

## **Leadership Skills in Communication Alexander Strauch Workshop BTN-ITC 2018**

Effective shepherding requires good communication with the people we lead and between leaders. Many eldership are poor at communicating with the congregation.

Since we are in the people business, we are also in the communication business. As Christians, we are specially engaged in communication. We have to communicate the gospel and Christian truth. We do most of our work by speaking the words of God to people.

But not only do we communicate by teaching and preaching, but also by personal conversation. Much of our work is done through conversing privately with people, as well as speaking to the whole congregation. In fact, some of the most important work in helping a church through conflict or making changes is done on the personal level of private conversations.

As a leader of God's people, be concerned about improving your ability to communicate. God is verbal and created us to be verbal creatures. We were made to communicate with God and people, but the fall impaired this wondrous gift. Sin distorts our ability to communicate, creating many interpersonal problems. Our Lord was an excellent communicator.

Poor communication causes unnecessary frustrations in a congregation. Many church discipline cases have been mishandled because of a lack of good communication with the congregation and the people involved. The guidelines listed below will improve your communication with your colleagues and with those you lead.

### **I. General Principles of Good Communication**

#### **1. Be Aware that Skillful Communication is Hard Work**

Most people, especially men, are lazy communicators. They often don't care to expend the energy it takes to communicate well.

Make the effort to communicate better because you care for and love other people. "Better is open rebuke than hidden love" (Prov. 27:5). People desperately need to hear that they are loved, appreciated, and understood. As a leader, you are important to people in your congregation. They want to talk with you and hear from you.

In all of Paul's letters, we see his exemplary ability to communicate with others on a meaningful level, to talk about difficult problems, to express his heartfelt love and sincere thankfulness, and to share his deep frustrations (see, for example, 2 Corinthians).

#### **2. Be Aware of the Ways You Block Good Communication**

Lecturing and preaching, withdrawing or giving "the silent treatment," being easily angered or hurt, monopolizing conversations, being self-centered, avoiding real issues, and being argumentative or patronizing all destroy good communication, particularly with your loved ones and close friends. We all have communication weaknesses. Seek to be aware of the potential ways

you block communication in your elders' meetings. With the Lord's help, work at improving your communication with your fellow colleagues.

### **3. Be Proactive in Your Communication**

Because elders work under shared leadership, they must be able to talk to one another honestly and openly. If elders can't correct, challenge, and direct one another, they will be ineffective as a pastoral team.

The judgment of every elder is essential to sound group decision-making, but the pressure to conform to the group's way of thinking or majority opinion can be so strong that sound, objective input is lost to the group. For the sake of preserving unity or personal friendships, some elders don't express their disagreement. Others may keep silent because they're afraid of appearing divisive. Still others avoid disagreeing with older, respected members. Such hesitation hurts group deliberations, hinders creativity, and stifles good decision-making.

Every member of the elder council has a unique and important perspective. A healthy eldership team promotes an atmosphere that encourages everyone to speak up honestly without fear of rejection or attack. Elders must keep in mind the fact that the Spirit of God can use one dissenting voice to prevent the group from making a wrong decision. Mature group members must learn to disagree without being disagreeable. They can express their opinions honestly, expecting that other colleagues will receive and consider them fairly.

So an elder needs to express his thoughts honestly, without fear of being a dissenting voice. If you, for example, have doubts about a proposal or course of action, express them. Don't be silent! Have the courage to speak out. Your willingness to be forthright may prompt others to speak as well.

### **4. Learn to Speak Gently, Calmly, Graciously, and Tactfully**

This advice is solidly rooted in Scripture:

- "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1).
- "Sweetness of speech increases persuasiveness" (Prov. 16:21b).
- "By forbearance a ruler may be persuaded, and a soft tongue will break a bone" (Prov. 25:15).
- "I, Paul, myself entreat you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:1a).
- "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Eph. 4:29).
- "Let your speech always be gracious [graciousness, attractiveness], seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6a).

### **5. Make a Conscious Effort to be a Patient Listener**

Effective leadership has more to do with listening than with talking. While it is easier to talk than listen, being a good listener will enhance your pastoral care and improve your meeting participation. We could avoid many tragic misjudgments and misunderstandings if only we would learn to listen better.

People want to be heard and understood, but they often don't communicate clearly. So to be a good listener, don't assume you understand what other people are saying. Be patient, listen carefully, and don't be too quick to respond. Ask lots of questions to draw out the speaker. Work at understanding the other person's viewpoint and thought process. Make eye contact and notice body language. Listen for what is not said as well as what is said. If you make a habit of doing these things, you will reap the benefits of fewer misunderstandings and conflicts in your life and in your elders' meetings.

God gave us two eyes, two ears, and only one mouth. A lot of people never learn a lesson from that - which is, you ought always to use your eyes and ears twice as much as you use your mouth. Another way of putting it in electronic terms: the purpose of the eyes and ears is to program the mouth.

The problem with a lot of human relationships is that there is too much "unprogrammed talk" (Reuel Howe, *The Responsibility of the Preaching Task*, p. 10)

## **6. Be Sure to Clarify Responsibilities and Work Assignments**

Shared leadership requires continual communication among group members about their areas of responsibility and specific assignments. As the saying goes, "What is everyone's business is no one's business." If, for example, someone in the church is facing a life-or-death operation, what will happen if each elder thinks another is responsible to visit before the operation? It could be that not a single elder will visit because each one thinks someone else will be there. To avoid situations such as this, or to eliminate wasteful duplication of efforts, it is essential that elders clearly communicate their specific responsibilities, special assignments, and time commitments. This necessitates regular communication regarding ministry responsibilities.

### **Provide Adequate Instruction When You Give a Person a Job to Do**

When giving someone a job to do, let that person know exactly what is expected. Don't assume that a person can read your mind or that he or she knows what the elder council wants. Let Jesus be your example. When He sent the Twelve out to preach, He told them in detail what to do, what to expect, and how to act (Matt. 10:1-11:1).

### **Don't Leave People in the Dark**

Let those you lead know your beliefs, vision, passion, and any changes in direction or policy. Communicate these matters regularly and clearly. Make your decisions known to all individuals and groups affected by them. Seek also to confer with key individuals or groups when making decisions.

Illustration: the elders of one church announced to the congregation that the organ would no longer be used for church services. However, they neglected to discuss their decision with the four organists or the ten families that had bought the organ for the church. As a result, these people left the church feeling angry and betrayed.

## **7. Don't Spring Important Decisions on People**

People want to participate in decisions that affect their ministry interests, so involve them in the decision-making process. Members of the congregation have wisdom, perspective, and information that may be extremely helpful in making sound decisions.

## **8. Stop the Rumor Mill Before It Stops You**

Frequent, open communication with the congregation stops church rumors, so invite questions and keep open the lines of communication between the elders and the congregation. In times of trouble, communicate even more than you normally would. This is especially necessary in matters of church discipline or the exposure of public sin.

Illustration: a church was torn apart by a rumor that money had been embezzled by one of the elders and that the other elders were protecting the culprit. The rumor was untrue. But because the elders failed to quickly and forthrightly clarify the matter before the whole church, people were confused and lost trust in what the elders said.

## **II. Elders Are to Model Good Communication within the Church Body**

### **1. Elders Communicating within the Eldership**

### **2. Elders Communicating to the Congregation**

### **3. Groups within the Church Communicating with One Another**