

MASA WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP NETWORK



Communicating

Challenging

Information

January 10, 2023

Welcome!

As you join the session today, **please share a favorite book you have read recently in the chat.** If you see a title you've also read recently, feel free to add a comment to someone else's message!

Setting the Stage:

- Consider the most challenging **messages** you've needed to share.
- Consider the most challenging **people** with whom you have had to communicate, negotiate, or reach a resolution.
- Identify one story to share within your breakout group where challenging communication did NOT go as well as you had hoped. Share why you think it didn't go well and what you might do differently in the same situation today.
- As you share these stories, identify common themes/ideas/similarities that make these communications so difficult.
- If you have extra time, share the opposite experience - times when challenging communication went really well. Why did it go well? What are common themes you notice in those situations?

What makes challenging communication so difficult?

- Add your thoughts to the [padlet](#).
- “Like” any posts with which you agree.

Strategies for Challenging Communication/Conversations: **Go Visual**



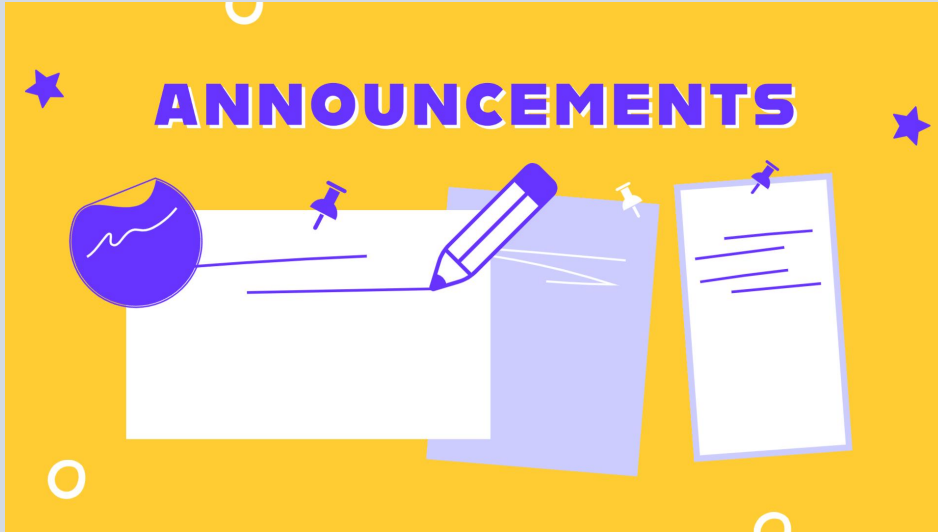
Having the volatile content of a meeting expressed in visual form, rather than delivered orally, will greatly increase your ability to separate yourself from the message.

Strategies for Challenging Communication/Conversations: **Get away from it**



Get the visual information off to the side so you can look at it along with everyone else.

Strategies for Challenging Communication/Conversations: **LOOK at the information**



Look at and talk to your visual aid rather than the listener initially.



Strategies for Challenging Communication/Conversations: Use third person language

Using first (“I”, “me”, “mine”) and second (“you”, “your”) person pronouns will tend to increase the parties’ possessiveness and defensiveness, in the case of bad news. Use of more neutral language (“**the report**”, “**the figures**”) will maintain a more objective tone and preserve the relationship.



*I have also found success with “we” - “We learned today . . . ”
“We received news that . . . ” “We were told by . . . ”*

Strategies for Challenging Communication/Conversations: *Separate the problem from the solution*

Resume eye contact when you start to talk about possible solutions.



Typically, this is also the time when I want to move attention away from the “news” and on to the “solution” or “next steps.”

Strategies for Challenging Communication/Conversations: **Use voice patterns systematically**

Our voice patterns range from **credible** to **approachable**.

Credible: flat voice that ends with an intonation that curls down (think of the voice of an airline pilot).

Approachable: rhythmic voice that ends with an intonation that curls up (think of the voice of an airline steward).

To increase your effectiveness, use the **approachable** voice when you are establishing the relationship (seeking information) **and have eye contact**; use the **credible** voice when you are delivering the bad news (sending information) and **looking at your visual information**.

Strategies for Challenging Communication/Conversations: **Consider your physical space**

Sitting at right angles (for instance across the corner of a table), makes it much easier to set up a neutral point to place the visual information as a natural part of the conversation.



If you are at a table, where you sit matters. Who sits at the head and foot of the table also matters. Give it thought and attention.



Strategies for Challenging Communication/Conversations: **Use specific descriptions**

Provide specific facts and evidence to back up your message (for instance, “the attendance report shows that you were late on 6 occasions in the last month”).

Avoid generalizations (e.g. “You always...”, “You never...”) and use questions to probe into any that they respond with.

There's a world of difference
between truth and facts.
Facts can obscure the truth.



Maya Angelou

Here is also a place where “I statements” can be more successfully used. “I noticed that . . . ” “When this happens, I feel . . . ”

*More recently, we have also realized that we need to ensure that we are seeking the **Truth** in our facts.*

Other things to consider:

- [5 Gender Differences in Communication](#) (note that he only shares 4:)
 - [Miss Communication](#) - *Have you ever heard someone call a female supervisor “cold,” just because she reacted like a man? This 23-minute digital video pulls the curtain back, highlighting how gender differences in nonverbal communication significantly affect workplace decisions and outcomes. Available for a fee and immediate download. Note - I have not previewed it - just found it as a potential conversation starter.*
 - [Making Difficult Conversations Easy - for Educational Administrators](#) - again, not one I have reviewed, but available for a fee and immediate download if you are interested.
- Are you speaking with cats or dogs? [Delivering Volatile News While Sitting](#)

Resources:

Print these and hang them by your phone. I did.


When you're on the phone, smile whenever you can. People can hear it in your voice.

When you get a volatile email, pick up the phone or walk to the classroom/building.

How to Communicate Challenging Information

Oftentimes, as communicators, we are messengers of other than positive information. Here's a summary of how to deliver it more successfully.



- **Go visual** - get the attention on something other than the messenger.
- **Get it off to the side** - get away from it - it is "them" and we are "us."
- Remember that listeners will consciously follow your eyes - don't look at them, they'll look at you and then you're the problem. **Look at the information** and they will, too. 
- **Use third person** - "the report," "the situation" or we - "We learned today ..."
- **Separate** the location of the problem from the solution to it.
- Use **credible** voice when sharing the information and looking at the visual. Use **approachable** voice when looking at the person and seeking solutions.
- **Use specific descriptions**; avoid generalizations and "always/never" language.
- **Position** body at 90 degrees or side by side.

If you can't go visual with the problem, you may be stuck and the problem may not be solved. The problem may be you and cannot be separated from the situation.

Based on the work of Michael Grinder & Associates,
michaelgrinder.com (360) 687-3238

Response Patterns

1. **Be direct** - use appropriate voice. Direct manner, credible voice, reflect the other person (or what you want).
2. **Paraphrase** - send the message you are listening and have heard all the information - don't "parrot phrase."
3. **Silence, Empathy, Non-Judgmental Acceptance** - let them run their "tape" - indicate that you are listening (but don't say "yes" if you don't agree).. Ask what role they want you to play.
4. **Clarify - Probe for Specificity** - Why? What? Where? Why? When? Intonation, Exaggeration, Exception
5. **Chunking Up for Agreement** - move to find agreement on ANYTHING.
6. **Third Position** - Keep Eye Contact
7. **Three Fs - Felt, Feel, Found** - use if you have changed your mind or feel the person may be working with old information.
8. **Dealing with People you can't Stand** - Get things Done; Get things Right; Get Along with Others; Get Appreciated.
9. **Metaphor** - Results in higher-level thinking - speaks to both sides of the brain and can be really effective if done well.
10. **I Don't Know**. If you don't know, say so - "Does anyone else know?" "I will find out and get back to you." "I don't know, but what I do know is ..."

Other Recommended Titles/Resources/Ideas:

Please share your favorites on this [padlet](#). If you had time in your breakout groups to talk about what works, here's a great place to share those ideas!

And remember:

Where you stand depends on where you sit. (Getting Together)

Be wholly trustworthy, but not wholly trusting. (Getting Together)

There is only one person over whom I have a reasonable amount of control and whose trustworthiness I can definitely improve - ME. (Getting Together)

It is never too late to affect the future. (Getting Together)

*An apology may be one of the least costly and more rewarding investments you can make.
(Getting to YES)*

*Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret. (Ambrose Bierce
as quoted in Getting Past No)*