

Effective Communication Skills

for Highway and Public Works Officials



Cornell Local Roads Program

NEW YORK LTAP CENTER

Effective Communication Skills
for Highway and Public Works Officials

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Preface

We prepared this workbook to accompany a training course on effective communication, primarily intended for highway and other public works officials. Its purpose is to provide highway officials some basic guidelines for talking with and getting along effectively with the public, their local governing boards, and each other.

This workbook and the one-day training workshop include topics about basic communication skills and tools for effective communication; how to use those tools to communicate successfully in specific situations; how to control anger when dealing with irate citizens; how to develop and use good telephone habits to ensure effective communication with your public; and how a good boss communicates with employees. These are interpersonal skills that will help you in your personal and professional interactions with people.

In New York State, highway officials are elected and appointed and have different titles, including Highway Superintendent, Commissioner of Public Works, Highway Manager, and Road Supervisor. We will use the term *highway official* to mean the primary highway, road, street, or public works person in charge of constructing and maintaining village, town, or county roads. We will use the term *governing board* or *board* to refer to the county legislature, town board, or village trustees.

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1 – Introduction

Everyone uses interpersonal communication skills. We use them at home with our families, in the workplace with our bosses and coworkers, on our computers when we answer email, and on the telephone when we order pizza. This manual is intended to help you improve your interpersonal communication skills and develop new skills to become a more effective communicator.

Interpersonal communication applies to all of our relationships, personal and business. Others respect or reject us based on our interpersonal communication skills. People send us messages in every interpersonal communication encounter. Those messages can be explicit (verbal comments) or implicit (nonverbal facial expressions, other body language, and physical space).

DEFINITION OF COMMUNICATION

Communication can be defined in many ways. In simple terms communication is:

- Information transmitted
- A verbal or nonverbal message
- A process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior

KEY ELEMENTS IN COMMUNICATION

There are three key elements in the communication process, which we will refer to throughout our discussion of interpersonal communication. They are:

- You
- Your audience
- Your message

YOU bring professional experience and education and training to the communication process. You have earned credibility with your employees, your board members, the public, the media, and your fellow workers.

In order to be an effective communicator, you need to know who your AUDIENCE is. If your audience is a highway crew, then you can talk

effectively about graders, alligator cracks, rutting, and pavement deflection. If your audience is the public or your board members, you need to switch from transportation jargon to "plain English." The principles of effective interpersonal communication are the same whether your "audience" is one person, ten people, or one thousand.

The MESSAGE element is equally important. What do you want to say? What is the best way to communicate the message? There is a basic rule used by journalists for writing a newspaper story that can help you focus your message. A well-written story should contain the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the story in the first paragraph or two. If it does not, it will not hold our attention.

The same principle applies to your message in the process of interpersonal communication. If you do not let your audience know quickly the who, what, when, where, why, and how of your message, you risk their losing interest, being inattentive, and tuning out.

Therefore, whether spoken or unspoken, messages should contain most of these elements:

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- Why
- How

COMMUNICATION TOOLS

There are four basic communication tools:

- Listening
- Speaking
- Reading
- Writing

All four of these basic tools can be learned and improved. First, you must want to improve your communication skills. Next, you must understand them, and recognize their importance in the communication process. Then, you need to learn some new skills. Finally, you must practice good skills to become a better, more effective communicator.

At an early age we begin to learn to speak, early enough that it is difficult to remember the process. However, most of us can recall learning to read

and write. These are skills we learn from parents and teachers. We spend most of our communication time listening. Yet, listening is a skill we are not taught, unlike writing, reading, and speaking. Probably, listening is the most important communication skill we can develop. We will explore listening skills in Chapter 2.

HOW WE GET AND USE INFORMATION

How much information we retain in the communication process depends on many factors. It is important for each of us to recognize how we learn best. Do we remember most of what we read? Most of what we hear? Do we learn more if someone shows us?

Typically, we retain information at these rates:

- 10 percent of what we read
- 20 percent of what we hear
- 30 percent of what we see
- 50 percent of what we see and hear
- 70 percent of what we see and discuss
- 90 percent of what we do

Another way to think about how we retain information is this adage:

Tell me and I will probably forget,
Show me and I might remember,
Involve me and I will learn.

NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal messages are unspoken and more difficult to interpret than verbal messages, but are just as important. This is particularly true when you think that someone is saying one thing and showing body language that tells a different story. Nonverbal cues are often neglected during interpersonal communication. We will explore them in Chapter 4.

A type of unspoken communication is writing. Communication in writing is powerful and lasting. Whether you write a letter, a memo, or an email message, written communication can be recalled word for word. Spoken communication is often misquoted and misremembered. Writing lasts a long time. So, think carefully about written communication. We will explore these skills in Chapter 3.

APPLICATIONS OF COMMUNICATION SKILLS

In Chapters 1 through 4 this manual will concentrate on basic communication skills, how to identify them, and how to improve them. In Chapters 5 through 7 discussion will involve applying these skills to dealing with the public, the workplace, and governing boards.

Change involves risk. It takes one to three months to establish a new habit. Be brave! Make the commitment to try one new communication skill, to practice it, to give yourself a chance to improve. Take a big step; you cannot cross a chasm in two small jumps. Communication skills CAN be learned.

2 – Oral Communication

LISTENING SKILLS: BARRIERS, IMPROVEMENTS, AND TIPS

Say what you mean, and mean what you say!

We have all heard that from time to time. Trying to understand the difference between what is said and what is heard can be frustrating. Consider these two examples.

Husband: “I don’t want to be late again.” [what is said]

Wife: “Did you mean we should leave earlier than 5:00?” [clarifying question]

Husband: “No, but you always say you’ll be ready on time, and we never are.” [what was meant]

Teenager: “All my friends are allowed to stay out late.” [what is said]

Mom: “Just because all your friends are, doesn’t mean you should.” [what is heard]

Teenager: “Why can’t I stay out later?” [what was meant]

Mom: “How late do you want to stay out?” [clarifying question]

Teenager: “At least until 11:30. Then I won’t be the first one leaving the party.” [what was meant]

Listening is really where all good communication begins.

Misunderstanding what another person is saying is one of the biggest obstacles to communication. Each of us sees the world in a unique way, and we usually assume that everyone sees it the same way we do.

Most people are born with good hearing, but not good listening skills.

Listening must be learned. Listening is a mental process requiring effort, and we can learn how to be good listeners. First, we need to understand what the barriers are to good listening skills. Then, we can identify ways to improve those skills.

Why We Don't Listen Well

We are busy people. There is much that competes for and distracts our attention, both at work and at home. We may arrive at work in the morning worried about an ill child at home. Or we may arrive at work with a full agenda in our heads, only to learn that our priorities have been rearranged for us. At the end of the day we leave work full of goals for the next day, and arrive home unable to turn off the ideas. At home our family or chores demand attention. And so the cycle goes.

Barriers to Effective Listening

Here are some barriers to effective listening. You'll probably recognize that most of them apply to you at one time or another.

- We can think faster than a speaker can talk, and jump to conclusions
- We are distracted and allow our minds to wander
- We lose patience, and decide we are not interested
- We overreact to what's said and respond emotionally
- We interrupt

Other barriers include use of “absolutes” and “limits”:

- Thinking or speaking absolutes:
“It will never work”
“We always do it that way”
- Setting limits:
“We tried it that way once!”

How to Be a Better Listener

There are some simple steps to becoming a better listener, but they take practice to achieve results. Here are some ways to listen better whether in a large group or one-to-one.

In a large group situation, such as a lecture or training session, try these exercises:

- Be patient for the entire message
- Be aware of speech cues (who, what, where, when, why, how)
- Listen for ideas, not just facts (stories, reasons, goals help us remember facts)

Try these guidelines when talking with someone on the telephone or face-to-face. Practice these for a week or two and you will soon realize that they work.

Verify:

“So, you're saying that. . .”

“If I understand correctly, you said. . .”

Question:

“What do you mean when you say. . .?”

“Have you really spent. . .?”

Acknowledge:

Look at the speaker and nod
Occasionally say, “hmmm” or “oh, right”

Silence:

This allows you to give your undivided attention to the other person. You may give some non-verbal cues that you are hearing, such as nodding your head, smiling, opening or closing your eyes. This method is especially useful when people come to you with strong feelings, either positive or negative. Their first need is simply to share the feelings and to have someone listen.

Encourage:

“Tell me more”
“Would you like to talk about it?”
“Want to have lunch and talk?”

✓ **Tips**

It is estimated that we use only about 25 percent of our listening capacity. Here are three tips to help you increase your ability to listen by 50 percent:

- Look at the speaker (benefit = 15 percent)
- Ask questions (benefit = 15 percent)
- Take notes (benefit = 20 percent)

Improvement occurs only if you practice these good listening skills. Try one of them for about three months. It takes at least that long to create a new habit. If you are a good list taker already, then practice asking questions to clarify what you hear. Avoid trying to implement all three tips at the same time. Success with one new habit will encourage you to try others.

Hearing is natural. Listening is a skill that we learn. Remember: we listen more than any other human activity except breathing!

SPEAKING SKILLS: WHAT TO SAY AND HOW TO SAY IT

Asking Questions

Asking questions is part of being both a good listener and an effective speaker. Part of developing good listening skills is learning how to ask questions to verify messages and to clarify understanding.

There are many ways to ask questions. Some are designed to clarify the message you are receiving. Others are designed to get more information.

Close-ended questions are designed to clarify, and can be answered with a “yes” or “no” response. Here are some examples:

Did the truck break down?
Can we provide you with more information?
Are you feeling ill today?

Open-ended questions are designed to get more information, and cannot be answered by a simple “yes” or “no.” Here are some examples:

How did the truck break down?
How can we provide you better service?
How are you feeling today?

Another questioning technique is called the *one-point solution*. The characteristics of the “one-point solution” are the following:

- Identifies an urgent concern
- Focuses on one issue at a time
- Forces a choice
- Leads to a specific solution

When using the “one-point solution” to ask a question, you can use several words, such as “one” or “best” or “top.” They all have the same characteristics. Here are some examples of “one-point solution” questions:

What is the one thing we can do to increase our safety effectiveness on the job?

What is our top priority in the shop this week?

When is the best time to conduct safety training?

We'll see how the "one-point solution" can help resolve conflict and disagreement later in this chapter.

A type of question to avoid is the "loaded" question. This means that the person asking the question "loads" the expected answer into the question. The response expected is presumed within the question. The classic example is:

When did you stop beating your kids?

The question presumes that you beat your kids!

Here are some other examples:

Don't you think we should call the boss before we load the next truck?

(obviously, the person asking the question thinks you should call, and "loaded" the expected response into the question)

Why don't you stop taking home tools from the shop?

(presumes that you are the one taking the tools)

Gender-neutral Language

The English language uses masculine nouns and adjectives when speaking in a general way about people. For example, "Man is a curious creature." Historical documents use masculine nouns to mean all people. For example, in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this nation. . ."

Pronouns are a part of speech that substitutes for nouns. For example, "he" for David and "she" for Laura. Masculine pronouns traditionally have been used in writing and speaking when we do not know the gender of someone or we mean both men and women.

Since the 1960s women have taken places of increased influence and responsibility in the workplace, government, and the world. It is no longer safe nor prudent to assume that a company's CEO or a highway official is a man. The last two presidents of Ireland were women. Both India and Great Britain have elected women as their leaders. Consider that more than half of those accepted into veterinary colleges in the U.S. are women. We should avoid making gender assumptions, as in:

Question – "May I speak to the doctor?"

Answer – "She's not here until later."

Reply – "No, I meant the doctor."

Avoid using common stereotypes, such as “female architect.” Ask yourself if you would say, “male architect.” Using gender-neutral language in your speech and in your writing is a habit you can acquire. Here are a few ways to deal with gender differences:

Avoid the he/she trap by using plurals or the second person, as in:
“A driver should slow his/her car when approaching a work zone.”

Instead, use:

“Drivers should slow their cars when approaching a work zone.”
OR – “You should slow your car when approaching a work zone.”

Use gender-neutral nouns, like these:

Mail carrier instead of *mailman*
Police officer instead of *policeman*
Firefighter instead of *fireman*
Person or individual instead of *man*

Refer to women subjects by their complete names, as you do men, such as: Ronald Reagan and Nancy Reagan instead of Reagan and Nancy.

In the end, we should consider what is respectful as well as the equality of the sexes. This will avoid creating hostility before you can get your message across.

CONFLICT, CRITICISM, ANGER

Dealing with Conflict

Every human being experiences conflict. It is a factor of human interaction. Whenever two or more human beings are involved in communication there is potential for misunderstanding, and hence, conflict. How we handle conflict is key to our own well-being and to developing and maintaining good relationships.

There are three basic ways to deal effectively in conflict situations:

1. Listen carefully to determine the nature of the conflict
2. Identify areas of agreement
3. Allow the other person a way out

Obstacles to Resolving Conflict

Sometimes we create barriers to resolving conflict effectively. If we do not confront the problem soon after identifying conflict, the issues may become more difficult to resolve. Other obstacles to resolution may include the following:

- Judging a problem too quickly
- Searching for a single answer, and believing ours is the best
- Assumption of either/or (either it's my way or not at all)
- Deciding that “the problem is theirs, not mine”

How to Overcome Obstacles

Often we create obstacles to resolving conflict when the solutions are simple. If we determine that the conflict could be negotiated, and we are willing to do so, then it will be useful to list some options toward resolution. List them all, even the ones you really do not want. Be creative and invent options that seem unusual. This “brainstorming” technique provides the basis for negotiating. Often “crazy” ideas lead to acceptable ones.

From this point you decide what you can give up, and you find out what the other person can concede. Negotiating a resolution to conflict need not be an “either/or” situation. Both parties in the conflict can win something if there is real effort to resolve the problem. Ask yourself these questions, as you move toward resolution:

- Is it worth fighting over?
- Can it be negotiated?
- Do I want to win the argument more than win a relationship?

The best approach to resolving conflict, whether in your personal relationships or in business settings, is to simply deal with it. Avoiding resolution will only escalate misunderstanding and may promote anger. Keep these key points in mind:

- Separate people from the problem
- Focus on interests, not positions
- Strive for mutual gain

Negotiation, Persuasion, Mediation

The starting point for negotiating in conflict situations is to realize who is the distressed, unhappy, or concerned individual. Human nature often causes us to assume it is “the other person.” We say to ourselves, “It’s their problem.” In the meantime, we actually are the distressed party in the conflict.

Once we realize that we have control over only our own behavior, we have taken the first step in resolving conflict. Remember, your behavior is in your control. You cannot control another’s behavior, except by changing your own actions toward that individual.

There are at least three tools to use to effect behavior change:

- Negotiation: Arranging or managing through discussion or compromise
- Persuasion: To move by argument to a new position or belief
- Mediation: Intervening in conflict with intent to resolve through discussion

All three tools require you to present information in the form of facts. Remember the six W’s in the communication process? They come in handy now. Information involves identifying who, what, where, when, why, and how. Agreement or at least presentation of information can lead to discovering ways to persuade individuals involved in conflict. Persuasion involves using information to convince others that there is more than one way to look at an issue. Mediation usually introduces a third party to the conflict in an effort to resolve problems.

There are a variety of negotiation solutions to conflict. One that is easy to learn and use is the “one-point” solution, which we discussed earlier in this chapter. The technique is offered in the book, *Power Tools: 33 Management Inventions You Can Use Today*. This technique involves getting feedback in the communication process, and involves open-ended questions.

The one-point solution is the difference between asking for general feedback like, “What is it you really want?” and asking for a *specific* response like, “What is the one thing that will make you change your mind?” If you only get one response it is usually something specific to use as the basis for negotiating a solution.

To use the one-point solution just keep the number “one” in mind when asking questions. Here are some examples:

- What is one thing I could change in my behavior?
- What one training program could I attend to help me the most?
- What is one question I should ask that I haven't yet?
- What is one new service we could offer to put us ahead of competitors?
- What is one thing you think we need to do to work together better?

✓ **Tips for Resolving Conflict**

Here are some tips for resolving conflict:

- Seek agreement or common ground
- Refuse to argue
- Seek commitment and action to change
- Plot the follow up
- Deliver on promises

Criticism

When we hear the word “criticism” we usually think of an unfavorable judgment. Yet, the primary definition of criticism is “the act of making judgments and the analysis of qualities and evaluation of comparative worth.” It is easy to understand how the word generates a negative meaning. If we set out to compare the worth of one person compared to another, by definition one must look better and one worse than the other. Is that not why we use the phrase “constructive criticism” to mean positive feedback?

If you receive criticism, try to take responsibility if it is yours to have. Ask yourself if there is anything that you have done to deserve the criticism.

If you need to offer a reprimand to someone, avoid doing so publicly. On the other hand, do not store up criticism and deliver it all at once. Choose the teachable moment and offer a one-point solution. Avoid using others as good examples because this compares one person to another, and can embarrass people unnecessarily. Use phrases that foster teamwork and offer suggestions for improvement, not merely blame. Here are two examples:

Blame	Constructive Criticism
Carol, the report you prepared was incomplete. I can't use it at the meeting now. You should have known I wanted a clear list of alternatives.	Carol, the report you prepared for my meeting needs a list of alternatives. I may not have been clear about my objectives. Here's one example of how we've done it before.
Blame	Constructive Criticism
Bill, we just got some calls about the four corners intersection. When you plowed the drifting snow, you must have blocked the visibility there. You should have been more careful.	Bill, we just got some calls about the four corners intersection having poor visibility. The first time I did that job it was tricky. Let's go over and take a look together. Perhaps I can give you a pointer.

When and How to Criticize

- Don't "store" reprimands
- Use the "teachable" moment
- Criticize privately
- Avoid using others as a "good" example

✓ Tips for Effective Criticism

Here are some tips for developing your style of effective criticism:

- Direct your criticism at behavior, not the person
- Say something positive
- Identify behavior that can be fixed or changed
- Avoid use of the word "you"
- Avoid negative words like "no, not, never, shouldn't"
- Offer specific ways to make changes in behavior (doable action)

Controlling Anger

From time to time we all become angry. It is a human characteristic. But, we are not born angry, we learn anger. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that we can learn to control it. Although we may not always successfully control our anger, the more we practice ways to control it, the more we will succeed. Just as with practicing good listening skills, we can practice controlling anger.

Anger can be healthy if we use it to help us understand our reactions to situations. Once we understand how to deal with our own anger, we can use that understanding to help us deal with anger in others. Suppressing anger or denying it can cause stress and physical harm. Public officials often must deal with angry callers or citizens at public meetings. It is easy to respond to anger with more anger.

✓ Tips

Here are some tips to help you deal with angry people:

- Practice good listening skills (remain silent if necessary)
- Avoid interruption
- Acknowledge anger (do not tell an angry person, "Now, don't be angry")
- Do not yell or lecture angry people (it disrespects their points of view)
- Be responsive by verifying the person's message
- Be specific about what you are going to do to help
- Allow angry people a way out regardless of what they say

TELEPHONE SKILLS

Often the first impression that people get of public officials is on the telephone. Yet we may treat telephone conversations casually. There are ways you can improve your first impressions with the public. Think about how you want your business, office, staff, and yourself to sound when someone calls.

By the year 2000 only two and a half percent of households in the U.S. did not have telephones. We take for granted that everyone knows how to use a telephone. However you should not assume that everyone you hire knows how to answer your office telephone projecting the image you desire. You should establish a procedure, inform staff, and train them to respond to telephone calls in a manner that reflects a positive image.

Effective telephone answering procedure should involve a standard three-part greeting:

1. Opening introduction (Hello – Good morning – Good afternoon)
2. Identity of organization (Town of Eden Highway Department – Police Department)
3. Personal touch (Rachel speaking – Superintendent Mills here – This is Kevin)

Once you have a procedure, what do you want to happen to calls and callers? You also need a process for recording, responding to, and following up on calls. At the least, everyone responsible for answering your phones should record the caller's name, address, phone number, the time of the call, and a few notes about the conversation. Standard phone logs are available at most office supply stores. Or, you can use the one we include in Appendix D.

If there are times when nobody is available to answer your office phone, voice mail is handy. A phone answering machine is a useful tool, and costs little compared to the ill will created by an endlessly ringing telephone. Invest a little more to get a digital machine so the time of calls is recorded automatically. Despite asking callers to report the time, they often forget. Make sure your outgoing greeting message is clear, short, and accurate.

Here is one suggestion:

“You have reached the Middleburg Town Hall. We're not here now. Please leave your name, phone number, and a brief message. Thanks for calling.”

Record your message, then call your office to listen to it. Make sure it is clearly heard and reflects what you want to say.

Voice Mail

Whether you use a telephone answering machine or have a message system within your municipality, it is a useful tool. It is much better to offer callers the alternative of leaving a message than listening to an unanswered ringing telephone.

A simple message contains the following elements;

- Greeting (hello, hi)
- Identity (you've reached. . .)
- Message:
 - Day, time of call*
 - Name, phone number*
 - Brief message*

When you leave messages for others, offer a call-back time and the subject of your call. This will help the respondent to prepare for the return call.

Summary

When using spoken language, remember these V A L U E tips:

- **V**erify what is being said
- **A**cknowledge feelings
- **L**isten “actively”
- **U**se simple language
- **E**liminate negative words

✓ **Tip**

Smile while answering the telephone. It “shows” in your voice.

3 – Written Communication

Traditionally, written communication has meant letters and memos, perhaps even casual notes written on a greeting card. In recent years written communication has been extended to include faxes, email, and Web pages.

MEMOS, LETTERS, NOTES, REPORTS

No matter what your job, you will find the need to write at one time or another. You will want to avoid some common pitfalls when you have to write a letter, press release, budget report, or set of instructions for your employees.

Here are some basics that will help you in whatever writing task you have.

- Keep writing simple
- Keep writing positive
- Keep writing accurate

Talk the reader's language. This principle relates to one of the key elements in the communication process, knowing your audience. Streamline your style. Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* contains ten sentences and was spoken in less than three minutes. Yet it is one of the most memorable speeches of all time.

Avoid wordiness. Often, you can shorten wordy phrases and keep writing simple. It is not difficult. After you write a letter, memo, or instructions for a procedure, look critically at unnecessary words and phrases. When one or two words can substitute for five or six, do it. For example:

Instead of writing:	Write:
We made a decision...	We decided...
With reference to...	Concerning...
Cooperate together...	Cooperate...

Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* is powerful, masterful, and persuasive. But, most of us are not professional orators. The point is to use language that is natural to us. Then it will seem natural to others. Avoid the jargon that is second nature to you in your job, but which is a foreign language to others. If you need to use technical language, explain it to your reader.

You can keep writing positive by avoiding negative words and phrases. Look at these examples:

Negative:

We can't issue the permit until you complete the application.

Drivers won't be able to use Main Street during the paving project.

Positive:

We can issue the permit when you complete the application

Drivers will use the short detour during the Main Street paving project.

Good grammar, correct spelling, and punctuation reflect a careful writer and one who respects the audience or reader. Whether you are a good speller or have forgotten more grammar than you remember, ask someone to proofread your letters, notices, and instructions. Ask a secretary, spouse, trusted coworker, or your own grade school student at home. Even the best writers have editors who check their work. Accuracy shows you care about your image and that you respect your audience.

Letter writing has become somewhat informal these days. However, there are some basic formats acceptable to almost everyone. Make sure that you include the date in your letter. It will help you remember to follow up if you do not receive a response when you expect it. Include the date on *all* correspondence, even your file notes, memos, schedules, and other writing. It can defend you if your records ever become subject to public scrutiny.

If you do not know who to address a complaint or inquiry to, avoid using "Dear Sir" or "Dear Madam." The best approach is to call and find out the name of someone to address your letter to. When all else fails, a salutation such as, Dear Customer Service Representative or Dear General Motors, can work.

To end your letter, use either "Sincerely yours," for a more formal letter or "Sincerely," for less formality. "Very truly yours" is less common now and a bit old-fashioned, but is acceptable.



Try these tips to achieve accuracy and clarity in writing:

- Use short words (fewer than 3 syllables)
- Use short sentences (fewer than 15 words)
- Use short paragraphs (fewer than 5 lines)
- Be direct and positive
- Use a dictionary to verify spelling
- Use spell-check on the computer
- Ask someone to proofread your writing
- Mark your own common spelling errors in your dictionary
- End with "thanks"

Research studies have found that, on the average, people in the United States read on an eighth-grade level. There is a function in Microsoft Word called the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level index. This index establishes the reading grade level of documents you type in Word. To access the tool, go to the Tools menu on the Standard Toolbar in the Word program on your computer. Follow this route:

1. Choose the Tools menu on the Standard toolbar
2. Choose Options
3. Choose the Spelling and Grammar tab
4. Under the Grammar section, check “Check grammar with spelling” and “Show readability statistics”
5. Complete your document
6. Spell-check the document

At the end of the spell-check function, the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level index will appear.

FAXES

When preparing a fax remember the 6 W’s: who, what, when, where, why, how. Faxes should be short, and include the basic information of your message.

Always use a cover page. The cover page should contain your name, title, organization, phone number, fax number, and email address. It should have the same information for the recipient of the fax. Often faxes arrive at a central office location shared by many people. The complete identity of the recipient is crucial in these situations.

You can devise a fax form cover page for use in your computer or for hand-writing. We have included a sample form in Appendix E.

WEB SITES

We have all visited good Web sites and bad Web sites, although we might have a difficult time explaining the differences. If your organization is contemplating a Web site, the first question you need to answer is: why? What is the purpose of the tool? Who will use it? What benefit will the organization and users get from the site? What is different about the site’s information from a newsletter, poster, flyer, or news article? How can it be updated regularly?

Often Web sites are the first contact people have with you and your organization. Websites should be inviting, informative, believable, and

developed for a specific audience. Your site should have credibility. Much information on the Web is wrong or a downright scam. Do some research about colors and design. For example, the color purple has various connotations, from nobility to spirituality.

Once those important questions are answered satisfactorily, you can think about design. Choose a Web site designer who can show you samples of work and who has references of satisfied customers. Insist that your Web site will work with the major browsers: Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator, Mozilla Firefox, and Opera 7 for Windows operating systems – Internet Explorer, Netscape, Safari, Opera, and Mozilla for Macintosh operating systems. There are others available.

Your Web site should be easy to read, easy to navigate, and easy to find. These criteria should guide you to building a successful Web site:

- Use a type size large enough to be legible without requiring readers to move close to the screen
- White lettering on black background can be difficult to read
- Red lettering on a blue background, and vice versa, is difficult to read
- Do not overuse capital letters; they are difficult to read
- Avoid flashing graphics and text
- Keep places to click on each page to a minimum
- Try to use no more than three clicks to get to information
- Always have a link for users to return to the top of a page or to the home page
- Test your Web site pages before launching them to the public
- Ensure that your home page loads quickly, in under ten seconds
- Check the site regularly for broken links, especially links to other Web sites
- Update your site regularly and post the date of the most recent update

EMAIL

It is estimated that over 80 percent of people who have access to the Internet use email. We can expect that figure to grow. Email has become another way we communicate.

Users of email tend to write more casually than letter writers. We think of letters as more formal than email. It is easy and quick to dash off an email message, but we should use the most basic “netiquette” of email. “Netiquette” is short for InterNET etIQUETTE.

As with all communication, and as we stress throughout this manual, know your audience. Use appropriate language. Be aware of the

recipient's use of email, whether the person sees email every day or once a week or even less frequently.

You can be more casual than with letter writing. Instead of “Dear Ms. Kelly” you can write “Ms. Kelly” or “Donna” if you are on a first-name basis. If your message is about more than one topic, use separate paragraphs for each topic. Trying to read a long email message on a computer screen is difficult.

Know the difference between the *to*, *cc*, and *bcc* options when sending a single email to multiple recipients. All names and email addresses entered on the *to* and *cc* (‘carbon copy’) lines will be seen by every recipient of the email. On the other hand, each name and email address entered on the *bcc* (‘blind carbon copy’) line will not be seen by those listed in the *to* and *cc* lines. This protects the privacy of the *bcc* recipients. Their email addresses will not be visible to the other recipients. Think carefully before using the *bcc* option: why do you not want the other recipient(s) to know you're sending multiple copies?

✓ Here are some “netiquette” tips to help you use email effectively and responsibly:

- Avoid using all CAPITAL LETTERS. First, it is difficult to read emails written in all caps. Second, it is considered the equivalent of shouting.
- Avoid overusing “urgent.” When faxes first became a popular means of communicating, most of us used a fax to send urgent information. Email started that way, and “urgent” has now become too commonplace to take seriously.
- Always include the applicable portions of the original email when using the Reply function. Many people get lots of email. When they receive a reply like, “That’s fine with me,” and no reference is made to the original email, they may not know what you are agreeing with.
- Watch for too many replies in a series of emails. Sometimes a string of messages becomes too long. Even the original topic changes!
- Spell-check and proof-read your emails before sending them.
- Always fill in the Subject line. It is frustrating to receive emails with blank Subject lines. Finding that specific email later can be very difficult. Your Subject line can also encourage readers to open your email sooner rather than later.
- Use a signature at the end of emails. It is sometimes difficult to find the From line in long email headers.
- Be careful using the Reply All feature, especially when responding to personal emails. Your reply should usually be sent only to the person in the To line.

- Respect privacy. If you would not pass around a private letter to others, do not forward copies of emails (or email addresses) to others without permission.

Finally, and most importantly, remember that although email should be treated as private communication, all email is public to some degree. That is because the Internet is a public medium. Respect email privacy as much as you can. Be aware that others can and may read the messages you send and the messages you receive. This is especially true in the workplace. Courts have upheld the right of businesses to monitor employees' email messages sent from and to workplace computers.

4 - Nonverbal Communication

BEHAVIOR

Behavior and attitude operate together for most people. Our attitudes lead us to certain behavior. If we have positive attitudes we tend to act positively, see options, and seek solutions to problems. If we have negative attitudes we may often feel defeated, assume the worst outcomes, and give up without exploring alternatives.

Public officials, teachers, supervisors, parents, and even fellow workers can be role models. We learn from our role models. These are people whose behavior we choose to copy because we value what they do and how they do it. We learn how to be a supervisor from those supervisors we have had. We learn to be parents from our own.

BODY LANGUAGE

Our own behavior can affect those around us. We try to draw impressions of people, and they of us, by observing both their verbal and non-verbal behavior. We communicate a lot without saying a word. It is estimated that over 75 percent of the messages we deliver are communicated non-verbally. We express ourselves using what is known as body language.

Body language can be as simple as a frown on your face, a smile, crossing your arms, or tapping your pen on a desk. Some convey hostility, others show open friendliness.

Body language includes our gestures, facial expressions, dress, and grooming style. Researchers have documented some non-verbal expressions common to all cultures. However, cultures show these common expressions in different ways.

These common expressions are:

- Joy
- Sorrow
- Fear
- Anger
- Surprise
- Disgust

North Americans tend to make less eye contact than Arabs. Africans are taught to avoid eye contact with people of higher stature. Physical contact is natural for Italians, French, Latin Americans, and some Arabs. It is less common for Asians, Germans, and Scots.

SPACE

In order to communicate effectively with people, whether in our own culture or in others less familiar, we need to understand accepted boundaries. The use of space between people who are communicating has been studied extensively. Here is a brief description of how we use space in the communication process:

Public space ranges from 12 to 25 feet and is the distance maintained between the audience and a speaker, such as the President and reporters at a press conference, or a professor and students in a classroom.

Social space ranges from 4 to 12 feet and is used for communication among business associates, as well as to separate strangers using public areas such as beaches and bus stops.

Personal space ranges from 2 to 4 feet and is used among friends and family members, and to separate people waiting in lines at teller machines or fast food vendors for example.

Intimate space ranges out to one foot and involves a high probability of touching, as in whispering and embracing. We reserve intimate space for parents, our children, spouses, and close friends.

Use of public, social, personal, and intimate space is interesting to observe in all cultures.

ATTITUDE

We all have the choice of how to approach the day each time we arise in the morning. Sure, things happen to discourage or disrupt us, but we can choose to face obstacles with cheerfulness, orneriness, optimism, stubbornness, hopefulness, or nastiness.

Medical professionals have documented the power of positive thinking. People have aided their own healing with optimistic and hopeful thoughts. Perhaps it is because they translate that hopefulness and optimism into action. They do not give up. They fight. They do not give up believing that their situation will change if they can find the right solution.

Your attitude with employees and co-workers works the same way. Saying, “we won’t” implies a decision. Saying, “we can’t” implies a lack of power and a sense of defeat. We can talk ourselves into negative attitudes if we repeatedly think negative thoughts. We can encourage ourselves and others to seek alternatives if we say, instead, “How can we?”

People are more willing to follow a leader who exhibits a positive attitude. People will try to avoid those who consistently exhibit a negative or hostile attitude. Be positive!

5 – Communication with the Public

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND HOW TO USE IT

Communicating with the public is one of the most important jobs of public officials. Communication defines public image as much as action does. You can do all the good deeds you can think of, but if you fail to communicate positively with the public, your reputation can be damaged.

Who is your public? In addition to your area residents and businesses, it can be neighbors, advocacy groups, other public officials, and the media. It is the person who walks in the door or the person on the other end of the ringing telephone. You need to be aware that you are vulnerable to criticism any time you do or say something, even outside the boundaries of your job.

You communicate with the public for three basic reasons:

- To inform
- To reassure
- To persuade

It is your responsibility to inform the public of the responsibilities of your office, whether you are elected or appointed. You need to reassure them in times of crisis, and persuade them that your policies are for the public good. It is easier to inform, reassure, and persuade people who understand, trust, and believe you. So, you should think of ways to create allies.

Take the initiative to inform your community about your office, what it does and how. When are your policies going to directly affect them? Use the media to announce changes in seasonal procedures. Learn how to write a simple press release (see Appendix G). If your municipality has a local newsletter, consider contributing an article or announcement in each issue. If your newspaper publishes guest editorials, submit something once in a while. Keep your name and office in the public's mind with *positive* news before something *negative* happens.

Public relations opportunities are excellent ways to meet and inform the public: school fairs, speaking to classes, local parades, community open house events. Keep a photo album of projects, especially “before” and “after” pictures. Those can be shared at public events, and are handy when the press asks for them.

Nearly every community has civic organizations that meet on a regular basis, and which serve the community. These groups include the Lions, Rotary, Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce, Grange, League of Women Voters, local schools, tourism board, and 4-H. Contact them and offer to speak at one of their meetings. Tell them about your job, your accomplishments, how your work affects the community, and about any plans for improvements. The work you do is central to the life of your municipality.

Make the extra effort to inform people of planned road work around their neighborhoods. Tell them the approximate dates, how weather can affect your plans, what time the work will start in the mornings, what time it ends each day. Give your name and phone number and invite inquiries. This approach can help offset complaints.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Effectively serving the public means putting your customers first. You should have a customer service policy that all of your employees know and practice. Focus on your customers, whether in person or on the telephone, by practicing good listening skills. Show your willingness to help and a concern for their feelings. Be sure to maintain eye contact when dealing with customers in person, and take thorough notes (remember the 6 W's!). Always offer thanks for their comments.

To find out how you measure up with your customers, evaluate your effectiveness. Ask your employees and customers questions like these:

- How fast are phones answered?
- How well are phones answered?
- What is the appearance of your office?
- What is the appearance of employees?
- How do customers rate the quality of information?

You can evaluate customer service by calling a few people who have interacted with your office in the previous three to six months. Ask a couple of the questions suggested above. Ask customers to rate your service by telling you if it was about what they expected, less than they expected (ask why!), or more than they expected (great news! also ask why).

Remember to acknowledge everyone with a positive attitude. It does not matter if customers are right or wrong, it matters how they feel when they hang up the phone!

And, remember to say, "thanks."

COMPLAINTS

Despite all the positive and proactive measures you take, there will be complaints when you work in public service. Have a procedure in place for handling complaints. Then, make sure that your employees know the procedure and follow it. Here are suggestions that combine the best procedures that we have heard from public officials who have attended this course. They work!

Devise a system for recording all complaints, whether they come into your office in writing, by phone, or employees hear a complaint while out on the job. As their supervisor, make sure all of your employees know how to record complaints properly. Keep a written record of who, what, when, where, why, and how.

You can use a single form to record all of these transactions. Should you be involved in litigation in the future, your record of actions taken in response to citizen complaints can save you and your municipality from costly civil actions. See the sample complaint form in Appendix D. You can use it for telephone calls, too.

One of the most effective ways to handle complaints is to realize that you must set boundaries with your response. Sometimes you can respond quickly, maybe immediately. Other times you will need to ask the person lodging a complaint to make an appointment with you. Acknowledge the issue, and suggest that by making an appointment, you will have more time to discuss the problem and work toward a solution. The appointment may be in your office or out in the field. A key question to have ready is, “What action do you seek from me (or our department)?” Encourage the complainant to be specific. Be cautious about promising solutions. Look for all angles and all sides of the issue.

✓ **Tips for dealing with complaints**

- Do not take it personally, and do not get defensive
- Never act on a complaint without hearing both sides of the story
- When in doubt, leave it out. (Maintain positive language. If you are about to say, “We never. . .” or “You shouldn’t. . .” – don’t!)
- Avoid blaming anyone: it does not help resolution to dump on someone else
- Say what you will do and when (set time limits and stick to them. Even if you merely get back to someone with the progress you are making, do it. In the absence of facts, people make up reality).
- Take notes

Effective communication comes full circle when you have listened, taken action, and then informed the person who made the complaint that the problem has been dealt with. Be careful to promise only what you can deliver! Once the problem has been solved, report back to the person who made the complaint. Say THANKS for bringing the issue to your attention. If possible, thank someone in person. Let the complainant know you have taken care of the problem. Lastly, whether you consider the process positive or negative, use it in your next employee training session.

SUMMARY

Whether dealing with complaints or just inquiries from the public, here are some things to remember:

- Show willingness to help
- Show concern for feelings
- Offer alternatives
- Astonish! (offer an alternative that will delight your customers!)

6 – Communication in the workplace

Communicating with the public is one of the most important jobs of public officials. Communication defines public image as much as action does. You can do all the good deeds you can think of, but if you fail to communicate positively with the public, your reputation can be damaged.

Effective communication in the workplace happens with effort. That effort must include participation and agreement between supervisors and employees. Each must want similar goals. Each must work with the other to achieve the goals.

According to *Achieve Solutions – Value Options* (a service for managed behavioral health care), a sense of common purpose can be the key in getting along with your coworkers. If you do not understand your department’s or organization’s goals and objectives, ask your boss. If you and your coworkers focus on common purpose, tasks become easier and results more predictable.

SUPERVISORS

Effective supervisors need to be available to employees. Whether you maintain an “open door” policy or not, employees should know when and how they can communicate with supervisors. If employees have ready access to their bosses, they will be able to clarify the common goals and objectives of the work place.

Attitude and Behavior

Much is conveyed by a supervisor’s attitude and behavior. Getting cooperation from each other is as much influenced by our attitudes as our behaviors. If we convey a positive attitude, people react to us positively. Conversely, if we convey a negative attitude, we will experience negativity in return. Consider this example:

NEGATIVE BOSS: “You’ll never finish this job if you run the grader that way.”

POSITIVE BOSS: “There are a couple of different ways to run that grader. How about if I show you one way I found that makes the job go smoother?”

Consider how to approach problems in the workplace. If there is a job to complete, materials are late arriving, an employee key to the operation called in sick, and a vehicle has broken down, it is easy to literally throw up your hands and voice despair. Such behavior conveys an attitude of defeat before you start to problem-solve. Employees will pick up on negativity and imitate it. A positive attitude can be converted to positive group interaction to solve the problem. Be assertive, announce the trouble, and ask for everyone's cooperation and help in getting the job done. When employees know that supervisors believe in their abilities, and will work with them to be successful, positive attitudes will convert into positive behaviors.

Supervisors should not take good work for granted. Praise good work. Thank people regularly. Be specific about behavior that needs to change. Remember that what motivates one person may not work with another. If you need overtime help, asking the most senior worker may not be doing them a favor. Perhaps the person has an ill parent at home to care for. On the other hand, another employee may welcome overtime to help pay for a newly purchased house. Build relationships with your workers, and be careful to maintain a professional manner.

One way to display a positive attitude is to give more credit than you take. If employees get credit for making supervisors look good, everyone benefits. Successful supervisors who are well-liked and respected as leaders always give credit where it is due. They also know how to share success with employees who contribute to a winning situation.

Humor has an important role in the workplace. Use it wisely, never at the expense of someone's embarrassment, and begin by directing it to yourself.

Goals and Objectives

Supervisors should reveal occupational goals and objectives. Just like a trip across the country, you can either wander aimlessly, or you can develop a plan, set a schedule for departure and arrival, and chart your course. You can anticipate detours along the way. The detours might be placed in your path by others or you may decide to create your own alternative route. Everyone needs to know the "road map."

- Where are you going?
- How can you get there together?
- What obstacles might you encounter?
- Who has the skill to contribute to success?

The differences between goals and objectives are subtle. A goal is the vision or purpose of an organization or work unit. It is defined by World Reference.com as:

The state of affairs that a plan is intended to achieve and that, when achieved, terminates behavior intended to achieve it...

Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines goal as:

The end toward which effort is directed...

How, then, would you achieve goals? That is where objectives come into the picture. Remember, you are “drawing a road map” for employees. They need to know your “destination” and the “proposed route.” Objectives are specific ways to reach goals. Using the “road map” analogy, an example of a goal and its objectives is the following:

GOAL:

Drive safely from Pennsylvania to Nevada in five days.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Develop route using up-to-date maps.
2. Drive no longer than eight hours per day, and plan stops accordingly.
3. Maintain safe conditions by checking weather and road construction reports.

Examples of goals and objectives that a public works department might have are these:

GOAL:

Establish and maintain timely, efficient, and friendly customer service response.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Answer telephones within three rings.
2. Respond to inquiries within 24 hours.
3. Ensure customers are satisfied via a follow-up phone call.

Be Clear, Consistent, and Fair

Stick to what you say if it is important and right. It is essential for employees to believe that what supervisors say one day will not substantially change the next. If your actions are different from your words, your employees will believe less of what you say. On the other

hand, if you need to reverse a decision or try a better way to do something, admit it. Everyone respects honesty.

Establish standards and let everyone who works with you know what they are. Here is how:

- Establish standards for quality and communicate them
- Establish lines of authority so everyone knows who is in charge
- Know what you want before telling others
- Tell *why* if you change your mind
- Be brave about admitting mistakes (use it as a learning opportunity for everyone)
- Know when to compromise and have alternatives in mind
- Know when and how to criticize (never publicly)
- Respect individuality

When trying to motivate employees, keep in mind that usually what you are trying to accomplish is to get someone to perform the job better. In order to do a job well, employees need to know *what* the job is, *how* you want it done, and *when* you want it done. If they do not know your vision for the finished product, you may get a different result than you planned.

Training

When employees know what the finished product should look like and the correct techniques necessary to achieve it, they will be able to "coach" each other along the way. Training can help to build good morale if done in an interesting, fun, and upbeat way, which makes everyone feel that effort really counts. This can help to build a "pride of workmanship."

Your crew will likely include members that may eventually become supervisors. Training will help develop these future leaders. Supervisors should include regular training for staff. Training can save money by decreasing the costly mistakes. And, if everyone knows what the final product should be, quality will improve.

Setting training objectives

Supervisors should set training objectives for everyone. Here are some examples of training objectives:

For a chip seal operation by a highway department:

Objective: After training, everyone will know that the stone must be spread before the emulsion breaks.

For effective customer service:

Objective: Everyone will learn and use a standard telephone greeting.

For safety:

Objective: A minimum of three employees will be trained to perform CPR.

When to train

Training should be conducted when there are new procedures to learn or as a refresher for an activity that involves safety. Here are a few other suggestions:

- A week or two prior to an operation because the training will be fresh in everyone's mind when the activity begins
- When new equipment is added to inventory
- On a rainy day or during a time when the work load is light
- When interest is high (for example, when everyone is wondering why some event failed to develop as planned)
- Whenever there is a significant turnover of employees

Training need not be long or involved every time you do it. A short lesson or refresher session in 15 minutes can be just as effective as a three-hour training class.

How to train

Training can be conducted with written materials, such as workbooks, manuals, handbooks, and guides. Written training resources are available from county highway departments, state regional offices, statewide associations, equipment vendors, safety agencies, the Internet and the Cornell Local Roads Program.

Do not rely on written materials as the sole means of training. “Read the manual” is good advice, but a *better* approach is a combination of showing people what you want them to learn, accompanied by some written material to refer to later. This approach uses the written material to *reinforce* the visual and oral presentation.

Videos are effective ways to provide regular training sessions for highway crews. You can build your own library by searching the Internet and you can borrow videos free of charge from the Cornell Local Roads Program.

Consider working with other agencies to share training. Sometimes local highway department employees can sit in on county sessions or presentations by state regional offices. Ask them!

Evaluation

People need to know the score. How would you feel as a batter if no one kept score during a baseball game? What would be the point of playing? What would be the motivation to continue?

Likewise, employees need to know their “scores.” They need to know how their performances will be measured, against what standards they will be evaluated, when performance will be assessed, and how the results will be used.

Measure employee performance with consistent and fair evaluation tools. These may be determined by union rules. The larger the organizational structure, the more likely there will be standard performance evaluation forms to use, and specific times for evaluation meetings. Engage employees in the process by asking them for a performance report for the evaluation period. Invite them to tell you in writing what they think their achievements and successes have been. Then use those as a way to begin your discussion.

✓ Here are some tips to help you with employee performance evaluations:

- Evaluate, even though it is a tough job; employees deserve it
- Expect what employees can deliver by considering individual capabilities
- Collect data constantly
- Measure results that you have clearly defined
- Reward good work

EMPLOYEES

Employees have a responsibility to contribute to the team effort. Employees should learn the job, the goals, the objectives, and become part of the workplace. Let coworkers get to know you. Your behavior should indicate a positive attitude. Consider opportunities to join coworkers for recreation outside of the workplace.

Listening is key to your success as an employee. Do more listening than talking, especially when work orders are being conveyed. Get the whole

story before you begin questioning. Ask questions when you do not understand. Remember the key questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Attitude and Behavior

Observe your supervisor's attitude and behavior. Observe what coworkers do and how they do it, how they relate to each other and to the boss. How does the boss react to certain behavior of employees? Is humor encouraged in the workplace? Is initiative rewarded? Let your observations guide your own attitude and behavior. You can choose to be cooperative and positive, or negative and troublesome. When in doubt, take the high road. Avoid being argumentative.

Let your behavior indicate your attitude. Once you have received orientation and training, you can begin to observe the workplace routine. Offer to help others when it is appropriate. After you feel comfortable in your new job, volunteer for projects to increase your skills. Arrive a little early, join in the coffee breaks, and be available for tough jobs.

Keep these behaviors and attitudes in mind, and you will be a *better* employee:

- Be dependable and loyal
- Be willing to accept criticism
- Accept praise gracefully
- Be neat and clean
- Be positive

Training

When there is a training opportunity, take advantage of it, especially if you have promotion as a goal. Ask your boss what the expectations are for learning a skill. What is the learning curve? By participating in training you not only improve your skills, you increase your value to your supervisor, your coworkers, and the organization.

Performance Evaluation

Keep track of your performance successes and ways you can improve. When in doubt, ask your supervisor for your "score." How are you measuring up to the boss' expectations? Be prepared for your formal performance evaluation by keeping good records.

If you disagree with your supervisor's evaluation, ask specific questions, like these:

What should I have done to perform better on that job?

What is one thing I can do to improve my attitude?

If I want to be promoted, what training can I get to help me?

SUMMARY

Much data has been collected and analyzed by organizational communication researchers. A couple of interesting profiles have emerged. Consider these two profiles, one of the positive supervisor, and the other of people who are employed by them.

The POSITIVE BOSS:

- Gives real responsibility to workers
- Trusts them
- Listens to them without criticism
- Listens without interrupting
- Is unafraid to admit mistakes
- Encourages them to think and to learn
- Encourages them to work out their problems together
- Appreciates their work
- Fosters good humor

EMPLOYEES who have positive attitudes:

- Contribute ideas
- Help one another
- Are comfortable expressing disagreement
- Laugh a lot, often together
- Learn readily and accept new ideas from the boss and from each other

You may not yet be a supervisor, but you may want to be some day. Maybe that's why you're reading this manual or attending the workshop. That's terrific! Do something new each year toward your goals, and you'll be there sooner than you think.

7 – Communication with your Governing Board

One of the best summaries of how to get along with your board members is the article, “The Ten Commandments of Political Engineering.” The Ten Commandments was written by George C. Protopapas, retired County Engineer, San Luis Obispo County, California. He first offered this advice in 1992, and it has been reprinted many times since. We offer it here, in summary, courtesy of the National Association of County Engineers (NACE).

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF POLITICAL ENGINEERING

1. First, and foremost, establish a good relationship with your board. This will determine how successful you are in all aspects of your job as the leader of your highway or public works department.
2. Keep your board informed about the operations of your department. This is easier if you develop an advocate on the board, someone who is interested in road and street projects. This person can become your liaison with other board members. Brief this person frequently about your plans, needs, and budget requests.
3. Make yourself available to board members. None of us like interruptions when we are busy. You should make an exception for calls from board members. You may need their cooperation at any time.
4. Fight as hard as you can, with persuasive arguments and plenty of details, for your requests. Do your homework. Prepare not just the facts, but also the “hows” and “whys” of your recommendations. If you are defeated, thank the board for their attention, and then embrace the result with enthusiasm. Nothing sours a relationship more than visible defeat and a bad attitude. Remember, you will have to deal with these folks again.
5. Approach your board with your recommendations in positive language. Avoid asking them what they think or what they want regarding an administrative or engineering matter. Consider their comments, but strongly present your case. They may set policy; you manage your department.

6. Whether you are elected or appointed, your duties should be defined clearly. Make sure all board members know your duties and responsibilities. Whenever new board members begin a term of office, give them this information. This will discourage individual board members from requesting you to do something that is unethical, unprofessional, or in conflict with other employees of your municipality.
7. When a board member refers a complaint to you, treat it with the utmost importance. When the issue is resolved, and especially if it is good news, consider informing the board member first, and suggesting the board member contact the complainant. You will look good no matter who delivers the news.
8. Treat all board members in the same manner. Stay away from showing favoritism.
9. When you receive compliments from the public, suggest that people pass them along to the board in writing.
10. Never embarrass board members in public, especially in meetings. If a board member makes a mistake at a public meeting, wait until after the meeting ends to correct the error. Make your board members look good to the public, and expect them to do the same for you.

SPEAK THE SAME LANGUAGE

When you are communicating with your board members, use simple language. Remember that your highway operations involve some specific language. Not everyone knows what application rates or retroreflectivity or motor grader techniques are. If you use acronyms in speaking or in writing, explain what they mean. The first time you use FHWA, say it is the Federal Highway Administration. Then you can repeat the acronym because everyone will know what it means.

If you develop an advocate on your board, you can begin to educate that person about the terms and definitions you use in your job.

Above all, communicate facts honestly. You will sometimes tell your board things they will not want to hear. Always tell them the truth. You will gain their respect, and you will maintain a reputation for integrity. Your credibility is one of your most important assets.

POLITICS

A lot could be said about municipal politics. Whether you are appointed or elected, it is wise to stay clear of political campaigns. Decline to endorse current or potential board members, even your highway liaison on the board. Remain neutral politically because you do not know who you may be working with after the election.

At the same time, keep your ear tuned to the political climate in your municipality. Do a lot of listening, and remain neutral. Resist pressure to agree with one side or the other. It is important to know what is going on and how it might affect you and your department. It is even more important to stay out of political disputes.

SEEK TRAINING

We discuss training for employees in Chapter 6. It is equally important to seek training for yourself and your other administrators (deputies, managers, supervisors). You should make the case to your board for continual upgrading of your skills because it will benefit them and your municipality.

Keep in touch with local, regional, state, and private training sources. State government holds regional seminars. Local educational institutions offer courses in computer skills. The Cornell Local Roads Program conducts training sessions throughout the state every year at reasonable cost.

Subscribe to newsletters and publications in your field. Some of these are free for the asking to public works officials.

BE AVAILABLE, VISIBLE, INFORMED, TRUTHFUL

Be friendly and available. Invite board members to see the new vehicle they authorized in the budget. Invite them to meet your crew some morning, and serve coffee. It is easier to work with people you know and understand.

Be visible by appearing regularly at board meetings, especially when you have good news and you are not asking for something. Prepare brief reports. A five-minute summary of progress on your spring clean-up or summer paving jobs will keep your board informed. In turn, they can respond to questions from the public. This makes them look good, and makes you look smart. If you cannot get to a meeting, but have something

good to report, use your board liaison. Have your short update read into the meeting record.

Be aware of agenda items. Know what's important to your board. Know current issues and how they might affect the public works department. There may be opportunities for you to assist board members, or to have them help you.

When a request from your department is on the agenda, be prepared to address the issue. It is best to have your request typed so that it can be accurately included in the minutes. Make copies of the request available for all board members. If you are using visuals such as a photographic display, charts, or tables, make sure that the graphics are large enough to be seen easily by someone sitting at the back of the room.

Remember: if you always tell the truth, you will have no problems remembering what you said!

REPORT YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Be proactive about reporting your accomplishments. If you do not do it, no one else will. Establish the habit of reporting to your board, perhaps after each season. Remind your board of the goals you set, and what was achieved. If some goals were not reached, tell why. Then outline your goals and plans for the next season.

At the end of each year, summarize the goals and achievements. It is a reminder to your board of what has happened. Include what did not happen and why. This is critical if lack of budget support was responsible for not meeting your goals. Do this in a straightforward manner, without criticism.

Thank your board for their support. Remember that you want them on your team next year.

Appendix A

Publication Resources

Better Bosses=Better Roads, Nebraska T² Center newsletter (Lincoln, Nebraska, April 1989)

The Elements of Style, William Strunk Jr. and E. B. White, Fourth Edition, Allyn and Bacon, A Pearson Education Company (Needham Heights, Massachusetts, 2000)

Getting to Yes, Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In, Roger Fisher, William Ury, and Bruce Patton, Second Edition, Penguin Books (New York, 1991)

Getting Ready to Negotiate: the Getting to Yes Workbook, Roger Fisher and Danny Ertel, Penguin Books (New York, 1995)

Getting Together, Roger Fisher and Scott Brown, Penguin Books USA (New York, 1989)

Guide to Employee Communication, (The), Communication Briefings (Pitman, New Jersey, 1990)

How To Talk and Communicate At the Same Time, National Association of County Engineers Training Guide Series (Kansas City, revised 1986)

One Minute Manager (The), Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, Berkley Books (New York, 1983)

Power Tools: 33 Management Inventions You Can Use Today, Samuel D. Deep and Lyle Sussman, Perseus Books (Massachusetts, 1998)

Working with Difficult People, William Lundin and Kathleen Lundin, American Management Association (New York, 1995)

Appendix B Internet Resources

The following sources were used in researching the information presented in this manual.

Email Etiquette:

www.emailaddresses.com/guide_etiquette.htm
www.learnthenet.com/english/html/65mailet.htm
careerplanning.about.com/od/communication/a/email_etiquette.htm
www.dynamoo.com/technical/etiquette.htm
www.library.yale.edu/training/netiquette
www.iwillfollow.com/email.htm
www.emailreplies.com

Web site Design:

www.grantasticdesigns.com/5rules.html
www.webstyleguide.com
www.webpagedesign.com.au
www.makoa.org/web-design.htm
www.firelily.com/opinions/thumb.html
graphicdesign.about.com/cs/designbasics/a/webrules.htm

General Information:

Achieve Solutions – Value Options
www.valueoptions.com/newsroom/factsheet_achieve.htm

Ask Dr. Dictionary
www.dictionary.com

Communication Briefings
www.combriefings.com

Crisis Resource Center, University of Houston (Houston, Texas, 2002)
www.uh.edu/crc

Guide to Grammar and Writing
www.ccc.comnet.edu/grammar

Merriam-Webster dictionary online
www.m-w.com

Maria Finch, University of Derby (Derby, England)
ibs.derby.ac.uk/system/modules/view/timetable.php?mcode=4CL002

Seven Things to Notice, Peter K. Gerlach, MSW, Stepfamily Association of America, Inc.
(Lincoln, NE 2005)
sfhelp.org/02/awareness.htm

World Reference (online dictionary)
www.wordreference.com

PLEASE NOTE:

Internet addresses for Web sites change frequently.
The URLs for these sites are correct as of June 2005.

Appendix C

Videotape and DVD Resources

Be Prepared to Speak, 27 minutes, CU Instructional Resources

Better Business Grammar, 12 minutes, Communication Briefings

Coaching for Top Performance, 25 minutes, American Management Association

Communicate and Win, 48 minutes, Communication Briefings

Communicating with People on the Job, 15 minutes, Communication Briefings

Correcting and Rewarding Employee Behavior, 27 minutes, Long Island Productions

Exercises in Communication Skills, 17 minutes, Long Island Productions

Listening: The Key to Productivity, 17 minutes, Communication Briefings

Make the Phone Work for You, 12 minutes, Communication Briefings

Making Your Point Without Saying a Word, 27 minutes, American Management Association

Managing People, 52 minutes, Kantola Productions

Power Writing: The Key to Success, 38 minutes, Communication Briefings

Powerful Ways to Persuade People, 42 minutes, Communication Briefings

Tap the Power of Teamwork, 45 minutes, Communication Briefings

Team of Your Life, 18 minutes, Caterpillar

A World of Gestures, 28 minutes, Berkeley Media

Videos are available for free loan from the Cornell Local Roads Program to highway and public works officials in New York State.

We regret that we are unable to lend videos out of state because of our many in-state requests.

For more information, call CLRP at 607-255-8033.

Appendix D

Sample Inquiry/Complaint Form

INQUIRY / COMPLAINT FORM

phone

TOWN OF NORTON
HIGHWAY DEPARTMENT

letter

Date: _____

fax

Time of call: _____

e-mail

in person

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

Phone #: _____

Request or complaint:

Referred for resolution to: _____ Date: _____

Completed by: _____ Date completed: _____

Action taken:

Appendix E Fax Cover Form

F A X TO: _____

Phone: _____ Fax number: _____

F R O M: _____

Phone: _____ Fax number: _____

Number of pages including this one: _____

Message:

Appendix F Sample Road Work Notice

**Town of Paradise Highway Department
One Main Street
Paradise, NY 12345
(123) 456-7890**

NOTICE TO: Residents of Highland Road

FROM: Rudy Roadmaster
Superintendent of Highways

Beginning on September 17 the highway crew will be working on Highland Road from approximately 7:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. We expect to complete the road work by September 30.

The work includes cleaning the ditches, regravelling the roadway, and compacting the new gravel that the crew plans to lay on the road.

We regret any inconvenience this work may cause you. However, we expect that when completed, the roadway will drain better in the spring rains and winter thaws. By getting the water off the road as fast as possible, the new gravel will last longer, preventing further rutting and deterioration, and providing you with better service.

Thank you for your cooperation and patience during this road work. If you have any questions or comments about the work, please call me at the Highway Garage. Early in the morning is best, before 7:30 a.m., or try between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m. You may leave a message on the machine, and I'll return your call.

Appendix G

Sample Press Release

**Town of Paradise Highway Department
One Main Street
Paradise, NY 12345
(123) 456-7890**

DATE: *June 12, 2005*

CONTACT: Rudy Roadmaster
Superintendent of Highways
Town of Paradise
Paradise, NY 12345 Phone: (123) 456-7890

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ATTENTION: Editors/Reporters/Announcers

The Town of Paradise will hold an open discussion about its pavement management plan for the town's road system.

Wednesday, July 10, 2005
7:30 p.m.
Town Hall
One Main Street
Paradise, NY

The Highway Superintendent has developed a five-year capital improvement plan for the town's roads. The town board and highway officials will discuss the plan and answer questions from the public. The plan is available for review ahead of the meeting by calling the town clerk at (123) 456-7890.

