

Digital Communication

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"Chris, we never know what's going on at the Club. What happened to the newsletter? I never see it any more. Why don't you post more on the bulletin boards? Can't you be better at communication?"

"Chris, don't give me long text, just tell me what's going on; I only want bullet points. Just give me a tweet when you've got something I need to know."

"Chris, if you don't solve the communication problem, well, we'll need to talk more seriously."

Chris is finding that, in this fast-paced, ever-changing digital age, communication is a real challenge. Young members have a very short attention span: if the communication hasn't made an impression in the first few words (or even the subject line, for that matter), the note is discarded. By contrast, some older members can't even open an iPad, let alone follow a Twitter feed. It's a tremendous problem for Directors and managers around the country. Bridging the technology gap is difficult business, particularly for managers who are also deep into operational issues, and for Directors who understand that their fellow members want information and will pressure them to deliver. Neither the GM nor the Directors tend to be experts in the latest technologies, or even in what makes good copy: rather, they simply work hard to produce as much material as possible for the members to see.

Years ago, Chris created a Facebook page for the Club. A Twitter account was set up. "Push Notifications" became a regular feature. The newsletter is now digital, but certain members still get a copy mailed to their homes, and copies are placed strategically around the Club. The bulletin boards are replete with the happenings of the Club. And yet, despite all these efforts, "I never know what's going on around the Club" is still heard every time an event is less than full.

In some cases, this supposed breakdown in communication may simply be an easy excuse, rather than a real issue. Sometimes, when a Club member asks a friend why they didn't attend a function, it can be difficult for the friend to admit that they just didn't want to go, and so their default response is something like "I never heard about that event! When was the notification sent out?" The friend being questioned may worry about being ostracized if they give a more truthful reply, such as, "I had to stay home for the season finale of Rock of Love! I can't get enough of Bret Michaels. Uh—I mean, I didn't hear about the event." Leaders who understand that not all members feigning ignorance are being completely truthful will get a better handle on the real issues: message content, message delivery, and message volume.

In order to communicate well, leaders must employ forms of communication that capture the attention of their intended audience. In her book *Resonate*, Nancy Duarte writes about two fundamental appeals. Analytic Appeals are for those who live for logic and analysis: a small percentage of receivers will find this approach valuable. Emotional Appeals, she argues, are far more impactful. Likewise, Jonah Berger suggests in his book *Contagious How to Build Word of Mouth in the Digital Age*, that there are six STEPPS: Social Currency, Triggers, Emotion, Public, Practical Value, and Stories. A message with any one of these qualities will yield a good read, but combining most or all will give the communication potential to be spread. "Social Currency" is a term that describes how it will affect Members to talk about a particular topic. Will it make them seem smart or informed? "Triggers" are stimuli that prompt Members to think about related topics. For example, an ad for rum reminds a Member of the mojito that his favorite club bartender makes specially for him. This may, in turn, prompt a memory that is emotionally meaningful. Perhaps the rum trigger reminds him of the Club and winning the Club Championship, thus conjuring up a very powerful positive emotion. The term "Public" refers to the psychology of imitation: when we can get some members to act, others will follow, particularly when those acting are naturally influential. Ideas are more often shared when they are of "Practical Value," and "stories" are the medium of remembering. We have a natural tendency to convert information into personal stories, so originating information in story form helps make the information seem more memorable and useful.

Good communication will address the issues that the reader or listener want in the manner that suits them best. If we're not communicating about what people are interested in, then they won't pay attention. It's our job to make the message interesting. The Member above who wants fast, clear information is looking for a tweet or text. If there must be text, give them the ability to choose exactly what they want to read - be specific in the subject line of an e-mail, and utilize STEPPS in concentrated form (maybe only one or two parts are possible in a particular message). The member who wants information from the newsletter wants to take their time with the information, and may be more interested in the volume of activity. Story-creating is important for these longer communications. In either case, the content needs to hit the receiver with information that they need early on, or the receiver will lose interest.

There are many methods for conveying messages in a dynamic and engaging manner. Videos are becoming very popular for everything from promoting events to teaching Members how to repair ball marks. Videos are exceptional opportunities to be creative and fun, in a short period of time. For old-line clubs, the locker room bulletin boards are the mechanism of choice when it comes to delivery and volume of information. However, many clubs have advanced to the digital bulletin board, which can update itself automatically, yielding a great volume of messages in a short period of time. GM Toby Tomko at Hickory Hills Country Club in Missouri reported that members were very apprehensive about using digital signage, but after Signera produced a suitable frame for their display, Members were spending several minutes in front of the display, reading about the day's activities and watching videos on a range of topics. "The members are drawn to that sign every day. We have also recently begun using it the day of a wedding to put a montage of pictures from the bride and grooms families up scrolling. They love looking at them and their guests love it also. BIG hit!"

When you want something to be memorable, consider the ingredients of STEPPS, and use as many forms of media projection as possible, according to the users' requirements. Your Member may still decide to stay home and watch "Rock of Love," but at least they'll remember what you communicated!