



Communication for Today's School Leaders

December 3, 2020




Today's Session

Time	Lesson/Activity
10:15-10:55 a.m.	Effective Principals are Effective Communicators
10:55-11:10 a.m.	Issues Management
11:10-Noon	Crisis Communication
Noon-1 p.m.	Lunch
1-1:20 a.m.	Communication Planning: Using the RACE Process to Tackle Issues and Improve Communication
1:20-1:50	Group Work
1:50-2:10 p.m.	Report Out
2:10-2:20 p.m.	Adding Media to the Mix and the Importance of Messaging
2:20-2:55 p.m.	Messaging Exercise and Mock Interviews
2:55-3 p.m.	Wrap-Up/Leaders' Guide to Communication




Effective Principals are Effective Communicators

Qualities of Effective Principals 

"Effective principals... understand that the foundation of their work and their school's success is the ability to communicate effectively."


(Stronge, Richard, Catano)

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Qualities of Effective Principals 

- ▶ Effective Communication
- ▶ Communication with Parents and Families
- ▶ Communication with Larger Community


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Qualities of Effective Principals 

Effective Communication

- ▶ Shared decision-making processes
- ▶ Good listening
- ▶ Strong relationships
- ▶ Open and democratic dialogue with multiple stakeholders
- ▶ Distributed leadership
- ▶ Crucial to meeting school goals

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Qualities of Effective Principals 

Communication with Parents and Families

- ▶ Principals who reach out to parents and community members are more successful than principals who do not.
- ▶ Principals who actively seek to build positive relationships with parents are better able to function effectively in their jobs.
- ▶ Principals of high-achieving schools spend more of their time working on parent and community relationships compared to principals in average schools, and as a result foster support for their schools.

(Stronge, Richard, & Catano)


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Qualities of Effective Principals 

Communication with Parents and Families

- ▶ Negative interactions with parents can deplete a principal's energy and detract from other important duties. ...High school principals nationally spend up to 20 hours per week working on parent issues, discipline, and community relations. *(Tucker & Tschannen-Moran)*


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Qualities of Effective Principals 

Communication with Larger Community

- ▶ School visions are strengthened when principals reach out to their communities to develop mutual support and shared purpose.
- ▶ A school does not exist in isolation but in an intricate context that influences its effectiveness. As such, a school principal is a school's best advocate and spokesperson internally and externally.


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Qualities of Effective Principals 

Communication with Larger Community

- ▶ Public support builds successful schools, so there is a significant need to increase public confidence in schools.
- ▶ Cultivating partnerships with businesses and educational organizations can reap benefits for both students and teachers.
- ▶ Community leadership is an important role for contemporary school principals to exercise.


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Qualities of Effective Principals 

"Good communication is the foundation for building positive relationships with parents, families, and the larger community... When a breakdown in communication occurs with any constituency, it is always to the detriment of the school and its students. Thus, it is critical for principals to communicate effectively to both internal and external constituents."

Stronge & Catano


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What school stakeholders want... 


A principal who is:

- ▶ Able to set a vision others want to embrace
- ▶ A relationship-builder
- ▶ An effective communicator
- ▶ The creator and guardian of a positive culture
- ▶ Personable, approachable, relatable, respected
- ▶ Supportive of teachers
- ▶ Visible and active in the school and community
- ▶ The school's biggest cheerleader

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There's No Denying... 

- ▶ Effective communication and leadership are inseparable.
- ▶ As leaders, we all have a responsibility to tell "our story."
 - ▶ What are the key components to your school's story?
 - ▶ How are you communicating now?
 - ▶ How can you tell your story better?
 - ▶ What should be included that goes beyond "traditional, but necessary" methods of communicating?

A Leader's Most Important Tasks 

- ▶ Ensure student achievement
- ▶ Build public support

That said... Good communication builds a team- that team that surrounds and supports a student so that he or she can succeed.

Never forget...


- ▶ Credibility is a key to parental satisfaction
- ▶ Good communication contributes to your credibility

Our Story = Our Brand = Our Reputation 


- ▶ Branding for your school is a process of communicating a valued and differentiated promise to target audiences and delivering on it consistently over time.
 - ▶ Define
 - ▶ Promise
 - ▶ Deliver
 - ▶ Remind
- ▶ Hallmarks of strong brands
 - ▶ Focus
 - ▶ Consistency
 - ▶ Known for something special
 - ▶ Visible leadership

Communicating Your Brand... 

- ▶ Excellent communicators know...
 - ▶ Their organization
 - ▶ Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities
 - ▶ Their customers
 - ▶ Who are they? What do they want? What do you want from them? How do you know they are satisfied?
 - ▶ Their competition
 - ▶ Who are they? What do they do that attracts?

Managing Your School's Reputation 

- ▶ Attack stereotypes, myths, and embedded misperceptions... feed the rumor mills with accurate and positive information.
- ▶ Take a position on key issues... be an organization of consequence, not just a victim.
- ▶ Reflect a positive reputation every day through good customer relations.
- ▶ Build a common body of knowledge that is easily accessible and understandable.

Managing Your School's Reputation 


- ▶ Engage influential leaders and stakeholders to reinforce your reputation.
- ▶ Refresh the evidence, examples, and data to support your positive reputation.
- ▶ Orient new employees. Infuse them with a sense of responsibility to be reputation stewards.
- ▶ Neutralize or marginalize the critics, negatrons, and change-resistors... don't let them dominate discussions about your schools.

Creating Ownership in Our Schools 


Heard of it → Tried it → Believe it → **Champion it!**




Issues Management

Mind the Gap 

Helpful advice for exiting the train...
If you mind the gap, you'll take an extra large step and be fine.
If you don't know about the gap, or you ignore it, you can break your ankle or worse.




School Leaders Minding the Gap 

- ▶ Minding the gap means knowing how the concerns of other key stakeholders in education may differ from yours.
- ▶ Develop the skills to create the kind of authentic dialogue that will resolve differences. Reach out!
- ▶ Takes effort and persistence... definitely better than getting tripped up by it.

It's Ironic... 


The vast majority of companies, organizations, public institutions, and government agencies that have experienced a major negative public situation said...

"They never saw it coming."


Trends to Consider 

- ▶ Younger... Older
- ▶ Majority/Minority... Minority/Minority
- ▶ Industrial Age... Global Knowledge Information Age
- ▶ Standardization... Personalization
- ▶ Silents, Boomers, and Xers... Millennials
- ▶ Quick Fixes... Continuous Improvement
- ▶ Macro... Micro... Nano
- ▶ Information Acquisition... Knowledge Creation
- ▶ Pragmatic... Ethical
- ▶ Unemployment... Hyper Employment

We are communicating in a different world and educating children for a profoundly different future.

Environmental Scanning 

- ▶ Social
- ▶ Political
- ▶ Scientific
- ▶ Ecological
- ▶ Economic
- ▶ Technological
- ▶ Biological
- ▶ International
- ▶ Health

The 90-7-3 Formula 

How can you effectively manage your school's image and relationships?

90% Do a good job... This is your day-to-day work

7% Listen to stakeholders

3% Communicate to stakeholders

Default excuse:
"It's a communication problem."


Stakeholder Engagement 

The difference between stakeholder *engagement* and stakeholder *enragement* is only one letter.

ENGAGEMENT
ENRAGEMENT




Crisis Communication and the Importance of Messaging



Crisis Communication: What Do People Expect from Leaders?

- ▶ Gain the wanted facts needed to protect them and/or their children.
- ▶ Make well-informed decisions using all available information.
- ▶ Have an active, participatory role in the response and recovery.
- ▶ Act as a watchdog.
- ▶ Recover or preserve well-being and normalcy.



Crisis Communication Lifecycle

Precrisis	Initial	Maintenance	Resolution	Evaluation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be prepared. • Foster alliances. • Develop consensus recommendations. • Test messages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the event with empathy. • Explain and inform the public, in simple plain terms, about the risk. • Establish agency spokesperson credibility. • Provide emergency sources of advice (including how/when to get more information). • Connect to stakeholders and public in continued communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help public more accurately understand risks. • Provide background and accompanying information to those who need it. • Gain understanding and support for response and recovery plans. • Listen to stakeholders and address their concerns. • Explain emergency recommendations. • Empower decisionmaking. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve appropriate public response to future similar situations through education. • Honestly examine problems and mistakes, and then reinforce what worked in recovery and response efforts. • Persuade the public to support public policy and allocate resources. • Promote the activities and capabilities of the agency (corporate identity reinforced—annually, too.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate communication plan performance. • Document lessons learned. • Determine specific actions to improve crisis systems or the crisis plan.


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Five Communication Failures that Will Kill Operational Success




- ▶ Mixed messages from multiple experts
- ▶ Information released late
- ▶ Paternalistic attitudes
- ▶ Not countering rumors and myths in real time
- ▶ Public power struggles and confusion

Crisis Communication: Five Steps for Success




- ▶ Execute a solid communication plan.
- ▶ Be the first source of information.
- ▶ Express empathy early.
- ▶ Show competence and expertise.
- ▶ Remain honest and open.

Not All Crises Are Created Equal




- ▶ What are people feeling?
- ▶ Messaging
 - ▶ Build trust and credibility
 - ▶ Make the facts work
 - ▶ STARCC Principle (Simple, Timely, Accurate, Relevant, Credible, Consistent)
 - ▶ Remember the 3 C's


Crisis Communication 

▶ The 4 Be's of Crisis Communication

- ▶ Be timely
- ▶ Be basic
- ▶ Be careful
- ▶ Be reassuring

Crisis Communication 

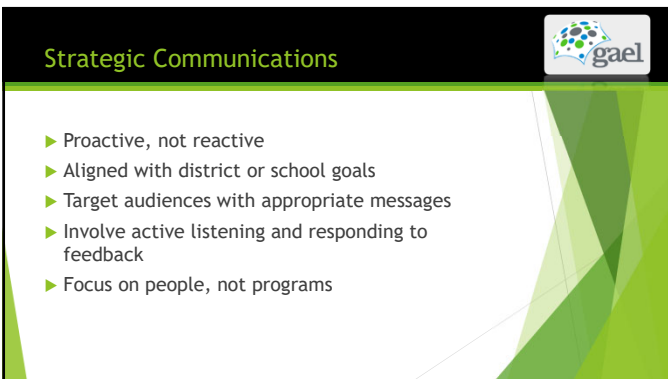
- ▶ Don't over-reassure. Elicit accurate, calm concern.
- ▶ Acknowledge uncertainty. Offer only what you know.
- ▶ Emphasize the process in place, describing it in simple terms.
- ▶ Give anticipatory guidance.
- ▶ Be regretful, not defensive.


Crisis Communication 

- ▶ Acknowledge people's fears.
- ▶ Express wishes. "I wish we knew more at this time."
- ▶ Reduce panic by providing clear messages- Panic doesn't come from bad news, but from mixed messages.
- ▶ Be prepared for "what if" questions but don't fuel speculation.
- ▶ Give people things to do.








RACE... The Four-Step Process 


Research
 Analysis
 Communication
 Evaluation

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Why PR Planning? 

- ✓ Forces you to look at all sides
- ✓ Prompts you to ask the hard questions before others do
- ✓ Leads you to examine how you communicate with key audiences
- ✓ Maximizes chances of success
- ✓ Strengthens relationships among key supporters

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Research 

The "Research" step helps you set the context for the situation. You are on a fact-finding mission.

What background do you need to know to design an effective PR plan?


What Who
Why How
Where When

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Analysis 

- ▶ Using what you learned in the "Research" phase, analyze the situation. What are the PR problems associated with what you want to do?
- ▶ Identify the following:
 - ▶ Goals/objectives of the communication plan
 - ▶ Key publics
 - ▶ Communication strategies
 - ▶ Communication channels

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Communication 


You've done your research, analyzed the situation, and now it's time to put your plan into action! Remember...

If it is hard to tell, it's hard to sell!

Your communication plan needs to address:

- ▶ Key messages

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Communication 


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Your communication plan needs to address:

- ▶ Key messages
- ▶ Key audiences

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Common Mistakes with Audiences 

- ▶ Not identifying winners and losers
- ▶ A reluctance to label a group as less powerful and needing less attention
- ▶ Assuming that groups will take similar positions on all strategies
- ▶ Not knowing exactly what you want from the audience
- ▶ Getting discouraged when you face opposition

Communication 


You've done your research, analyzed the situation, and now it's time to put your plan into action! Remember...

If it is hard to tell, it's hard to sell!

Your communication plan needs to address:

- ▶ Key messages
- ▶ Key audiences
- ▶ Strategic communication strategies
- ▶ Timing for communication roll-out

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Evaluation 

How did it go? And how will you know?

Ask yourself:

- ▶ Was I successful?
- ▶ What's the evidence?
- ▶ How will I use the results?

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RACE Process Scenarios and Report Out 

- ▶ Review the RACE Process to determine what you know, what you don't know, as well as the best way to communicate this issue, and how you would evaluate your overall communication effectiveness.
- ▶ Discuss the larger issues: Repercussions? Unintended consequences? Early wins?
- ▶ Be prepared to discuss your group's scenario, communication plan, and key messages.


Adding the Media Into the Mix 

Effectively Managing the Media 


- ▶ Understand the media business.
- ▶ Know their expectations– and their limitations.
- ▶ Know and assert your rights.
- ▶ Prepare. Prepare. Prepare.
- ▶ Seek lasting, positive relationships, but have contingency plans.

Your Rights as a School Leader 

- ▶ To receive fair and accurate representation in the news media.
- ▶ To conduct business without media interference.
- ▶ To challenge media misbehavior without reprisal.

Prepare. Prepare. Prepare. 


- ▶ Be accessible.
- ▶ Never give an interview that you are not ready for... it's ok to delay.
- ▶ Know your message.
- ▶ Practice your delivery.
- ▶ Control the interview.

Prepare. Prepare. Prepare. 

- ▶ Know your objective and your audience. Think specific!
- ▶ Write key points to say... and not to say.
- ▶ Use simple, lively, conversational language. Be quotable.
- ▶ Use numbered lists. (Think of the rule of 3)
- ▶ Familiarize, not memorize.
- ▶ Be honest, especially when it's the hardest.




The Importance of Messaging




Tips for Written Communication

- ▶ Timely
- ▶ Simple
- ▶ Stick to the facts
- ▶ Offer reassurance




Developing a Message

- ▶ Know your objective and audience.
- ▶ Get to the point (WIIFM)
- ▶ Keep your readability level low
(Average Americans read at the 9th grade level or below.)
- ▶ Write key points to say- and **not** say.


Developing a Message 


- ▶ Mind your paragraphs
- ▶ Use shorter, fewer words
- ▶ Use conversational language. Be quotable!
- ▶ Use numbered lists.
- ▶ Familiarize, do not memorize.
- ▶ Be honest, especially, when it's hardest.

Messaging Group Work 

Use the SOCO or Messaging Worksheet to determine key messages for you to share on your group's scenario.

Time is of the essence... the media is pulling up to your school.

Final Thoughts... 

Final Thoughts on Effective Communication 

- ▶ Commit to regular communication
- ▶ Act on your intention
- ▶ Know yourself and be real
- ▶ Listen and learn
- ▶ Change if need be
- ▶ Make yourself available
- ▶ Find the real person in the other
- ▶ Don't let others be wrong
- ▶ Identify and promote strengths
- ▶ Make it clear that your goal is the success of other people

Overhaul Daily Communication 

- ▶ Create opportunities for dialogue
- ▶ Build tools to connect
 - ▶ Streamline messages
 - ▶ Make them available to audiences segmented by need to know
 - ▶ Make access to information easy and accessible
 - ▶ Make a distinction between messages that are "call to action" as opposed to those that are "informational"

Leader's Communic "eight" 

 Quality	 Listen	 Golden Rule	 Fill Buckets
 Innovate	 Beware Chicken Little	 Tell the Truth	 Build Brand

12 Commandments for People Who Work With People, Ann White
