



## Communications: The Key to Successful Leadership

**W**hile different people have different styles of leadership, there are some common features found in successful leaders. One of the most important characteristics is that effective leaders are effective communicators. With the many responsibilities, audiences, deadlines and issues any board member or district administrator faces, it is easy to forget to employ the leadership skills that can lead to success.

First of all, it may be beneficial to take a few minutes to remind yourself of the basic communication skills.

Effective listening skills include making eye contact, leaning forward, nodding, restating key points and asking for clarification.

Skills of an effective speaker include standing or sitting up straight, speaking clearly, making eye contact, repeating key points, avoiding jargon and acronyms and asking if the listener has any questions. Be sure you are still using effective listening and speaking skills on all occasions.

But effective communication is more than effective listening and speaking. There are many other actions that increase the opportunity for communication and expand the number of people involved in personal communications.

**Visibility.** Being seen is another form of communication. Whether it is around the district office, other school buildings or around the community, being seen at district and community activities indicates a high level of interest and involvement in what is going on locally.

**Accessibility.** Reducing the barriers someone has to overcome to reach you lets people know you want to communicate with them. Providing your direct phone number and e-mail address, holding office time at different district buildings, holding meetings where interested people can attend and establishing fixed hours for easier contact make you more accessible to others. Replying in a timely manner to people who contact you also confirms that you are accessible.

**Involvement.** There are many ways to be involved, and they can all be ways to communicate with various publics. Some examples include:

- *Key communicators.* Forming a “key communicators” group provides a regularly scheduled time to communicate with those “movers and shakers” who can provide input from the community and disseminate information provided by the district.
- *Membership in community organizations.* It will provide many opportunities for communication. First of all, participation in civic organizations lets people know that the board members and administration are supportive of the community. Secondly, discussion during meetings allows the district representatives to learn about current community topics and to present issues regarding the district. Finally, it builds relationships that can be beneficial outside the parameter of the civic organization.
- *Decision making.* There are constantly decisions that need to be made. Involving other people in the decision process by requesting input is an excellent opportunity for communication. When people are able to

participate in the decision-making process, they are more likely to support the decision. However, their involvement should be “real.” If the decision has been made and other people’s involvement is just for show, they will sense that. The resulting damage can be worse than not involving them at all.

- *Variety of people on committees.* While people who have been actively involved and supportive of the district should not be ignored, involving new people on committees and task forces brings in new ideas and perspectives. This can keep the ongoing planning and management process fresh. The dynamic of new people and new ideas can often invigorate others who may have been involved a longer time.

### **Emphasize the positive;**

**celebrate.** So often, it is the difficult, negative or troublesome issues that garner all the attention at meetings. Make a point to highlight the positive, progressive and rewarding events and activities of the district at meetings.

**Seek out the quiet voices.** The vocal people, whether they support the current topic or not, always manage to be heard. Take time, particularly on major issues, to seek out those people who don’t often express their opinions. This may require more than providing opportunities. These people may have to be invited to express their opinion and be allowed to do it in a format in which they feel comfortable, such as a public forum, personal meeting or in writing.

**Get to know the district’s neighborhoods.** As noted under

