules for Public Speaking:

- Stand up to be seen.
- Speak up to be heard
- Set down to be appreciated

9. Iowa State Dept. of Education; Effective Communications; Chapter 40; pg. 10-11

C. Written Communication

There are three common reasons for written communication; 1.) To inform; 2.) To request and 3.) To persuade. Lay Leaders will be called upon to do written communications for all three reasons. The use of "Email" is widely accepted by clergy and laity as an often-acceptable means of written communications. However, do not assume everyone has email, or that they routinely access and read email, this is often not the case. Whenever you make use of this electronic communication method, make sure you have email addresses of all the persons with which you wish to communicate, and you have their authorization to communicate with them in this manner.

Writing should be directed at a specific audience. Wording, concepts and phrases used in writing should be appropriate to the age and educational level of your audience. Good grammar is essential, as is spelling and appearance. Understand what your goal is in writing your message and what your desired response/goal is for your audience. Your first paragraph should define the reason for the communication. (11)

Your writing should be accurate, clear and concise. Reduce complexity through careful and logical organization of your content. Make a list of your major points and make sure they are presented in logical order. (12)

Plan your document by developing an initial draft, which covers the material points and summarizes your results. Begin with the easiest to write portions and work toward the harder portions. Edit, Edit, Edit. (13)

Pay attention to significant elements. Intellectual property is important and should not be violated. Give credit where credit is due. Number your pages if there is more than one page. (14)

D. Visual Communication

The saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words,” so the use visuals when appropriate can add dimension and pizzazz to your presentation. Keep your visuals simple. They should get the point across with little explanation on your part. If they are not readable from the back of the room, they are too complex.

Don't include visuals just for the sake of having visuals – they should either contribute to your presentation to make it easier for you to be understood – or they should be left out. (10)

Summary

Effective leaders are effective because of their ability to successfully communicate a combination of the passion held for their convictions, and solid arguments in support of those convictions. The objectives of leadership – winning people over, building cooperation, getting the right people involved – are achievable through effective communications. (15) The Local Church Lay Leader plays a key leadership role in communicating to the congregation new opportunities for ministry and training, in working as mediator in resolving conflict and restoring the Church family to wholeness and finally in supporting the Church pastor as a trusted lay representative. As Disciples of Christ it is our mission to ‘communicate’ to the world the greatest gift ever given – the saving grace of Jesus Christ – to the entire world. Finally, Christ gave us the very best examples of effective communication through his use of common themes and parables, in word and visual presentation, to communicate to those around Him. We have no better example than to follow His lead implicitly.

10. Iowa State Dept. of Education; Effective Communications; Chapter 40; pg. 12

11. Iowa State Dept. of Education; Effective Communications; Chapter 40; pg. 7.

12. Ibid; pg. 8.

13. Ibid; pg. 9

14. Ibid; pg. 9

15. Effective Leadership Through Effective Communications; Matheson, Duncan; June 3, 2003

EFFECTIVE LISTENING

The list of skills necessary for one to be an effective Lay Leader is long and varied. One trait that always seems to make the ‘top three list’ is listening. Bishop Blake taught on the importance of all church leaders being servant leaders, focusing on the needs of others. It follows that servant leaders must listen to others. We must develop and nurture the ability to truly hear what others say to us.

A significant reference in the following thoughts on how to become an effective listener is two chapters from the evangelism training manual "Grow Your Faith and Give it Away", written by Dr. Woody Davis, while he served as Teacher of Evangelism for the Oklahoma Conference in the 1990's. His theory is that effective evangelism is 80 - 90 % and 10 - 20 % telling. The same principle applies to Lay Leadership. The people whom we called to lead will not listen to us unless they believe they have themselves been heard. We've all had conversations in which we realize that the person to whom we are talking has mentally left the conversation. They may be face to face with us but their mental focus is miles away. We've also had conversations in which it was clear that we were being heard, that our mind, heart, and soul was "in sync", truly synchronized with the other person. The following is an attempt to identify factors, which help people become effective listeners.

First, one must CONCENTRATE on the person to whom they are talking. At this moment in time, this person receives our undivided, complete attention. Christ did this when He'd been called to Lazarus' bedside and, while passing through a crowd, the woman with longstanding issue of blood-touched garment. He turned, and amidst the crowd, gave the woman His undivided attention. This involves removing the barriers of noise (internal and external distractions that decrease our attentiveness). It means removing our personal concerns, setting aside the many self-centered issues that constantly try to pull us away from connecting with this person to whom we are talking. Christ, when faced with the ultimate sacrifice on the on the cross, set that aside momentarily and had a wonderful teaching moment with the disciples when He washed their feet. Avoid mental rabbit running. This occurs when the person across from us says something that triggers an interesting thought in our minds. Our temptation is to chase that thought, taking us completely away from concentrating on what the person is saying.

Second, one must exercise CONTROL. This simply means knowing when to speak and when to be silent. Our minds can work faster than the other person's mouth and we interrupt and finish their thought in mid sentence. Or we are uncomfortable with silence. Often the other person's deepest thoughts follow a period of silence. Christ often asked questions of the disciples then allowed them time to think and grapple amongst themselves for an answer.

Third, one must COMPREHEND what the other person is saying. Challenges to this include information overload (receiving much more information than we need or can process). Christ got to the heart of the matter when approached by the rich young ruler, who went into a major discourse about all the laws, rules, and regulations he was keeping. Christ instead focused on the one area that was keeping the young man from being a true follower, his attraction to material wealth. He removed unnecessary information to focus on the real issue. We can practice 'isolative listening', picking and choosing what we want to hear. Once, when talking to a builder about building a home for the Wesley Foundation at Langston University, he casually mentioned about fifteen minutes into the conversation, that he wouldn't be able to do the project because it was

for a church. The day before on the telephone he had tried to get out of talking to me about his company's involvement in the project and I had ignored and overruled him. This time I pushed him on his statement and he informed me that he was a Jehovah's Witness and there was simply no way he could do a building project for another church. We talked on for a few minutes, reached a point of mutual respect, and I left. Had I listened fully the day before rather than isolating my listening on what I wanted to hear, I would have learned that he was not going to be a player in our project. Other distractions to our comprehending what the person is saying include presumptive listening (because we know the person well, we presume to know what they are going to say before they say it) and defensive listening (we allow the conversation to become a debate or a contest, a competition we are trying to win). Christ, when 'on trial' before Pilate and Herod, simply listened to what was asked of Him and answered their questions. In a fight for His life, He just talked to them. Dr. Davis quotes Robert Tuttle: "when the argument begins, the Holy Spirit leaves".

The last element in Dr. Davis' chapter on Active Listening is CLARIFICATION. This involves confirming that you have heard and that you understand and in doing this you also help others clarify their thinking. Challenges to clarifications include selective listening (choosing to respond only to certain parts of what the other person is saying, instead of the total) and insulated listening (avoiding parts of the conversation because they take us out of our comfort zone or are 'too hot to handle'). Similarly, insensitive listening (choosing not to look for the deeper meaning in what is being said) keeps the conversation on a superficial level and prevents us from giving the person a total hearing. A friend told me of her experience at a women's spiritual retreat. Late in the day, after a series of emotional and motivational talk, the subject of dealing with the loss of parents came up. Both she and her friend were so emotionally drained (and had themselves lost parents recently) that they simply tuned out this talk. Insulating, desensitizing themselves and selecting what they wanted to hear in this instance was a protective mechanism.

Grasme Beavers, in materials presented in an OCS workshop, lists several roadblocks to effective listening: "Paralleling: telling your experience instead of listening to their problems; Giving advice: moralizing (usually starts out trying to be helpful, but ends up with irrelevant issues; Rote reassurance: usually done to be helpful but denies others the right to their feelings; Judgments: jumping to conclusions, inferences; and Defending: not my fault!" He describes several kinds of listening: "Attentive: listening without interruption or judgment and letting others talk; Active: responding in a way that adds to other's understanding of the problem and their feelings by reflecting to them your perception of what you heard or what they feel; Listening to help: using attending and responding skills when others have a problem that does not involve you but you want to be caring and helpful; Non-defensive listening: using attending and responding skills to allow others to express their 'upset ness' with you, and then getting them focused on the issues."

The above identify challenges to our being an effective listener, things to avoid. The following are positive tips for becoming a better listener. Some are so simple they hardly seem worth mentioning but all of us have been in conversations where they were absent and the communication was less than optimum. Maintaining a posture of involvement by leaning forward at eye level (or slightly below 'see' level) at a proper distance while maintaining eye contact are physical aspects that put us in a position to listen. When our children were growing up, my wife had a way of positioning herself that included the above, but here eyes and the way she looked at them said "you have my total, undivided attention; nothing in the world is more important to me than what you are saying".

What we say and the questions we ask also have a major impact on our conversations and help to draw out what the other person wants us to hear but may have difficulty in expressing. Describing back to them what you believe they are feeling or saying without judging them helps put them on more comfortable footing for deepening the conversation. Asking open questions (these help them explore their thoughts) rather than closed or loaded questions (these limit their options to reply or look for preselected responses) can certainly take conversations to the mountaintop. I once had a friend named Ben with whom it was extremely easy to 'fall' into deep conversation. Part of the reason was because he asked questions like "How did that make you feel?" Or "What did you want to happen in this situation?" He also had simplicity about him, largely through mental focus and eye contact that made conversations with him pure joy. He was killed in a motorcycle accident a few years ago and at his funeral there were hundreds of people who claimed him as their best friend.

A final thought on listening involves empathy. The whole point of our conversations with others is to arrive at an understanding of what the person is saying and why they are saying it. If we are successful in empathetic listening, an emotional connections or bond is reached. Dr. Davis summed this up by saying "we get right on the couch with them." We hear, we understand, we feel what they are saying. I like the fourth stanza of "Servant Song" in the Faith We Sing hymnal: "I will weep when you are weeping, when you laugh, I'll laugh with you. I will share your joy and sorrow till we've seen this journey through."

Several principles of effective listening have been presented. Certainly we don't want to complicate that which comes naturally to some, or make life more difficult. Incorporating these skills into our way of life is like the golfer developing his/her swing. I'm not a golfer but it seems to me that the beginner is taught about ten things to think about before swinging the club. As the game is played, these ten things become more and more natural until they are done practically without conscious mental effort. I participated in this evangelism training ten years ago and have had refresher courses since then. I certainly don't practice them in every conversation I have, but I will tell you that they definitely work. The bottom line is loving people as Christ loved us, by giving them our undivided attention.

Woody Davis' theory is that people will not listen to us until they have themselves been heard. This is a primary tool effective in lay leadership. Thanks for listening as you read this!!

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*Davis, Dr. Woody; "Grow Your Faith and Give It Away", an evangelism training manual and exercise developed by Dr. Davis while he was Teacher of Evangelism for the Oklahoma Annual Conference.

PRODUCTIVE MEETINGS IN THE MINISTRY OF THE *FATHER*

F = Focus. Keep team members focused on the item (s) under discussion.

Facilitate the involvement by all team members by asking questions and drawing all members into the discussions.

Remind team members of the schedule and the remaining agenda items. This reinforces the need to focus on the discussion at hand.

A=Agenda. Always have an agenda, even if there is only one item to discuss.

List the start and stop time for the meeting. List all the items to be discussed. Include opening and closing prayers. Assign a time estimate to each item.

T=Timing. Start on time. Stop on time. Stay on schedule.

Doing this shows you value and respect the time of your membership. List the meeting start and stop time. Don't wait for latecomers. Acknowledge latecomers by telling them you will 'catch them up' at the end of the meeting. Deferring to late arrivers penalizes those who arrive on time and awards 'power' to those who arrive late.

H=Honor. The objective of each meeting is to honor the will of our Father.

Open and close the meeting with prayer.
Invite God's presence and guidance in the work of the committee.
Encourage active 'listening' to everyone's input. God works through every Willing worker. (Remember the donkey and Balaam—Numbers 22:21).

E=Empower Decision Making.

Include all people in the decision making process. Ask questions of those not participating. When it becomes apparent an agenda item will require further information, participation or discussion to reach a resolution, assign the item to a subgroup of team members, to meet and return with a recommendation on a specific date.

R=Resolve, Repeat and Respect.

Reach a definable resolution/decision on each agenda item. Close the discussion on each item by repeating/reciting the decision/resolution and obtaining each participant's agreement.
Close the meeting by repeating the agreed upon resolutions (even if it is to table them for another meeting) for each agenda item.
Thank each person for attending and participating in the meeting.