

Obstacles to Effective Communication



Misunderstanding the Role and the Person

Effort must be made to build the respect and trust between the communicator and the leadership team. The goal is mutual understanding of how the roles can best support one another; this takes time, ongoing dialogue and regular interaction through weekly meetings with leadership and other departments.



Not Involving the Communicator

Communicators can best assist the leadership when they are aware and involved. Despite the pull from other priorities, the leadership must be disciplined enough to share goals, concerns and information with the communicator from the beginning, rather than pulling the communicator in once a situation is already in progress. Share the big picture with the communicator and seek their insight.



Ignoring Confidentiality

The communicator must understand the importance of keeping information confidential, working with leadership to determine when and what is appropriate to share with the public and other audiences. It is important to balance the desire to inform the public with internal privacy and business practices.



Disregarding Deadlines and Audiences

To be effective, communicators and leadership need to understand their different audiences and to craft messages unique to those groups' needs, desires and interests. The media's deadlines are important and should be respected. Responses to media inquiries should be as timely and informative as possible.



Not Preparing Leadership to Address the Media

The media often prefer to interview congregational leadership, thus the communicator should prepare leadership to be interviewed by media representatives. Techniques such as messaging, transitioning from questions to key talking points, and how to deflect negative questions should be taught to the leadership.



Messages That Aren't Prioritized

Communicators juggle a vast array of media outlets, messages and deadlines, thus they must prioritize how they respond. Instead of treating every internal and external request as urgent, the communicator and leadership need to prioritize based on the mission, goals and key messaging of the congregation. Criteria to help set priorities should be clear, known to both leadership and the communications team and reviewed on a regular basis.



Using Outdated Communication Tools

Communication tools and channels are constantly changing, thus the communicator needs to understand which to use to reach various audiences. Using old tools and not incorporating new technologies may result in audiences missed and messages not delivered. Communicators should provide insight to leadership on which are the best channels to reach unique target groups and monitor the congregation's use of such tools, including social media outlets such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, Discord and others.



Allowing Conflicting or Off-Point Messages

When conflicting messages or information from other sources in the congregation are allowed confusion and uncertainty may result. All communication should be coordinated and distributed by the communicator and tied to key talking points and strategic goals. Others in the congregation should check with the communicator so any contact with the media can be coordinated.



Ignoring Feedback and Public Comments

Comments from the public, both through email and on social media, should be monitored and addressed appropriately in a timely manner. Such feedback is a useful method of understanding concerns and interests of external audiences. Remember that not all comments need to be responded to, however they should be tracked.



Permitting Blocks to the Sharing of Information

The communications staff need to be aware of relevant situations and possible news stories; they cannot be as effective when access to such information is blocked from them. This is true of the congregation overall as well as individual departments. The communicator should be included in various department decisions, especially those that might have a public relations aspect.



Unclear Communication Objectives

Every communication effort needs at least one clear, tangible objective. What is it that you want to achieve? How will you measure success? Use the S.M.A.R.T. model to ensure objectives are solid: Specific – is it clearly defined? Measurable – how will you gauge performance? Attainable – is it a reasonable goal? Relevant – how realistic is it? Timely – are there clear deadlines for results?



Using Jargon or Unusual Terms Without Explanation

Specialized or internal terms that are known to the congregation but not to external or other audiences undermine communication outreach. Any unfamiliar, unusual or technical terms should be explained and put in context for easier understanding.



Omitting Evaluation and Assessment from the Plan

A crucial step in communication work is the evaluation. Assessments should be done regularly to ensure that the plan stays on track and so that changes can be made, if needed. Quarterly evaluations are best as they can help to track audience trends and campaign effectiveness during different seasons.



Short-term and Underbudgeted Investment

A communications plan should include clearly defined resources. Know the investment needed ahead of time for all aspects of the plan so that you best understand what you can and cannot accomplish. What is the budget? How will it be allocated throughout various campaigns? Is there flexibility for the unexpected? Take the time to cultivate an effective PR plan for your organization. The time and effort you put in will only help you to better understand your target audience and thus help toward overall success.