Bridging the Communication Gap in Code Enforcement

Presented By: Marcus Kellum, MM/PA, CCEA
Discussion Topics

• Internal and External Communication
  – Co-workers, residents and everyone in between

• Using words your customers use

• Gender and Age Collaboration

• Plain English
Session
Housekeeping Rules

• Start, break, stop times
• Electronic Device etiquette
• Asking Questions
Public Service

The future of the public service is under intense scrutiny and review as to its effectiveness and whether it provides value for money spent by taxpayers.

They see the civil service as large and bureaucratic serving as an employment agency rather than a provider of efficient services.

"You can have the best strategic plan and all sorts of goals but it's the interactions that create the results"
Information Gap

- General public expectation is that information should be made readily available as needed in a comprehensive manner.

- The public service is sometimes of the opinion that the public can make themselves more aware by doing research, reading publications and generally informing themselves on information that is available.

- To bridge that gap a more concerted effort must be made to bring information to the public in layman’s terms.
Plain English (or layman's terms)

• The term “layman’s terms” is commonly used when discussing government or business communication.

• Language that is easy to understand, emphasizes clarity and brevity, and avoids overly complex vocabulary.

• It is free of clichés and needless technical jargon and should be appropriate to the audience's developmental or educational level and their familiarity with the topic.
Use words your customers use

- Choose words your customers normally use, not what attorneys or your coworkers use

- If you must use a specialized term, define it for your readers

- Select the plain, rather than the “formal” word

- Imagine you are writing to an intelligent friend who knows nothing about your work

- This isn’t “dumbing-down” the language, it is showing respect for busy people who aren’t familiar with your specialized terms
Why should we do this?

- Residents are more likely to pay attention to your message
- People read plain, conversational language quickly and more patiently
- Studies show people are more likely to follow simple instructions than complex ones
- People have a right to readable language when it involves their legal rights
## Common Examples

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Plain Talk Exercise

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Knowledge Gap

01
The general public expectation is that it is possible that a quick and positive response to all requests for assistance from various public institutions should always be forthcoming.

02
Some Public Service folks believe that the public should understand that there are procedures that must be followed.

03
To bridge the gap public education must be ongoing using all modern communication methods.
Communication Barriers

- Physical Barriers
- Attitudes
- Language
- Physiological Barriers
- Problem with Structure Design
- Cultural Noise
- Lack of Common Experience
- Ambiguity
- Information Overload
- Jumping to Conclusion
Group Exercise

1. Individually select the top three communication barriers from the list.

2. Based on the top three selected by the group:
   - Form workgroups
   - Discuss “the barrier”
   - Develop a strategy to deal with it in the “code enforcement arena”
Diversity is our advantage
Diversity

• Teams these days are diverse, notably culturally and generationally, but also in other ways
  • Planners are quite different from Code Enforcement staff, for example

• Those can be big gaps, so stay alert

• Be aware “not everybody thinks like you"
Bridging the Workplace Generation Gap

- Four, and possibly five, generations work side-by-side in today’s workplaces:
  - Veterans/Silent (born 1928–1945)
  - Baby Boomers (1946–1964)
  - Millennials (born since 1991)

- Although each person is an individual with his/her own personality, shared experiences shaped the generations and influenced their work styles.

- Recognizing the strengths and values of each one promotes respect for diversity and fosters cohesiveness within the workplace.
Fact

• Millennials are 80 million strong, and they'll make up 50% of the US workforce population by 2020

• Is your organization ready for this generation?
Be aware of preferred work styles

- Veterans tend to prefer detailed directions and guidance
- Baby Boomers work best in teams, value meetings and ask for direction when needed
- Gen Xers, many of whom grew up as “latchkey” kids, are independent, resilient and adaptable. They work best when they are empowered to work alone to get the needed result
- Gen Yers respond well to workplace structure, challenges and coaching (Like Boomers, they work well in team situations).
Adopt effective communication techniques

• Veterans are used to formality — a memo, personal conversation or a phone call

• Baby Boomers also respond best to personal contact but have adapted to voice mail and e-mail

• Gen Xers expect the direct, immediate response that e-mail and instant messaging bring

• Gen Yers and Millennials have communicated via technology all their lives. It’s no surprise that they find cell phones, texting, and social networking essential and effective
Identify the most successful feedback techniques

1. Veterans understand “no news is good news” and expect feedback only when a goal is met
2. Baby Boomers expect corporate accomplishments to be recognized through promotions, a hierarchy of titles and a yearly pay raise
3. Gen Yers, especially those raised with high expectations and much praise, appreciate immediate rewards
4. Gen Xers and Gen Yers both seek immediate and continual feedback to assure they are on target with organizational goals
Recognizing the strengths and values of each one promotes respect for diversity and fosters cohesiveness within the workplace.
Gender Communication

There are certain patterns of behavior that each gender tends to display, however this is not to state that all men and all women have certain characteristics.

We have to be careful never to generalize or stereotype; we will focus on trends that different genders tend to posses in terms of communication styles.

In the book Brain Sex, geneticist Anne Moir and co-author David Jessel state, "Male and female brains are structured and process information differently.”

In communicating, it would help if men and women stop judging and trying to convert each other, accept our different abilities and skills as complementary, and blend them cooperatively to manage workplace and life issues.
The lesson: Don't assume subordinates know as much as you do.

- Too often, leaders assume followers understand the big picture that managers & supervisors have access to, or that they share the same expertise.

- They often leave things out, preventing full understanding.

- At the same time, don't drone on with everything you know, to compensate.

- Aim for a dialogue, asking questions to determine the listener's understanding and whether sufficient explanation has been given.
Credibility is an important area to focus on when it comes to influencing effective communication between employees and their superiors.

When executed correctly, communication with workers reinforces trustworthiness for managers and other high-level employees.

But if there is a deep communication gap between bosses and staff members, it can ultimately undermine productivity and employee engagement.
Credibility and Communication

• At its core, communication with employees is just sharing information, but it is also layered with influencing how employees perform. For effective communication from bosses to employees, here are the three essential principles to follow:

  – Honesty – Nothing erodes employee confidence faster than dishonest communication (as mentioned above). While some information is clearly reserved for higher-level access, sharing honest discourse with employees goes a long way to reinforce credibility.
Credibility and Communication

• Respect – Work hierarchies can be alienating to lower-level employees, who can easily feel less valuable to the workplace than their bosses.

• Respectful communication, both written and verbal, helps bridge the communication gap felt across varying departments. An effective strategy for reinforcing each employee’s value to the company includes proactive communication from upper-level bosses, directly to line-level employees.
Trust – For security purposes, certain information simply can’t be shared with the entire workforce. However, trust reinforces employees’ perceived value to the municipality, so whatever can be done to include them in the big picture helps foster job satisfaction and better performance among staff.
• According to Jason Dorsey, chief strategy officer at The Center for Generational Kinetics, part of the answer is in learning how best to approach coworkers.

• Dorsey believes that acknowledging that someone is part of a particular generation is not meant to put them into a box, it is just a way to glean clues on how to better understand and connect with them.

• “Communication styles are learned young and to get the best value out of employees, you need to look at their best communication strategies too,” he says.
Social Media and Code Enforcement

From a 140-character tweet to a 56 MB video clip, social networking is a force that cannot be denied or ignored.
Social Media and Code Enforcement

If you want to successfully run an organization, you can't afford to ignore social media--That's especially true if you're running a code enforcement department.

Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest: For some code departments social media is as valuable, if not more valuable, a resource than it is for traditional brands and businesses.

It helps humanize the force by allowing departments to connect and converse with the general public, but more importantly, it provides a platform for code officers to share information quickly and respond to complaints from residents (who are often more forthcoming over social media than they'd be in person).
Social Media and Code Enforcement

- A 2013 social media survey from the International Association of Chiefs of Police found that 96 percent of police departments use social media in some capacity, more than 80 percent say it has helped them solve crimes, and 73 percent of agencies said it helped improve police-community relationships in their jurisdiction.
Social Media and Code Enforcement

• Embracing social media does not negate traditional code enforcement work; ultimately code officers still deal with human beings and code enforcement remains a one-to-one business.

• But social media is becoming an important tool for officers and municipal government.

• As more people migrate to mobile devices and tablets, it will be important for cities to have applications that run on those platforms.

• Many people have mobile devices and smartphones, so applications and websites should be able to interact with people via those platforms.
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