

# **Commissioner Doctorate Thesis**

## **Effective Communication Habits for Commissioners**

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## **Preface**

For a skill that is so vitally important to be mentioned as often as it is through out many pieces of literature in the Boy Scouts of America, there have been few resources that offer solutions as to how we can improve our communication skills in detail. Most resources simply repeat the importance of having good communication skills while only offering just a few helpful suggestions and not going into the details so that one can better understand the reasoning. How many times as commissioners have we have been faced with the situation of visiting a unit that is having “communication problems.” We end up leaving the unit at the end of the meeting only to make an emergency phone call to our Assistant District Commissioner or District Commissioner to warn them immediately what you have heard and seen. Another common situation that it seems we find ourselves in is having a scouting volunteer approach us at district meeting or event. The next thing we know we have been “data dumped” with the unit’s “dirty laundry.” At this time we act immediately to make a visit or to have an emergency visit to perform our commissioner lifesaving skills and to “get to that bottom of this” so the unit will have restitution as quickly as possible. How many times, once we meet with the unit and do our research, does the situation turn out to be something completely different than what we were originally led to believe. Once again, communication, or the lack there of, provided us with another challenge and we remind ourselves to always remember that there is “always two sides to ever story.” It is this vital key of commissioners having effective communication skills, the absolute necessity to have the material to train our commissioners so that they may possess the skills to better perform and manage their responsibilities and the events that this commissioner has witnessed through his own experiences that has lead to the writing of this thesis.

## **Introduction**

The commissioners' role within the scouting organization requires both knowledge of and proper execution of excellent communication skills. Most of us as commissioners understand the importance of good communication skills as it is mentioned in several places throughout literature made available to us by the Boy Scouts of America. A thorough understanding of what communication is and the issues that interfere with the process must be explored in order to develop the means to improve our performance in this important area. Thus, by us as commissioners taking the time to truly understand not only why effective communication skills is so vitally important and also improving our communication skills, we will be better able to assist, coach and support the units we are responsible for. Additionally by exploring the elements, methods and pitfalls of communication in relation to the volunteer organization, the need to educate commissioners in this essential skill will become apparent. After all, isn't a commissioner's first and foremost responsibility unit service?

## **What is communication?**

According to Webster's Dictionary, Communication is defined as "exchange of ideas, conveyance of information"<sup>1</sup>. While this definition gives a basic description, it fails to scratch the surface of the depth and complexity of interpersonal communication. The "conveyance of information" extends beyond the spoken or written word. The context of the communication, attitudes of both speaker and audience, and even the physical movements of the participants all influence the message. As human beings we all send and receive messages to one another that are filtered through our attitudes, experience and perception of the world in which we live.

## **Communication Skills**

Several skills will aid you in communicating with others. First and foremost is speaking clearly. None can comprehend what your words mean if they can not hear them clearly. Second, you need to watch your body language. It can send an entirely different message than the words that you are speaking. Third, making eye contact helps engage the audience. They will believe that you are actually talking directly to them. Fourth, summarize what you are saying. It helps keep the conversation on track. Fifth, ask the audience questions. Only then can you start to gauge their comprehension. Sixth, give specific examples. This should help the audience relate to the message that you are trying to deliver. Seventh, encourage note-taking and provide an outline whenever possible. Eighth, anything you can do to shut out distractions will result in a huge increase in the audience's comprehension.

## **The Necessary Components of Communication**

In order for us to have effective communication, we need to have five basic and necessary

components. Let us examine these in detail so that we may better understand them. By doing this, it should assist us by allowing us to be mindful of them so that we may put them into practice.

### **Speaker**

It is impossible for communication to take place unless we have someone to present. We have to be aware also that there are good and bad speakers. Of course, our goal is for us to become good speakers. Being a good speaker has several advantages for a commissioner. As a commissioner we set the example to other scouting volunteers. This is why we are told to be in full scout uniform. We are teaching by setting the very example that we would like to see in the units that we serve. How can we expect others to do this simple task when we do not encourage them or demonstrate to them through first hand examples. This is where we need to understand that when we put on our uniform we are representing something that is much bigger than ourselves. We are representing a higher set of values that the public still recognize today. People have a tendency to listen to good speakers and ignore, block out or even become offended by bad speakers. If we have already given our audience a reason to classify us as a bad speaker, how much more difficultly will we have in trying to deliver our message? The quality of a good speaker is directly conglomerate with how effective they can deliver the message they are trying to deliver.

### **Message**

This is the second necessary component for communication to take place. Now that we have a speaker, there has to be something for him to speak on. Keeping an open mind, the message that we are speaking about can also have positive and negative effects. We need to know and understand the message that we as speakers are trying to deliver. By having a good

understanding of our message will allow us to make sure that the message we are trying to deliver is also appropriate to our audience. Have we ever seen a class or a presentation where the speaker tripped over his own words, constantly had to look at his notes or a book, used the word or words “um” and “and um” between his sentences? Have we also seen a speaker that just simply got up, spoke in monotone, and read a Power Point presentation that the audience could have simply read for themselves? This can usually be avoided by being familiar with the message and practicing the delivering the message to a coach or even a mirror. Simply doing this will allow us to catch common mistakes and even improve the dynamics of our message delivery skills therefore keeping our audience’s attention. One of the favorite methods that this commissioner enjoys using is to have more than one speaker to deliver the message. This works very well keeping the audience engaged. With a team of speakers working together that have practiced, understand the message being delivered, and having good chemistry together, the effectiveness of your message delivering will know no limits.

### **Audience**

Now that we have a speaker and a message with a good understanding of it, we need to have an audience to receive the message. We also need to be aware of what audience is receiving the message. Would you speak to unit leaders in the same manner as you would to scouts? Would you speak to unit leaders the same way you would speak to your Assistant District Commissioner or District Commissioner? Remember that the environment can also affect you audience. Put yourself in the audience's place. Ask yourself a few simple questions. Is the room temperature comfortable? Are the chairs comfortable? Will the audience need to take notes? Can they take notes easily? Does the layout of the room work with the message that I am trying to deliver? Remember, our goal is also to try and do what we can so we can

deliver our message to a good audience.

### **Feedback/Listening**

"To listen well is as powerful a means of communication and influence as to talk well" -

John Marshall

Often when people discuss great communicators they tend to focus on those who speak well and give eloquent speeches. This is of course an unbalanced view as it neglects half of the communication equation. Listening is essential and often the key to truly effective communication. This also happens to be possibly the most difficult element to master as it requires the individual to change their focus from themselves. This is an imperative skill for commissioners to develop within themselves and encourage in others within the Scouting organization.

"If you want to be a good conversationalist, remember that listening is more than simply letting another person talk. We're asked to pay attention, to make an effort, to heed. Listening is thus active, not passive, behavior consisting of hearing, understanding, and remembering."<sup>2</sup>

Breakdowns in communications frequently result in conflicts between volunteers. Learning to listen with an open mind, not clouded by preconceived ideas would eliminate many of the conflicts that occur between individuals.

### **Understanding the Message**

This is the necessary component that is most often overlooked. Most people in today's society are raised to be polite. This can also lead to another breakdown in the communication process. After a speaker finishes delivering the message, even if the audience did not understand what message the speaker was trying to get across, most of the audience will clap

and show appreciation to the speaker for their efforts, regardless of the fact that they did not get or understand anything that was said. The message has now become lost. Now some speakers are slightly aware of this occurring. Then, in an effort to correct this at the end of the message, they will ask for questions. All too often, the speaker will only have question if he is lucky at all. The audience just wants the speaker through so they can move on to something else. As a speaker we must ask ourselves if we really had the audience attention. Hopefully the speaker's goal at the end of the message is to finish on time and to leave adequate time at the end to answer questions. Hopefully the audience will be so engaged that this is the area of the message that you run out of time and you have to have additional and more detailed communications with them.

## **Types of Communication**

There are many types of communication. As a Boy Scout Commissioner, familiarity and usage of the various types of communication is essential.

### **Written**

Written communication is the use of the written word to communicate. This may be done by pen and paper or by electronic means. This type of communication requires perhaps more consideration when crafting the message as there is not an opportunity to gauge the emotional state or the responsiveness of the recipient to the information. In written communication, this volley of speaker and audience is essentially lost. The speaker no longer receives the verbal or non-verbal responses of the audience. He is left with the challenge of crafting his words carefully in order to transmit the message in such a way as to not be misread. This is a skill that is often overlooked in the rush to get the message to the audience. It is also required that

the receiver must choose to respond for the speaker to know that the message was received and understood. Simply because a message was sent does not mean it was received and understood. Also, please remember that once the message has been sent, the speaker no longer has control over how the information has been received or if it will be understood.

## **Verbal**

Verbal communication is the use of the spoken word to convey information. There are several variations of verbal communication.

There is face to face communication. This is the most interactive means of communication as there is a continual volley of information passed between the speaker and the audience. In this type of communication it is quite common for the roles of speaker and audience to be frequently exchanged. In face to face communication, when the participants enter into the conversation with openness to the exchange, there is a lower risk of misinterpretation. Should the face to face communication be a speaker delivering a message to more than one person, the audience usually does not respond continually using verbal communication. Their body posture and movements very clearly communicate to the speaker their receptiveness and interest in the subject. It is much easier to gauge successful receipt if the audience restates what was said, or by asking a question, shows understanding of the message. The speaker has the option, based on the audience's reaction, to adjust their presentation, if needed, to convey the information effectively.

In verbal communication that is not face to face such as on the telephone. The ability of the speaker to gauge the response of the audience is clearly diminished. The speaker must rely upon the quality of feedback that he receives. Verbal communication has often been equated with a game of volleyball. First the speaker must serve the ball that is communication to the

audience. The audience returns the ball in the form of positive or negative feedback. Often times the speaker is limited to interpreting the quality of feedback, the tone of that feedback and indicators of interference based on background noise. If little to no feedback is being received the speaker may need to adjust his presentation to that audience. In addition, the speaker must set the example and not overreact. The speaker needs to remain mindful that a multitude of outside factors can affect the audience's feedback. These factors can include, but are not limited to, a bad day at work, a problem with their spouse or children, or a favorite television program.

There is public or presentational speaking. This is usually a more formal setting and generally does not allow for as much feedback from the audience. The majority of audience response is in the form of body language. The speaker may choose to adjust his presentation based on the non-verbal responses he perceives but is usually bound to a specific agenda of information to be presented. It is still usually possible to solicit some questions or response to better gauge the audience's understanding of the message.

Verbal communication may also take place through electronic means. The most commonly thought of form is telephone conversation. This type of conversation has many similarities to face to face communication as the role of speaker and audience change frequently throughout the conversation. While the emotional responses of the individuals may be gauged by the speed and tone of their speech, this manner of communicating lacks the element of body language as an indicator of understanding. Verbal communication can also take place over the Internet either with or without accompanying video. Obviously, without video would have similar characteristics to a phone conversation and with video would essentially have most or all of the elements of a face to face communication.

## **Non-Verbal**

Body language is the subtle movements, the gestures and the posture of the bodies of the participants. These communications are often transmitted and received subconsciously by the participants. We use these as clues to the emotional state of the other participant in the conversation. Is the person bored or not really listening? Are they interested and excited? Are they defensive or agitated? Participants often use these clues to adjust or modify their presentation in order to attempt to effectively convey their message.

## **What prevents productive communication?**

"The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place." -

George Bernard Shaw

As in other areas of human interaction, there are many items that interfere with effective communication.

"When dealing with people, let us remember we may not be dealing with creatures of logic. We may be dealing with creatures of emotion, creatures bristling with prejudices and motivated by pride and vanity." - Dale Carnegie

The state of mind of the speaker is often one of the greatest influences in how effectively the message is conveyed. An angry or frustrated speaker can very easily communicate anger and/or frustration even if it is not intended toward the receiver. These messages are transmitted through body language and tone of voice. In written communication, these messages can be transmitted through word choices, sentence structure and punctuation.

The state of mind of the receiver also influences how the message is received. If the receiver

is already in a defensive posture, any attempt at communication may fail. One of the best techniques to remove the defensive posture is to ask the audience to restate what they heard and see if they agree or disagree with the message you are presenting. If they agree, briefly discuss the common areas of agreement. If they disagree, ask them why. Communication will almost always occur then.

Therefore it is imperative that for communication to be effective both parties must be aware, open and committed to the process.

### **Electronic Communication**

The advent of modern methods of communication has further complicated the issue for commissioners and volunteers. In the space of human interaction, electronic communication is still in its infancy. While it is good to be open to advancements in technology, we as individuals are still learning the pitfalls associated with them by trial and error.

For the Commissioner, the wisest course of action in this regard is to apply the same rules of etiquette used in other forms of communication. Maintaining the same consideration and vigilance in word choices and composition will allow individuals to use these useful means of communication and community with minimal misunderstanding. Once again, always remember that there is no such thing as private electronic communication. Anything that you send can, and probably will, be shared with others. “Don't let e-mail substitute for effective group interaction and the instant two-way interaction of phone calls.”<sup>3</sup>

### **Social Networking**

Facebook, MySpace and Twitter are just a few of the better known social networking websites. The media has issued multiple warnings to users to use caution and careful

consideration when posting to these sites as they are not private. Individuals have lost promotions, jobs and even spouses over careless use of this type of communication.

While this may be an excellent medium for keeping people in touch with one another and bonding a group together, its misuse can have equally devastating results. The informality of this means of communication tends to lower our guard and cause us to forget that there are certain rules of polite interaction that still need to be observed. When considering a posting to one of these sites it is best not to post anything that you would not post on your office bulletin board or wish to see on the front page of the news paper. This is very important as there is no way to take it back once it is out here.

### **Email Etiquette**

Some rules of email are familiar. Most have learned that typing in all capitals constitutes yelling. There are many more pitfalls that some fail to take into consideration when they choose this method of communication. Email can be a very effective way of conveying dates and times, coordinating schedules, or other similar types of information. Unfortunately, it is often used to discuss highly emotional issues resulting in damage to relationships that can not be repaired as easily as in a face to face discussion. When sending an email that could have an emotional impact, the speaker has no opportunity to evaluate the frame of mind of the audience. They also have no means of controlling who the eventual audience may finally end up including.

Many times individuals become emboldened to confront another in a way that they would not do in a face to face discussion. This type of email is sometimes referred to as a “flaming email” due to the inflammatory nature of its contents.

“If the email you're contemplating writing is highly charged and emotional, some experts recommend delaying both the composition and sending for 24 hours, to let emotions settle.”<sup>4</sup>

Often those individuals also believe that they may speak freely as the email is “private”.

“Sadly, email's very informality tends to cloud our minds, leading us to assume that what we're writing is only for the eyes of sender and recipient.”<sup>5</sup>

Individuals often fail to realize that even when erased, mail servers may still retain a copy of an email for some time. Employer's servers may also retain copies. Recipients forward emails to others to pass on the message.

We also need to understand that we face the challenge that email sometimes are not received or even lost in transit. Many of the items we wish to communicate are aimed at a large audience. Thus, we may have many addresses listed. Just because we have completed a message and pushed the send button, does not mean that communication has occurred. The addressees may not check their email regularly in a timely manner. They may have changed their email address and did not update anyone. What if they are having computer problems? Have we ever found ourselves in the position of trying to communicate with someone for an extended period of time only to find out that they are no longer the valid point of contact for that scouting unit? We must constantly check to see which addresses were rejected and update those addresses as well as our other points of contact. Not everyone has accepted this as a preferred method of communication. As a final caution, those who flood our email inboxes with spam are always looking for long addresses lists to expand their mailing lists. This is a common practice. All too often we have heard that “I didn't have enough time to talk or call everyone individually so I sent out an email to everyone.” Once again, how can we be sure that communication has taken place? Refraining from using this “shotgun blast”

approach is being considerate to everyone that we are trying to communicate with.

## **Communication Mistakes and How to Avoid Them**

In the current environment where most of the individuals who donate their time to scouting truly live a hurried life, it is difficult to avoid miscommunication. A scouter needs to convey information but has a limited amount of time so they send out a quick email. This email – no matter how well meaning may be misinterpreted. The hurried nature of their communication often causes the content to be misread. The inability with this type of communication to gauge the receivers' ability to interpret the intent of the communication is also a major factor related to miscommunication. As a receiver, you can help improve communication by confirming you will attend a meeting and/or event and passing on any questions you have so the sender can answer them for everyone. If you see an item left out and needs to be clarified, you can offer to the sender to relay it to everyone.

## **What is the Commissioner's role in promoting effective communication within all levels of the scouting organization?**

The commissioner is responsible to not only communicate effectively but also to set the example for the other volunteers affiliated with the Scouting organization. Their role is to guide, teach and promote effective communication in and between all levels of the organization. Failure of a unit to attend an event or send a representative to a meeting could have been solely because they were not informed or found out to late to respond.

## **Know and Understand Communication Methods**

It is not only essential for a Scout Commissioner to know about communication but also to use this knowledge in their regular interactions with other volunteers. This means choosing

the appropriate method available to impart information. While modern methods of communication can be convenient, they are often not appropriate for the information to be conveyed or for the receiver of the information. It is the responsibility of the communicator to consider these important factors when determining how, when and by what method to communicate.

### **Know and Understand BSA Policy**

It is not necessary that scouting volunteers have an identical understanding of what we say when it comes to our training courses. Our challenge as trainers is to see that the audience is all headed in the correct and same direction. The only exception is our understanding the policies of the Boy Scouts of America. As commissioners, we must understand that it is vitally important that we all have an identical understanding of these policies. The policies, that the Boy Scouts of America have given us to use, are in place for specific reasons and are not up for us to debate over.

### **Communication Under Duress**

"Two men in a burning house must not stop to argue" - African Proverb

The effort to provide a quality program for the boys many times results in moments of frustration and frantic activity as volunteers push to complete the preparations for events on limited personal schedules. It is at these times that volunteers need to be equipped with the tools to recognize the high emotion of the situation and adjust their communication accordingly.

### **Recommendations and action plan**

How then do we teach ourselves to slow down and evaluate the elements of our

communication in order to minimize misunderstandings?

First, begin at the beginning. Include communication as a part of new leader training. While the time available to train new volunteers is at a premium, the inclusion of training on effective communication would go a long way towards retaining these same volunteers. As an organization we lose volunteers on a regular basis due to frustration and anger stemming from poor communication. While educating commissioners on the subject is helpful and allows those in that position to set the example, it would be beneficial to begin those habits in some of the earliest training.

It is important that in training the volunteers, that leadership training include educating volunteers in essential communication.

It is also important that the shared goal and vision of the Boy Scout organization be continually reinforced in order to further equip volunteers to overcome emotional responses in their efforts to work together.

### **Best Practices in Communication**

As with other areas of our lives, the ideal is difficult to attain. It requires a shared focus and common understanding of the goal of the communication, an agreement by the participating individuals to attempt to keep the focus on the organizational goals rather than their personal agendas or bias and to endeavor to listen to others actively and effectively.

When needing to convey information, taking a moment to evaluate the proper means by which to communicate in order to minimize the risk of misunderstanding is the single most important step.

Message –

Consider the message. Is this data that can be effectively supplied to the audience through an efficient email? Is this a sensitive issue that needs to be discussed in a private, safe environment? Is this educational material that needs to be imparted in a formal group setting? These questions can help determine the proper means to convey the information.

Environment –

Consider the environment. The environment can be a determining factor in choosing what and how to say something. Discussing a volunteer's error in judgment should be done privately for example. Likewise, if there a clarification of a policy or procedure that all adult leaders present need to be informed of; a private conversation with an individual would not be appropriate. Airing a grievance with another volunteer should not appear on Facebook. The environment therefore, should be considered before attempting communication.

Method –

Consider the method of communication. Is the method of communication that is being considered appropriate based on the information and circumstance? Being careful to use an appropriate means of communication based on the information available will help the speaker to assure that the information being conveyed will most likely be received and understood in the manner that was intended.

Speaker –

Consider the Speaker. Are you as the speaker angry? Are your emotions putting you at risk of not clearly conveying the information? Is your message strictly an emotional response with no real constructive purpose? If this is the case, the best course would be to delay the communication until the emotion has subsided.

As the audience it is also important to consider the speaker. Is the speaker emotional? Should you stop the conversation before a misunderstanding begins? Is the speaker calm or concerned? As the audience, you can be as responsible for the effectiveness of the communication process as the speaker.

Audience –

Consider the audience. Is the audience emotional or defensive? Is the audience open and engaged? Formulating the presentation to the audience can reduce the risk that misunderstanding will occur.

Are you the audience? Do you need to consider your personal beliefs, prejudices or agendas as you listen to the speaker? Evaluate these issues. How will they affect your ability to receive the information that is being conveyed? Will they affect your ability to listen to what is being said.

### **How to Improve Communications**

One thing that the scouting program has proved over and over again is the fact that good quality training is one of the most effective tools it has to offer. Do we not tell all of our new unit commissioners that every scout deserves a quality program with quality trained leaders? We also need to humble ourselves and realize that all of us have a need to improve our communication skills. This is a huge step for some of us due to the fact that it contradicts our very human nature. In all my years in scouting and in all the literature that I have been presented, not once have I come across the perfect communicator. Looking back at my scouting career, there is no question that my communication skills have drastically improved over time. If you should find someone who does not feel that they need to improve their

communication skills, please be mindful that this is just human arrogance. Remember that communication is a lifetime skill that none of us shall ever master, but hopefully we can improve.

### **Be Careful of Abbreviations**

For the most part, there are two main areas that abbreviations can create challenges for commissioners. These challenges can usually be avoided if the speaker takes a moment and reminds himself what target audience he is addressing. When we use common abbreviations, that are widely using in the scouting program, such as but not limited to DC (district commissioner), ADC (assistant district commissioner), UC (unit commissioner), COR (chartered organizational representative), we can very easily find ourselves talking above our target audience. Another area where we can use abbreviations improperly is when we are using electronic communication such as text messages and email. Most people know the abbreviations such as RSVP (repondez s'il vous plait) and ASAP (as soon as possible). We now have new abbreviations that we have to deal with that some people just do not know. There have been hundreds of messages that have had the abbreviations such as BFF (best friend forever) and OMG (oh my god) just to name a couple. This commissioner has also heard some very interesting translations to these abbreviations as well. Some of these translations were even offensive. Why would we want to send a message to someone that could easily create hostility for us. If we are lucky, our target audience would just ignore us and delete our message. We can quickly see how this could quickly multiply and spiral out of control. In both cases, we are using terminology that they do not understand. Once this happens, we are allowing the target audience the opportunity to become distracted, turn us off, or even become offended. Should we offend them, even accidentally, it is human nature and

some may feel that they need to retaliate and talk negatively about us before understanding the how, why and what the message really was trying to accomplish. They may feel that we are communicating to them in a belittling or condescending manner and we are better than them. We have now made the responsibilities we have as commissioners serving the units that we are responsible for ten fold.

### **Where to Improve your Communication Skills**

There just is not a magical answer to where all of us can improve. Our own individuality prevents that from happening. One of the simplest ways to improve our communication skills is to always remember that communication requires a bare minimum of two. We can have the best speaker and message the world has ever seen but, if no one is there to receive it, we have still accomplished nothing. Further quality training can guide us into doing our own self evaluations so that we may be able to find our own areas of improvement. Commissioner College is a wonderful resource that we should take advantage of to further knowledge and skills. With the many classes that the college has to offer including the time and commitment required to earn your doctorate, the opportunities are limitless for commissioners to find several areas where they can improve their communication skills. Another excellent resource that should be used is the “Wood Badge for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” course that is offered as council level training. There are three patrol presentations in the course syllabus that deal directly with improving one's communication skills. They are “Listening to Learn”<sup>6</sup>, “Communication”<sup>7</sup>, and “Managing Conflict”<sup>8</sup>. This course would prove to be highly valuable to anyone. It does not matter who or where you are in scouting. This course has something for the newer and the seasoned scouters. All too often I have heard someone that just completed a Wood Badge course tell me that “not only did this course help me

tremendously in scouting, but it has also improved the quality of my life. I have been able to apply what I learned in Wood Badge and use it in my day to day life". Both of these training opportunities offer far too much for self improvement to be taken lightly and should be strongly considered by anyone in the scouting program.

As commissioners, we still need to have an understanding that we are serving a purpose that is much larger than any of us. That being said, as commissioners, we can assist each other. Practice your own communication skills with your peer commissioners, your assistant district commissioner, and your district commissioner. Develop relationships with your assistant council commissioners and council commissioner. Gain their insight and apply their knowledge and feedback accordingly. These people alone should be a wealth of knowledge.

## **Closing**

It is imperative that communication within the Scouting organization should not be taken lightly. As much care should be given to preserving the relationships of the volunteers and the cohesiveness of the group as would be given to our most cherished friendships. It is only in this environment of cooperativeness and understanding that we can set the proper example for the young men that we seek to serve with the Scouting program. By improving the communication skills of the commissioner staff and making basic communication a part of training. The commissioner staff can therefore be much more efficient providing unit service.

We therefore must require of all commissioners and volunteers that we take the time to educate ourselves on effectively communicating with others and use that education daily in our interactions. First, be aware and do not enter into conversation without evaluating the issues to be discussed. Consider the motivation for conveying the information. Is this

communication for the benefit of the organization or does it benefit one individual's personal agenda. Second, evaluate the sensitivity of the issue. Third, evaluate the medium to be used in this communication. Last, how open is the speaker to constructive responses to the information being conveyed.

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