

Tips and Resources for Better Communication

Communication is key for an organization to run smoothly. Whether working for a non-profit organization or a private company, one of the biggest challenges of working in a group is how to communicate your ideas effectively and efficiently. Healthy interaction allows for organizing members to collaborate successfully. In addition, adequate communication mediums are crucial to allow for this type of interaction to take place. Without these proper conduits, basic organizational tenets such as follow-up, agenda-setting, discussion and announcements cannot be conveyed to involved members.

The following steps can be used to ensure effective communication:

- Communicate your thoughts whenever possible; don't expect people to simply read your mind—speak up!
- Make sure that the information is disseminated to everyone who is involved. If you don't have time to call or email everyone, then have a fan-out list, where each person can be assigned another person to call and inform
- If you like to initiate small talk, then plan for it adequately without making it the main focus of your discussions
- When you have phone discussions, try to send a follow up email to reiterate key points, to ensure that everyone is on the same page
- Always have an agenda ready for any meeting. For short meetings, have an objective in mind and give it your total attention
- Speak once and listen twice. Sometimes, you might get caught up in an endless argument simply because you refuse to hear what the others are really trying to say

Typically organizers are not able to communicate effectively for many reasons, such as convenience issues. Face-to-face meetings may not be feasible due to hectic schedules or geographical barriers. Thus, the organizers must come up with innovative ways to interact with and engage members that find it difficult to stay in the loop. Several areas can be utilized for communication including internet, phone, and email. Below, each area is discussed with effective tools to help your group communicate better.

Email

Email can be very powerful tool to communicate your thoughts and keep a record of all discussions in an organization. The downside however, is that people might overuse email, especially for quick messages that could be handled in minutes. In order to avoid this problem, proper etiquette should be discussed to people who wish to be on your organization's forum. Also remember that email may not adequately convey your emotions; therefore, be careful of how you present your thoughts.



Finally, be focused on your topic when writing. Don't start a discussion about an idea for a program and end with another idea. Make sure your emails are succinct, and clearly outline what the purpose of your communiqué is.

Email Distribution Lists

This resource helps send your communiqué to a set number of group members, such as an executive board. This keeps all discussion confidential and distributes your emails to a select group. For a good example of this type of service visit <http://groups.yahoo.com>.

Distribution lists are one of the most valuable tools that an organization possesses. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to guard its integrity by employing the proper security measures and protocols. Make sure that there is a chosen moderator who has exclusive control of the list and use your discretion often in adding and removing people when needed.

Message Board

Message boards can be quite effective in capturing peoples' input and encouraging dialogue, if utilized properly. Again, protocols and etiquette should be discussed and a designated person from your organization should oversee the forums. Finally, make sure that you provide your group with guidelines to limit use only to pertinent discussions.

Message boards can also serve as a way to communicate with your members and provide resources. In addition, message boards can also be used as an internal tool for purposes of archiving discussion for later use. Visit the following site for a free service: <http://www.phpbb.com>.

File Transfer Protocol (FTP)

Having an FTP account dedicated for the organization can be really helpful in resource sharing. Users can upload and download files as they see necessary. However, structure is crucial to avoid an information overload problem and disorganization. Instruct your users to upload and download files properly by providing easy user interfaces and structured guidelines. FTP accounts are very effective when used with your organization website.

Chatting Services

Chatting through instant messengers can be useful but it is limited only to when you know people will be online. Therefore, plans to meet have to be made in advance. Similar to other discussion venues, one pitfall is that people will waste time with irrelevant chatting. To deter this, make sure that a moderator ensures that everyone is apprised of the agenda and kindly encourage everyone to stay focused.

Also consider using voice chat features to personalize the meeting and to help moderate it. For a free voice and chat service visit <http://paltalk.com>.



Conference Calls

This service is an excellent way to meet for organizations whose members cannot travel for face-to-face meetings. Services today can easily organize meetings by allowing you to pick and choose who to invite, send electronic invitations with agendas, and to even record your meetings. You can also arrange to review documents by sending them beforehand to the meeting participants. For a free conference call service visit <http://www.freeconference.com> to setup your organization's account.

There are several pitfalls in conference calls meetings. Background noise sometimes may be a problem, especially if there are quite a large number of participants. You can remedy this problem by asking members to make sure they are in a quiet area when attending. You can also ask them to use the mute feature either on their phone or through the service when they are not talking. Conference call meetings also tend to inadvertently silence those who may not be actively involved in the discussion since there is no face-to-face interaction. Moderators may not actively engage all participants because they are not visible as in regular meetings.

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