

THE ART OF COMMUNICATION IS THE LANGUAGE OF LEADERSHIP

ISMO HEIKKILA, NATIONAL DIRECTOR, ABORIGINAL SERVICES, T.E. WEALTH

THE ESSENCE OF LEADERSHIP IS REPRESENTED IN THE TITLE OF THIS ARTICLE, A QUOTATION OF JAMES HUME. EVEN WITH STRONG LEADERSHIP SKILLS, LITTLE CHANGE CAN HAPPEN UNLESS THE VISION, MISSION, DECISIONS, AND RESULTS ARE COMMUNICATED IN A WAY THAT THE INTENDED AUDIENCE UNDERSTANDS.

Does this sound familiar: “I told them – I sure hope they get it!” We tell our stories, and we listen to the stories of others. We are communicating. Yet is the communication effective? How do we know if our messages are truly understood?

“He who would do great things should not attempt them all alone”

– SENECA PROVERB

Throughout history, from the earliest cave drawings, petroglyphs, hieroglyphics, and alphabets, to the printing press, man has employed new methods to advance communication. Today we have the Internet, smart phones, and cloud computing. Successful leaders adapt their communication behaviour to take advantage of these new technologies, because these tools make it easier for people to tell their stories and to reach a larger audience. With every new development, there are the “early adopters” who embrace the enhancement, there are those who tend to lag behind, and there are those who refuse to adapt.

Face-to-face oral communication has been the preferred communication method. So how has technology affected our oral communication?

Traditional and modern senders and receivers of oral communication would include parents, children, family members, teachers and students, employers and employees, etc. In today’s society, oral communication has been enhanced beyond the basic telephone by cell phones, radio, television, and social media.

Both urban and rural Aboriginal communities can take advantage of digital technologies to share information, engage their members, and give them a voice in decision-making.

“Electric communication will never be a substitute for the face of someone who with their soul encourages another person to be brave and true.” – CHARLES DICKENS

Traditional indigenous communication has always included instruction of young people, community meetings, cultural activities (such as festivals), record keeping through storytelling, and of course unstructured communication of learnings, observations, and opinions. Communication technology is having a behavioural impact on everyone’s communication, as there is an increasing merging of traditional and dominant communication methods.

Nothing can totally replace the value of face-to-face communication. We communicate over email and phone, but even then messages can be misinterpreted and a sense of personal connection is not truly established or maintained. In fact, it’s said that over 90% of communication is nonverbal, using cues like gestures and facial expressions.

Meetings can be effective at getting things done. When there’s an issue that requires a decision, consensus happens more quickly. One simple conversation could eliminate back-and-forth emails. When there are many people in a meeting, there’s more energy and opportunity to participate and creatively contribute. Oftentimes there’s also a synergy that ignites discussion and innovative thinking.



It's not just about truly listening and hearing what is being discussed in a meeting. Nonverbal communication is also taking place. Nonverbal communication is reacting and adjusting to nonverbal cues. These cues can tell you very easily that it's time to wrap things up or make an effort to change the quality of your voice to be more engaging (or at least to change the subject.) And the very opposite is also true; if colleagues are smiling, nodding or leaning forward, you know that they're invested and have their buy-in.

Yet non-verbal cues can also be misinterpreted. It's an interesting dynamic of communication behaviour that enables one to adapt one's "personal style" of dealing with potential conflict based on a disagreement over an issue.

"The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn, and relearn." –ALVIN TOFFLER

There are many instruments that have been developed by behavioural psychologists. One of the more common is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) assessment, which is a psychometric questionnaire designed to measure psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions.

Another tool is the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI), which provides an assessment measuring the relative frequency with which one uses five modes of behavior – competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating – in a conflict situation. Through awareness and understanding of one's own typical modes of dealing with conflict – essentially disagreement – one realizes when a specific mode is being used too much, or perhaps too little. Everyone uses all five modes, depending on the situation, yet one has a tendency to rely on one or two modes most often.

We know that there's a feeling of community when we're better able to socialize and interact with one another. A sincere, respectful, personal touch is always appreciated. We quickly build a bond that sets the foundation for trust and ultimately for lasting relationships. This personal touch requires taking risks with others. Sharing one's personal thoughts and experiences about a specific issue subjects one to possible judgment and may affect how others view us and how we wish to be viewed. It is this area of "risk taking" that enable relationships to develop through trust.

Every social grouping – families, workplaces, communities – have reason to enhance their formal and informal channels of communication, in order to strengthen relationships. Once relationships are sound, there can be increased alignment of values, decision-making, and results.

"With best thoughts, words and actions, we align our past, present and future" –JOHN R. DALLAS, JR.

The study of organizational development, which applies to Aboriginal communities as well as non-Aboriginal, brings forward the question of the sources of conflict. Are the differences based on the people currently involved, or the systems around them, or perhaps a bit of both? An assessment of one's own personal style, and what values are inherent in that style or mode of behaviour, is an important learning if one is to assess how one interacts with the broader environment. One's environment has many components, ranging from leadership, department managers, rewards, policies and procedures, to the culture of "the way we do things around here."

Communication means that assumptions are made by the original Sender of the Message as well as by the Receiver. If verification, also known as feedback, does not occur (i.e. if the Receiver does not communicate back to the Sender), then there could be a disconnect, possibly resulting in a conflict due to misunderstanding. It is very important that the Sender verify that the Receiver did understand the original message.

ISMO HEIKKILA brings over 30 years of financial services experience and an effective ability to communicate to a broad spectrum of issues related to change management, communication planning and financial education.

He works closely with Aboriginal community leadership and human resource professionals to learn about their existing issues and design complimentary communication and change management programs. Ismo is a regular speaker on such matters having spoken at the national conferences of NATOA, CANDO, the Industry Council for Aboriginal Business, the National Indigenous Council of Elders Forum, as well as the AFOA Canada national and regional chapter conferences. Ismo also consults on matters relating to adult learning, financial literacy, and philanthropy.

THE ART OF COMMUNICATION IS THE LANGUAGE OF LEADERSHIP

THE EXCITING ASPECT IS THAT WHILE THERE ARE GUIDELINES, ONE CAN BE CREATIVE IN ADAPTING AND ALIGNING MESSAGING WITH THE DELIVERY SYSTEMS. YOUR AUDIENCE WILL LET YOU KNOW IF YOU'VE BEEN SUCCESSFUL.

A key element of effective communication is the diligence of leaders in establishing and maintaining appropriate formal channels of communication. A community website, newsletters, standard frequency and agendas for community meetings, etc., are all common communication methods. These formal channels are a blend of both past and present methods, representing the current culture and systems. They also should include the style of the communication leaders, be they Chief & Council, department managers, Trustees, or others. Another must-have is that the target audiences also need to have access to formal channels of communicating and giving feedback to leadership. This is an area that also requires appropriate protocols and resources. Communication is a very broad and complex area and is a continuing challenge for everyone.

The exciting aspect is that while there are guidelines, one can be creative in adapting and aligning messaging with the delivery systems. Your audience will let you know if you've been successful.

As a closing thought, it seems that the Seven Sacred Teachings of Love, Courage, Wisdom, Truth, Respect, Honesty, and Humility provide communication guiding principles which everyone can agree upon.



Building Today... for Future Generations

As a proud corporate member of AFOA, T.E. Wealth's dedicated Aboriginal Services team works with Communities and Trusts in the provision of:

- investment advisory services
- communication strategies
- financial education programs

Celebrating over 40 years of excellence with offices across the country, T.E. Wealth provides completely independent and objective advice.



Jack Jamieson
Vice President
Aboriginal Services
toll free 1-866-430-0537
jjamieson@teic.com
www.tewealth.com/aboriginal/