

COOPERATIVE COMMUNICATIONS 101



By Rich Berendson

Communication

Definition:

A transmitting
A giving and receiving of information by talk, writing, etc.
Information given
Official records often defined as "communiqué"

Case Study I

My name is Anne, and I am a member of ABC Cooperative. I am chairperson of the Activities Committee and our cooperative is a member of the Midwest Association of Housing Cooperatives (MAHC). The Board of Directors has asked me to contribute an article to MAHC's newsletter based on a recent activity in our cooperative.

I Need Your Cooperative Help!

The Activity - - A white elephant fund raiser

The Objective - - To bid on each white elephant gift contributed from the cooperative, there are six.

The Gifts - - A lamp, vase, pair of bookends, picture frame, six paperback classics, and a cribbage board with pad and pegs.

Cups are placed in front of each gift for donations. We have also provided scratch pads with pens.

The Result - - Each contribution is put in the cup (dimes, nickels, pennies, whatever). The person making the donation will record it on a scratch pad. The more donations made, the more likely the winner!

Those donating more win the 'ELEPHANT'.

Please write a two paragraph article trying to cover the white elephant fund raiser using the information as it has been provided. We will use feedback to discover from you your ability with communication skills.

Case II

Start a handwritten message of three sentences through the class. The starter will keep his/her copy - a second copy will be written and passed along to the next person.

Each person, in turn, will read the message, tear it up, rewrite it, and pass it along.

Compare the first message with the last. Is the final message accurate? Are the two recognizable as the same message?

Sample Message: (Not to be used by the class)

We have no agenda for the meeting. I do know, however, the budget review is ready. The Finance Committee will meet on Tuesday evening to discuss it.

Case III

1. Is a planned agenda sent to all board members prior to the meeting?
2. Are the length of the meetings and the length of the agenda compatible?
3. Is background material compatible with agenda times?
4. Is the Treasurer's Report understandable? Secretary? Vice President? President?
5. Do the minutes of the meeting refresh your memory?
6. Are the Committee Reports understandable?
7. Is your Board of Directors innovative, imaginative and effective?
8. A Board
 - a. Is not recreation
 - b. Is not a place to meet pals
 - c. Is not a place for reward
9. Your Board of Directors needs to know its membership
 - a. To serve them
 - b. To communicate with them
 - c. To work with them

Write a one paragraph column on the topic "As I See the Big Picture".

Take the content of your column from any of the above questions. Using "feedback" let's see what has been accomplished by you as a communicator.

Communication

The objective of this workshop is not to educate you on the editorial design and process regarding newsletters, brochures or flyers published in the housing cooperative. It is to teach you some techniques as to why these items are the most effective communication aids. These aids will keep everyone aware of what the special interests or current trends in the field of cooperative housing are. And how interpretation and predictions keep cooperative housing members well informed and tied together in communication skills.

Types of Communication

Newsletters

Current trends
Up-to-date interests
Leisure-time activities
Benefits of cooperatives
Member comments
Advertising
Choosing titles....Do they say something? Image portrayal?

Brochures

Coverage of development
Member activities Bulletin on issues Services rendered

Flyers

Glitz
One-page
Eye-catchers Needed detail Follow-up

Projecting and Image

Formal memos and memory cues
Impact and impression
Key word "control"
Thoughts as "labels"
Content and quality
Important identifiers

Remembering the Reader

Interest and concern Increasing good will
Who, what, where, when, why and how
Reader benefits

Register Warmth and Closeness with:

- Titles
- Accents
- Advocacy
- Briefs
- Capstone
- Dateline
- Dimensions
- Insider Notes
- Keynotes
- On-line Comments, Facts, and Data
- What's New?

In the final communication process we seek to:

- Preserve objectivity
- Work with professionals
- Use agencies, services, individuals
- Find illustrations, clip art, and design

Points of Light

Listening is only important if you learn by listening - -

- The person(s) you are talking to will like you for listening, will talk less, and will be inclined to listen to you - -
- Agreement and disagreement can be formed by being well-informed and reaches toward the solution you are looking for

When listening:

- Get the main points
- Listen to HOW something is said
- Watch for attitudes and skills as well as motivation.
- Try to put yourself in the speaker's shoes

Share responsibility when listening to make communication more effective:

Real Communication

Five W's

WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and WHY

Even "HOW" should be added when five W's are satisfied.

WHO - is you and your audience along with the housing cooperative you represent.

WHAT - is answered by problem(s). Attitudes and behavior enter here as one reality because problem(s) are measured by straight line or change. If reality is change then how much direction is desired should be based with attitude and behavior. What also should affect success or failure by evaluation of communication strategy.

WHERE means geography. The locale you are contemplating should be specifically named sites in order to make WHERE precise.

WHEN refers to "time" - - possible limitations which are placed on what your communication goal is.

Communicate by telling it like it is

- Talk or write for "real"
- Make message appropriate to circumstances - whatever they may be
- When writing or speaking make the message simple, understandable, ready to accept and act upon
- Know what barriers are and make the message so clear it will eliminate any anti-action
- Plan for feedback. Allow adjustment to efficiently achieve your objective.

Messages Can Change

Language is a verbal code. So, code, content, and treatment of the words, sounds, gestures, rule for structuring message.

Rules of structure are spelling and grammar to form words and then sentences.

Writing becomes a verbal code, but non-verbal codes such as certain papers or colors of paper, typeface, ink, logo, control traditional paragraph placement.

Face-to-face messages can be verbal or non-verbal codes. These codes carry very little content but bring side messages in emotions, feelings, attitudes, and how a message can be interpreted.

The "real" basis of these codes is verbal pitch, physical movements, body posture, eye contact, and facial expressions.

Attitude and Motivation

Attitudes and motivation, brought into a communication situation, run in a lane together. Attitude allows a person to behave in a specific way to a specific situation while motivation provides the incentive for performing specific ways of behavior.

Thus we say an attitude is influencing a person to act in a certain way and the motivation becomes the reason for the influence.

Some attitudes and motivation happen because of social, business, or cultural arenas surrounding a communication situation Value and beliefs of people, setting aside shyness and ambition, may be viewed as individual personality patterns.

Sender/Receiver Syndrome

In sending messages to a receiver, or more than one receiver, it is important to know or obtain knowledge about them. Audiences have wide variances from speeches and plays to concerts, newsletters, books, letters, and memos.

To know an audience is to recognize factors that influence people's reactions to messages. Some factors are communication skills, attitudes, motivation, and knowledge.

Lucky for us, we are equipped to be both senders and receivers. Mouths and hands used in speaking, gesturing, and touching can become the most important sending and receiving organs.

Communication Skills

Do you understand how important it is to know what you are communicating? People who may stumble over words when they speak or who may hesitate with poor sentence structure when writing may have their ability questioned. But, if speaking vocabulary is clear and writing seems to flow in smooth content nobody needs to second-guess communication skills.

Sending skills become limited in some cases when repetition of phrases is frequent and when interpretation of spoken or written statement becomes clumsy.

The skill becomes a known when speaking ability is made with smooth phrases and continual eye contact, gestures, and smiles that unite the speaker with the audience.

Again, the skill becomes a known with the written message when accuracy in spelling and punctuation takes on a special meaning with subject continuity. It will become impossible to second-guess the writer when clearness of word interpretation, interpretation of statements, and handwriting skills takes over to make the written message a literal translation to get the action across.

Study Groups

When people come together to share an issue of importance in the co-op, the barnstorming that is done completes itself in writing down the ideas, disseminating the information necessary for decision making and policy control.

Requirements for a study group are simple. They must have a mutual interest in specific topics, be willing to make phone calls, collect materials, talking with other people and preparing a report for discussion and alternative solutions.

In all of this the base line is communication. Several ideas here leave us to believe the means of communication covers a large area of dissemination.

Newsletter

Published monthly, the housing co-op newsletter can be considered the "back fence" of the co-op. Informal communication lines lie open in one-on-one conversations with the neighbors living closely to one another. The real purpose of a newsletter is to provide members with pertinent information between meetings.

The newsletter may provide business information of the co-op in the form of summaries, policy changes, management notices, committee activity, etc. But, even better than just business should be considered the social and human side of the co-op along with political news (possibly a letter from your city councilman, the Mayor, the city clerk, or from whomever depending on how the city government structure is set up).

The co-op's back fence will bring about all kinds of information and data necessary to keep the communication flowing and wide open.

Posters, Signs, and Leaflets

Quick communication gathering is done with posters, signs, or leaflets. Any of these items are easily posted in accented member ways of the co-op. Short, concise, notes written with specific purpose in mind, echoes the policy making in the co-op and lets members know the who, what, where, why, and when of what has been written.

Do you want to run for the Board of Directors? Be the best of all communicators with a personal message about YOU and why YOU will be the best person for the board.

Do you have special interest in finance, welcome wagons, parking, pets, membership? Write your own personal vita with open declaration of why you'll be the best for a committee, the board, whatever!

You'll win!

Speakers

with knowledge and education, a MUST for the co-op, a Speaker's Bureau, from your membership or a speaker of your choice representing cooperative housing, can prove another type of communication which will bring positive notes of acceptance from your membership.

Do you know what the latest insurance, tax, legislative, regulations are? All of these items can drastically affect your co-op. Find out the answers by asking. Asking is answered with guest speakers. A good and positive way for one-on-one communication.

All speakers' appearances should be carefully planned, adequately advertised started and completed on time and booked for a follow-up (feedback) of the success or failure of the event.

Make the Image and the Image will Make You!

- Express yourself! Making well is a large part of our culture!
- Express yourself! With art you tell us your feelings!
- Express yourself! With music you express emotion!
- Express yourself! Write it down and you show us a gift of knowledge!
- Express yourself! Speak and you are heard. Show emotion, spark, and vitality and people listen!

Facilitators/Barriers to Effective Communication

TIME

If we talk too long we ramble and stray and points of light are missed.

If we write too long we say nothing and the communication system is lost.

Late or early arrivals at meetings provide gaps of effectiveness and can provide motivational decay for everyone.

PLACE

If effective communication is to take place, we have to find a location that facilitates communication. If the communication deals with remodeling the community building, then the logical location is the community building. This aids in covering subject matter effectively.

If you try communication in a sterile, gray, location, communication ceases immediately because the impact of the cold surroundings registers and all is lost.

SPACE

If communication is right, the communicators will share an equitable space from one another to make the message "take".

Edward T. Hall, author of *The Silent Language*, writes that there are four zones that are identified for communicators to make the message "take".

1. The zone of intimate distance - from physical contact to 18 inches
2. The zone of personal distance - from 18 inches to 4 feet
3. The zone of social distance - from 4 to 12 feet
4. The zone of public distance - from 12 feet to the limits of sight and sound

The first zone is never used in public conversation.

The fourth zone is good only for communication on impersonal topics or personal topics without much meaning

The second zone is appropriate for personal or impersonal communication.

The third zone is used to transact business or carry on polite conversation.

ARRANGEMENT

This can be either a facilitator or a barrier.

Are communicators always on the same level? "

How about location of desk, podium, tables, etc.?

These items can prevent "body language", posture, physical attitude, body gestures, and eye contact, face-to-face from becoming effective communication skills.

FINAL POINTS OF LIGHT

1. Try to affect a change in the attitude and behavior of others
2. Meanings come from people
3. The more people communication passes through the more distorted it becomes.
4. The most important part of a message is non-verbal.
5. All of us hold positions or roles in multiple organizations.
6. A fact is a statement of certainty.
7. Feedback is crucial to effective communication.
8. To open communication, there must be a sender and a receiver.
9. Be sure your purpose is concise and clear when working communication.
10. Communication strategy is a plan for HOW the communication will be received.
11. Communication skills are planned by varied groups of people.
12. Know yourself and say "I am an effective communicator,"
13. Remember a happening can be as simple as "a drop of rain."
14. Be sure your promises find "you out!"
15. Dare to be creative!

FEEDBACK

This process is the most effective means of communicating. The process becomes an action how we act, what we say, and what we write. Feedback is a constant reminder to check ourselves and our sources of information. Feedback provides information relating to the sender and the receiver, the reaction of the receiver to a sender's message as well as the relationship between the sender and the receiver.

Feedback provides four types of information.

1. How well the sender performs as a communicator.
2. What the receiver's attitude and behavior is in relation to the sender's performance
3. What reaction to expect from the receiver to the sender's message in terms of unanticipated beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors coming from the range of the message.
4. What relationship has developed between the sender and receiver?

From time to time we hear the expression "positive and negative feedback". If the sender and receiver reactions employ, we have success, thus positive reaction. If the method employed from the sender fails to accomplish the objective of what is said or written it becomes negative with nothing accomplished.

When the message is read at the same time it is being received, it opens doors for correction of types, spelling or other words which make the message more to the point.

Have you ever talked on the phone with a sender who uses grunts, yawns, off the mouthpiece inflection, or other substitutes for direct messages? We end the conversation wondering if the message was received, or was the message understood, or did the message thought change so the reaction or behavior of both sender and receiver of message become confused.

Delayed feedback often becomes the most popular method of communication especially when the message carries through many communicators and arrives home after many other messages have been received clouding the issue.

On a board of director's level, it becomes necessary to use a written message or memo. It becomes the best method of delayed feedback and arouses behaviors in all board members for reaction to a system which has speed and accuracy.

Unlike immediate feedback, delayed feedback has to be asked for, or sought out. If successful feedback is obtained quicker by the sender or ensures that the feedback is gotten at all.

Feedback becomes more accurate when finally it is understood what they know and guesswork, or if, has been put to rest.

Let's train ourselves to send messages BEFORE decisions are made and make sure the decision made is consistent with all feedback, information data, and messages obtained.

THIS COURSE DOES NOT BEGIN TO COVER ALL DATA THAT MAKES FOR EXCELLENT COMMUNICAITON AND MAKES YOU AN EXCELLENT COMMUNICATOR. WHAT WE HAVE TRIED TO COMMUNICATE TO YOU IS THAT THE PRACTICE OF STYLE AND THEORY IS A BETTER BEGINNING!

GOOD LUCK!

Communications

Ten Hints for Effective Communication

1. Seek to clarify your ideas before communicating.

The more systematically we analyze the problem or idea to be communicated, the clearer it becomes. This is the first step toward effective communication. Many communications fail because of inadequate planning. Good planning must consider the goals and attitudes of those who will receive the communication and those who will be affected by it.

2. Examine the true purpose of each communication.

Before you communicate, ask yourself what you really want to accomplish with your message - obtain information, initiate action, change another person's attitude. Identify your most important goal and then adapt your language, tone and total approach to serve that specific objective. Don't try to accomplish too much with each communication. The sharper the focus of your message the greater its chances of success.

3. Consider the total physical and human setting whenever you communicate.

Meaning and intent are conveyed by more than words alone. Many other factors influence the overall impact of a communication, and the speaker must be sensitive to the total setting in which he communicates. Consider, for example, your sense of timing - i.e. the circumstances under which you make an announcement or render a decision; the physical setting - whether you communicate in private, for example, or otherwise; the social climate that pervades work relationships within the company or a department and sets the tone of its communications; custom and past practice - the degree to which you communicate. Like all living things, communication must be capable of adapting to its environment.

4. Consult with others, where appropriate, in planning communications.

Frequently it is desirable or necessary to seek the participation of others in planning a communication or developing the facts on which to base it. Such consultation will help to lend additional insights and objectivity to your message. Moreover, those who have helped you plan your communication will give it their active support.

5. Be mindful, while you communicate, of the overtones as well as the basic content of your message.

Your tone of voice your expression, your apparent receptiveness to the responses of others - all have tremendous impact on those you wish to reach. Frequently overlooked, these subtleties of communication often affect a listener's reaction to a message even more than its basic content. Similarly, your choice of language particularly your awareness of the fine shades of meaning and emotion in the words you use - predetermines in large part the reactions of your listeners.

6. Take the opportunity, when it arises, to convey something of help or value to the receiver.

Consideration of the other person's interests and needs - the habit of trying to look at things from his point of view - will frequently point up opportunities to convey something of immediate benefit or long-range value to him. People on the job are most responsive to the people whose messages take their own interests into account.

7. Follow up your communication

Our best efforts at communication may be wasted, and we may never know whether we have succeeded in expressing our true meanings and intentions, if we do not follow up to see how well we have actually put our message across. Ask for feedback, get your listener to express his reactions so that you can be sure there is complete understanding and appropriate action results.

8. Communicate for tomorrow as well as for today

While most communications may be aimed primarily at meeting the demands of an immediate situation, they must be planned with the past in mind if they are to maintain consistency on the receiver's view. Most important, they must be consistent with long-range interests and goals.

9. Be sure your actions support your communications

The old saying, "Do as I say, not as I do", cannot be true if real communication is to be achieved. Actually, the most persuasive kind of communication is NOT what you say but what you DO. When an individual's actions tend to contradict his/her words, we usually discount what they say.

10. Seek not only to be understood, but to understand. Be a good listener.

When we start talking, we often cease to listen or many times we become so interested in thinking about what we will say when our turn comes to talk that we miss part of what is being communicated to us. Words pass through the lips, but should come from the heart. We must learn to listen with the inner ear if we are to understand the inner man.

The Art of Listening

By Robert Haakenson

Where were you on the night of October 30, 1938?

If you were near a radio, you may have heard a hair-raising "news broadcast." The East Coast was being invaded by men from Mars. They had landed in gigantic flying saucers. They were obliterating everything in their path.

The broadcast created panic, in a small Minnesota town, a woman burst into a Lutheran prayer meeting to announce that the end of the world had come. In Newark, New Jersey, 20 families in a single block rushed from their homes, their faces covered with wet towels and handkerchiefs. In Mount Vernon, New York, a man considered a hopeless invalid rushed from his wheelchair, climbed into an automobile, and disappeared.

Three times during the broadcast, announcements were made that the program was an adaptation by Orson Welles and his Mercury Theatre of H.G. Wells' science thriller *The War of the Worlds*. But some listeners had tuned in late. Others were too stunned to notice the announcements. Of the six million listeners who heard the broadcast, about one million thought it was real.

This example shows what happens when people do not listen attentively. When instructions are not clearly understood, delays and confusion result. Misunderstandings often occur because we do not pay attention. We hear, but sometimes we don't listen.

Listening well is one of our most important skills for living. It is a skill that can be sharpened. Why it is worth sharpening is shown by three facts: 1) We spend more time listening than in any other form of verbal communication, 2) yet most of us tend to be poor listeners. 3) Fortunately, it is easy, enjoyable, and profitable to improve our listening ability.

Listening: Plentiful and important

Let's take those points in order. Did you ever stop to think how much time we spend in listening? The pioneer study (1927) by Dr. Rankin of Ohio State University, since confirmed by others showed that we spend 70% of our waking day in some form of verbal communication of which by far the greatest part is listening. Here are the proportions:

- ❖ Listening, 45%
- ❖ Talking, 30%
- ❖ Reading, 16%
- ❖ Writing, 9%

In other words, we spend almost six hours a day listening to some form of oral communication. One business executive estimated that he earned 40% of his salary by listening. For a psychiatrist, a police detective, or a personal-loan bank officer, the percentage would very likely be even higher.

Nobody questions the importance of learning to read. In fact, there is a considerable furor over "why Johnny can't read". It could be argued that, since we spend three times as much time at it,

it is three times as important to learn to listen.

The first formal course in listening was taught in 1947, yet listening is coming increasingly into its own in sales and personnel management. One expression sales manager's use is: "Don't win the argument and lose the sale". Listening is insurance here.

Another sales maxim is: "The foolish salesman would sell me with his reasons; the wise salesman, with my own". How does the wise one learn my reasons? By listening.

Poor Listeners

Many of us, unfortunately, are like that foolish salesman. We tend to be poor listeners.

You've probably played that parlor game in which several people are sent out of the room and called back one at a time. 'A' is told a story to repeat to 'B', who repeats it to 'C', and so on. At fourth or fifth hand, the story can become quite garbled. It's an amusing yet sobering demonstration of how unreliable our listening can be.

One of our biggest handicaps is the number of things we learn that aren't true. A New Orleans firm assured a researcher that the morale of its employees was high. The researcher then spent a year working in the company to see for himself. The data he assembled constituted a vehement denunciation of the management and also disclosed that employees understood only about a quarter of what management thought they understood.

Hearing incompletely or incorrectly can produce confusion. It can also lead to disaster like the sinking of the submarine Stickleback. An electrician's mate, hearing the order "come off", thought he heard "come on" and turned his rheostat up. The sudden surge of current tripped the circuit breakers and cut off the Stickleback's power supply. She plunged out of control. Then she surfaced directly ahead of a destroyer escort which rammed and sank her.

Failure to comprehend what we hear can be compounded by failure to retain what we do take in. Painstaking research has established that, within 24 hours, we will forget 50% of what we heard the previous day. In two weeks, we will forget 25% more. That goes not only for specific details such as the closing price of General Motors on a given day but also broad, general conclusions such as whether the market is going up or down.

That is a depressing picture of our listening habits, is it not? We don't hear everything we should; we don't understand everything we hear; and we don't remember everything we understand.

However, there is something we can do about the problem. The first step is to analyze our listening habits. If we find that we have bad listening habits, we can exchange them for good ones.

Dr. Ralph Nichols of the University of Minnesota listed what he calls "the ten bad habits of listening" They are grouped here under four main headings. Let's take them in order

Allowing Emotion to Creep In

Two forms of over stimulation: Over stimulation takes two forms. It can be a hostile reaction to the speaker. We may dislike the speaker so much that we do not hear what he is saying. It can also be an overly enthusiastic reaction. A familiar fact reexamined from an unusual point of view - a chance word or phrase - sometimes sends our imagination racing and leaping ahead to greener pastures. We come back to earth with a bump as we realize we have not heard a word the speaker has been saying.

Interference by personal prejudice: Emotional bias is one of the most formidable barriers to clear comprehension. Sometimes it takes only a single word to set the bile rolling; "capitalist," "liberal," "fundamentalist," or whatnot. We immediately cease to think with our heads and transfer that activity to the region of the solar plexus. Demagogues, of course, are well aware of the universal tendency to respond emotionally rather than rationally and play on it with great skill.

Points nine and ten treat the taking of notes and the thought-speech speed ratio.

Inefficient Practices

Taking notes: In general, we do too little note-taking. Nichols and Stevens' call it "pencil and paper listening". The very act of writing something down helps fix it in our memory. A trick that works for many people is based on the assumption that the subconscious mind resents having to exert itself and must be approached in a roundabout manner. The trick is to write it down, casually and with no conscious effort of memorization, something to be learned. After two or three repetitions, the subconscious mind is tricked into remembering.

We must be sure, however, that our note-taking is properly organized; otherwise, we end up with a précis that isn't precise and an outline that doesn't outline anything. One professor of my acquaintance speaks despairingly of "compulsive note-takers." Effective listening is the first step toward effective note-taking. We must understand what the speaker is saying before we can write it down.

Besides the précis and the outline an effective way to take notes is the "fact-and principle" method. The page is divided by a vertical line. In one column, facts are recorded; in the other, the generalization or principle that they support is written.

Wasting the advantage of thought-speech speed ratio: This is as important to listeners as the "hog-corn ratio" is to a Midwestern farmer, who considers the number of bushels of corn equivalent in price to 100 pounds of live hog. The thought-speech speed ratio is the relative amounts of speech and thought that can be accommodated in a given length of time.

I have deliberately saved this point for the last because it requires some explanation, and it may be the most important of all.

Typically, we speak at the rate of about 125 words per minute. Walter Winchell, with a hot news flash, may have approached 200; and Sir Winston Churchill, in one of his magisterial, state speeches, may have decelerated to 90 or 100. But, for most communication purposes, 125

words is approximately our usual speed.

We think infinitely faster than we talk - 400 to 500 words per minute. We can also think in images and concepts. Puck's boast that he would put a girdle round the earth in 40 minutes is a trifling feat compared to what our imagination is capable of doing!

Now, if we give the speaker his 125 words a minute, so to speak, and keep 375 for ourselves, isn't that to our advantage? Yes, but only if we use the advantage wisely. We aren't using it wisely when we are thinking where we shall have lunch or where we can get \$1,200 on the trade-in. After each digression, we find it harder and harder to return our attention to the speaker. The thought-speech speed ratio becomes, instead of an advantage, a sheer invitation to distraction.

These, then, are the "ten bad habits of listening". If we don't have at least one of them, we are extraordinary. If we have three or more, we need to work at making ourselves better listeners.

Improving Our Listening

How do we go about it? Let's make a few specific suggestions, giving a 20th-century code designation of ASOC.

A stands for attention. The first requirement for good listening is receptivity. To listen well, we must be open-eared and open-minded. Electric current can't flow if the circuit is closed.

All of us know there are times when being attentive is easier said than done. We are provoked or preoccupied. We are worried by deadlines and deadlocks. Such things, however, are a condition of being alive. We should discipline ourselves to push worries into the background and to make room for the speaker. We should strive for empathy; we should try to become in rapport (psychologically "together") with the speaker.

S is substance. Never mind the details...within reason. What is it all about? We should not concentrate on isolated facts or on the speaker's appearance and delivery. Whether or not he makes grammatical errors is less important than whether or not he makes sense. What is the significant information being presented?

O is objectivity. Attaining it is not easy. By nature we are emotional and subjective. Our tendency, when we dislike a speaker, is to disbelieve him. Bias and comprehension make poor working partners. If we are aware of our bias and on guard against it, we can prevent it from interfering with our listening. Experience shows that valuable information is often picked up in the most unlikely places. Lincoln said he had never met a man from whom it was not possible to learn something.

C is for creativity. To be good listeners, we must contribute something. We must work as hard to extract ideas and information as the speaker does to present them. Here the thought-speech speed ratio works in our favor. First, we should summarize what was said: drawing conclusions and attempting to distinguish between the forest and the trees. Second, we should

think ahead; speculating on what is coming next and attempting to determine in what direction the speech, interview, or conversation is heading. Third, we should test the validity of what the speaker is saying. We should note whether he is offering facts, statistics, and other evidence to support his contentions or whether the statements made come mainly off the top of the speaker's head. Finally, we should judge the manner in which conclusions are reached. Is the reasoning logical and consistent? Does it square with reality as we know it?

This is the meaning of our code word ASOC. We should pay attention, extract substance, attain objectivity, and make a creative contribution of our own.

You may say: "Well and good but what about the speaker who is obviously hopeless, who is a bore, and who hasn't had a new idea since 1918? Listen anyway. He might surprise you.

There are at least six reasons for being a good listener:

- ❖ We can learn by listening.
- ❖ Listening gives us time to think
- ❖ Listening solves problems
- ❖ Listening helps us to make better decisions.
- ❖ Listening gives us self-confidence
- ❖ Listening helps us sell

Remember the warning: Don't win the argument and lose the sale. Good Salesmen try to do just the opposite. Have you ever listened to a subordinate's troubles and suddenly realized that you had exactly the same problem with your own superior? Once the problem is seen in perspective, so to speak, a solution becomes obvious.

Conclusion

Let's conclude by briefly summarizing the points we have made. We need to understand the art of listening. It is so important to our effectiveness and; happiness. Unfortunately, most of us by nature have listening habits that are extremely poor. By making a slight exertion and by even huffing and puffing a little, we can quickly bring about a dramatic improvement.

We can make astonishing progress if we discipline ourselves to give the speaker our empathic attention, seize the substance of his speech, keep our heads clear by objectivity, and participate as creative listeners.

If we do this, we'll not only make ourselves better listeners, but also make the speakers better speakers.

A speaker can nearly always tell whether his speech is getting across. Mark Twain loved to tell the story of a lecture he once delivered in Newark. Before the lecture, a young man earnestly begged Twain to make his uncle laugh. He feared the old gentleman had not much longer to live and wanted to hear him laugh just once more.

Twain easily recognized the uncle sitting in the front row from the description given and went to work.

He tried old jokes, new jokes, dialect jokes, Western jokes, Mississippi River Jokes, everything in his repertoire. Although the audience enjoyed itself greatly, the old gentleman never even smiled.

When the lecture was finished and when the manager was pouring ice water on Twain's head, he asked: "What made you carry on so toward the end"? Twain explained, and the manager burst out laughing. "That poor old fellow," he said, "has been as deaf as a post for 30 years".

Hidden Agendas

Any group works on two levels; the level of the surface task with which the group is immediately concerned, and the level of the hidden, undisclosed needs and motives of its individual members. Participants' aspirations, attitudes, and values affect the way they react to the group's surface task. Such individual "hidden agendas" siphon off valuable energy that could be used for accomplishing the task at hand and for group maintenance. Understanding how these hidden agendas work in the life of a group helps the group achieve its common goal more efficiently.

Individual Needs

A person joins a group in order to fulfill or express certain personal needs. His behavior as a member of that group is neither random nor haphazard: It is keyed to his personal motivations, which may be social or emotional, explicit or hidden to the group, known or unknown to the individual himself.

Needs, of course, take different forms and can be satisfied in different ways for different people. Physical and security needs are basic: An individual must have food, shelter, and warmth in order to maintain life; if he is not to be overwhelmed by anxiety, he must also achieve some security and stability in his environment.

When such basic survival needs are met, other needs press for satisfaction. An individual has social, ego, and self-fulfillment requirements as well. These are the needs that can best be fulfilled in a group situation; thus, their satisfaction is often the individual's motivation for joining a group.

As individuals seek acceptance from others, social needs become apparent; when these are filled, the person's ego presses for its satisfaction... Finally, as the individual begins to understand his own unique identity, he can become fully himself.

Hidden Needs

Hidden beneath the surface of the group's life is many individual, conflicting currents; its members' needs for belonging, acceptance, recognition, self-worth, self-expression, and productivity.

Such needs are personal and subjective, but they are not necessarily "selfish". Looking for the

satisfaction of personal needs through group membership is both "normal" and "natural". We are not concerned here with the question of how or whether these needs should be satisfied, but with their effect on the group as a whole.

If one individual's needs block another from achieving his needs block another from achieving his needs, or if such personal needs hinder the group from accomplishing its goals, then we become concerned. We want to legitimize the individual's fulfillment of his needs in ways that do not raise obstacles for other members of the group.

Some Suggestions for Leaders

The leader should keep in mind the fact that a group continuously works on both the hidden and the surface levels. Hidden agendas may prevent the group from moving as fast as participants would like or expect.

What can be done about hidden agendas?

1. The leader can look for hidden agendas and learn to recognize their presence.
2. A group member may help surface hidden agendas. He may say, for example, "I wonder if we have said all that we feel about the issue. Maybe we should take time to go around the table and ask for individual comments so that we can open up any further thoughts".
3. Hidden agendas can be brought into the open and discussed. But not all hidden agendas can be confronted successfully by a group; some are best left under the surface.
4. The leader should not criticize the group for the presence of hidden agendas; they are legitimate and must be worked with just like the surface task. The amount of attention that should be given to the hidden agendas depends on the degree of their influence on the group's task.
5. The leader should help the group find the means of solving hidden agendas. Problem solving methods are needed, though techniques vary.
6. The group should spend some time evaluating its progress in handling hidden agendas. The last fifteen minutes of a meeting devoted to such evaluation is often very helpful.

Better and more open ways of dealing with hidden agendas should become apparent through experience. And as groups mature, hidden agendas are often reduced, thus increasing the amount of energy the group has to devote to its surface tasks.

You and Your Cooperative

Staying Communication Positive

Often when we talk about communication skills, we think about ourselves and how we can improve on the kinds of messages we send, some through what we say, through directions we give, and more to the point the warnings we might leave.

To build positive communications - -

- Think of how you are addressed as a board director, and how you feel about the formality or informality in the title, whichever is the case.
- Think of something another board member or member of the housing co-op has said to you that made a lasting impression and how you felt.

We remember because the words have helped us to know who we are and why we are, or can become, stronger board directors.

Communications quickly become the process of sending and understanding people messages. All of us choose to communicate in various ways - -

- We use language, expressions, touch and feel
- We learn about ourselves through applause, approval, and messages from others

If we like ourselves and feel attractive, it is because others around us have communicated positive messages.

Messages

- With your organized mind, you make a great board director.
- You are very responsible! When you think through your financial decisions, they reach out with lots of TLC for the co-op.

If we communicate responsibility with our real feelings and reactions, we use "I" messages to keep control.

If we label one another we communicate that we are very inadequate, but, if we label the behavior we are describing the real problem.

Setting Boundaries

As boards of directors of housing co-ops, it allows the power to set boundaries of action. Each board must designate what is important to them, and the boundaries set result in cooperative style and need.

There is no best style or need.

Messages:

The member doesn't have too many rules or doesn't give too many directions, but is encouraged by sitting on the sidelines and giving many cheers to the board urging them on.

The manager spends a lot of time taking instructions, explaining the rules, and building rapport as to how to "play the game." He/she provides advice and strategy on how to play. The manager's job is not to do it for the board, but to use professional expertise so that the board will not become involved in an activity that will hurt them or the membership.

The president and board of directors should catch you every time. They are the enforcers - - there to "blow the whistle" every time there is a violation.

Because everyone believes that different rules are important, they are taught and enforced in different ways. All rules and boundaries are important.

Self-Esteem

What is self-esteem? It is not a permanent status. If it is worked on, it should, with self-approval, build in the most favorable way about how a person feels about himself or herself.

People who have self-esteem:

- Feel good about themselves
- Know what they do well
- Feel comfortable in a group
- Recognize they cannot do everything
- Accept responsibility for what they do and how it is done!

Communication effects how we see ourselves and others. If "messages" are good, we feel well. Self esteem can become a fluctuating experience. Always know what you do well, focus on behavior and recognize important feelings.

A Collection of Communication Guidelines

Be as straight and direct as you want others to be

Use "I" messages: Take ownership of your own beliefs and opinions.

Try to understand how others see something before you disagree. Perceptions are as unique as our own experiences, images, dreams, and goals in life...so they are bound to be different.

Listen actively, not only to the words but to the whole person, including feelings.

Treat feelings as valid data; respect your own and other's.

Clarify: Avoid assumptions.

Avoid rhetorical questions or questions that are really statements.

Feedback can be a gift Try to hear it and understand it.

Conflict is absolutely inevitable; it may be creative and constructive.