

Communication PRinciples for Principals

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COMMUNICATION: ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES



IDEA

Get involved in your community. Check with family support groups, morale, welfare and recreation program managers and the base commander to determine how you can contribute your time and talent. Encourage teachers to do the same.

EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES – COMMUNICATIONS, PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MARKETING

Brochures e-mail and web sites are helpful to principals in their communications efforts – but are they the most effective? Brochures and interactive web sites build support and are important tools in your communications kit, but they can't be expected to increase support. It's better to adopt the mantra that: *"People beat paper just about every time."*

Interpersonal relationship-building techniques are the most effective way of engaging your audiences and the community. It's difficult for anyone to ask questions of a brochure or to get the same quality of interaction from web sites that face-to-face dialogue provides.

M. Frederic Volkman of Washington University in St. Louis designed the following Hierarchy of Effective Communication to emphasize the importance of interpersonal-relationships to communication efforts. Note where brochures, letters and newspaper articles placed:

Hierarchy of Effective Communication:

- One-to-one, face-to-face
- Small group discussion or meeting
- Speaking before a large group
- Phone conversation
- Hand-written, personal note
- Typewritten, personal letter, not a form letter or e-mail
- Personal "form letter"
- Mass-produced, non-personal letter
- Brochure or pamphlet sent out as a direct mail piece
- Articles in organizational newsletter, magazine, tabloid
- News carried in popular press
- Advertising in newspaper, radio, television, magazines, posters, etc.
- Others – billboards, pens, give-aways, etc.



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Applying the Hierarchy in your school

How can principals adapt the Hierarchy of Effective Communication in their schools? Here are some suggestions from the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA):

- Encourage teachers at your school to send notes home commending children for the smallest of accomplishments.
- Remind your staff to take five minutes at the close of the school day to review the major points of instruction covered during the day.
- Encourage teachers to routinely provide you with information that can be a source of a news story for your newsletters, website, base newspaper or the media.
- Give parents a chance to provide feedback, even if it might not be always positive.
- Write your own notes and send them home to parents for a child's noteworthy accomplishments.
- Get involved in your community. Check with family support groups, morale, welfare and recreation program managers and the base commander to determine how you can contribute your time and talent. Encourage teachers to do the same.
- Encourage teachers to offer or suggest programs involving their students and themselves for an educational presentation at a commander's meeting, wives club meeting or family support group meeting.
- Encourage and remind your staff to involve parents and Servicemembers in classroom activities.
- Think about stopping in at the home of student who might be having a difficulty of some kind.
- Encourage your staff to use community resources (doctors, dentists, lawyers, medical technicians, pilots, commanders, etc.) for visits and talks in the classroom.
- Encourage your staff to adopt a unit that is deployed; and have students write to single Servicemembers or those who are injured.
- Schedule Principal's Coffees in the mornings and evenings to meet with parents.
- Maintain a bulletin board highlighting articles about teachers, staff and students at your school. Have older students maintain the bulletin board.
- Set up a "Hall of Fame" bulletin board where photos, biographies or newspaper articles about former students can be displayed.
- Encourage and remind staff about every-day phone and visitor courtesy.
- Take a course in communications, public relations or marketing.
- Write notes to teachers, staff and support staff employees, recognizing their efforts and accomplishments.
- Meet with your staff to talk about what your school stands for and develop your own "key messages" to display in the school.
- Communicate with your staff, students and parents well before any major change or implementation of a new decision.
- Use the four-point communication test when decisions are made:
 - Who needs to know this?
 - What do they need to know?
 - What is the best time and vehicle to communicate this?
 - How will you know the message has been received?

Content adapted from *Principals in the Public*, published by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) and the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA).