



No Text Zone: Here's How You Should Communicate with Fellow Board Members



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Community association board members spend a lot of time communicating — whether it's with one another, community members, vendors or your management company. If communication is ineffective, the whole community could end up paying the price. With so much of an association's success tied to communication, I want to share a few best practices in a four-part series. In the first, I'll tackle text messages and explain why, if your association is using text as a primary means for communication, it may be time to try some alternatives.

Often, board members think that if they're *sending* communications, they're communicating effectively. You sent the **meeting minutes** (<https://info.associaonline.com/hoa-board-meeting-pro-tools>) via email, shared the agenda via text, phoned in the maintenance request to the service provider and mailed a receipt to the community member AND you kept copies of your communications, so what could go wrong?

Plenty. That's because when sending these messages, you're presuming that the people you're communicating with — through email, phone conversation or letter — *understand* the message you are trying to convey. But in many cases, your messages are being sent, but not *received*.

But why?

Tools and technologies like email, social media, mobile networks and more mean that we're all multitasking and sifting through lots of information day and night. Our workday used to end at 5 pm, but, now it can follow us from the board room to the bedroom, thanks to smartphone technology. Because of this shift, we're always on and there are many things competing for our attention.

So, now communications that we may have spent a little more time preparing and reviewing in the past, get sent at lightning speed on whatever tool we're using at the time. We're all on a fast track and have less time to listen or read like we did in the past.

As a direct result of this new way of communicating, I have been involved in a number of meetings where, after listening to both sides of a situation, we arrive at completely different perceptions regarding what was said and what needs to be done.

So, how do we correct this?

We need to first select the right tools to deliver our messages. Written messages (text or email) frequently have no topic, words are left out to shorten the message, the details are missing or there is a general lack of clarity. Letters, on the other hand, tend to be very structured; however, they can be too long, too detailed or too confusing — there's a reason **why TL; DR is a popular shorthand** (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Too_long;_didn%27t_read). Verbal communication also has its pitfalls, including distractions, boredom and disinterest.

But we'll cover those next week. Right now, let's talk text.

Text messages are designed to be short and quick, so they do a great job of satisfying our desire to consume and share bite-sized information as quickly as we can, but this method comes with serious limitations when it comes to communicating as an association board. Text messaging is fine for personal communication among family and friends; but, it's not recommended for use in a business environment. The drawback of the short messages is that when texting tends to use shorthand — a pared down or abbreviated style of writing that is designed for brevity instead of clarity. In some cases, shorthand works. In the medical industry, for instance, there's an established, set of acceptable abbreviations that denote common medical terms so that medical professionals can quickly communicate because a few seconds could be the difference between life and death. In community association management, we have so many moving pieces that clarity is much more important than brevity. It's not just the language that gets used in text messages. Some people also use emojis to convey ideas, but these can often get lost in translation too. A **recent study found that different phone providers display emojis differently and even when a recipient receives the correct emoji, they may not interpret the sender's meaning correctly** (<http://grouplens.org/blog/investigating-the-potential-for-miscommunication-using-emoji/>).

When it comes to issues that matter to your community, don't create situations where your message can be misinterpreted. Although your board is comprised of volunteers, a community association is a professional endeavor, and in professional matters, clarity is key.

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Be sure to check the blog next week, to learn about another popular form of communication, email, and what tweaks you can make to your email messages to increase opens and action from email recipients.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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