



Using Communication to Develop a High Performance Operation

By Leonard Gude, Vice President, Financial Aid Solutions, Regent

What distinguishes a high performance operation from others? What are the reasons for its consistent excellence in performance? This is the second in a series of six articles which will outline actions that you can take to move your operation forward and increase your stature within your organization. To read the first article in this series, "How Does Defining Purpose Help You Develop a High Performing Operation", [click here](#)

Communication. Once you have clearly identified your operation's purpose, you must effectively communicate that purpose to everyone involved so that it can be well understood and implemented as needed. As a leader, one of your most important tasks is to communicate effectively. It is important that you project a professional image as you communicate with others.

Sender. The audience's perception of your competence and credibility can be negatively affected by misspelled words, disjointed arguments, rambling sentences, and poor grammar, layout, structure and appearance.

Example: The purpose of the office of financial aid is to assist students and prospective students in obtaining the financial resources necessary to enroll in the institution so that they can complete their educational program and enter the workforce.



Audience. Instead of attempting to communicate to all constituencies with a single message, customize and personalize the message to your audience. Why should they listen? How is it relevant to them? Customers, supervisors, coworkers and employees long to be treated as special and important individuals.

Message. In organizing your message, make sure that it is clear and concise. Don't attempt to address multiple issues. Focus on a single topic or issue and keep it short.

In the opening statement, you should answer the question as to "why it is important to me" (your audience)? If you don't catch their attention in the first statement, they are unlikely to continue reading or paying attention to what you have to say.

Next, you should summarize or concisely articulate the issue or problem that needs to be addressed. In doing so, avoid using acronyms and be careful to explain terminology or details that the audience may not understand.

Now that you have their interest, you should communicate what action should be taken. Be specific as to who, what, when, where, why and how. Also insure that they understand any consequences of not responding in a timely manner.

Finally, provide them with contact information. You should offer to provide additional details or include them as appendices, URLs, or attachments.

Delivery. The vehicle that you use to convey the message to the audience is often as important as the message itself. Today, there are many options to utilize to deliver your message. Should it be verbal, letter, email, internet or text message, video or a combination of these mediums? Again, which of these vehicles is your audience most comfortable with using? While email works well for students in their 20s and 30s, younger students may prefer text messages and older students may prefer letters.

Feedback. This is the probably the most important step in the communication process. Without feedback, how do you know if the message was received, read and understood. Have others review and edit your work. Check the grammar and spelling. Read aloud what you have written. Do they understand the message that you are attempting to convey? How effective is your delivery vehicle? What percentage of the audience received your message? What percentage of them responded to it?

Summary. This may sound like a lot of work but the return is worth the investment. It is not often that you get a second chance to persuade the audience, so it is critical that you get it right the first time when you contact them.



How Does Defining Purpose Help You Develop a High Performance Operation?

By Leonard Gude, Vice President, Financial Aid Solutions, Regent

What distinguishes a high performance operation from others? What are the reasons for its consistent excellence in performance? This is the first in a series of six articles which will outline actions that you can take to move your operation forward and increase your stature within your organization.

Purpose. The first step in developing a high performing operation is to understand why the operation even exists in your organization. What purpose does it currently serve? What purpose should it serve? How does it influence and how is it influenced by other parts of the organization? What would be the consequences to the organization and its clients if your operation ceased to exist?

As the leader, you need to be able to thoughtfully and honestly answer these questions and to clearly articulate the responses to them to the leadership, the staff and the clients of your operation. You should think in the future tense, so as to define what you see as the purpose of your operation for the years that lie ahead instead of simply looking at the current state.

Example: The purpose of the office of financial aid is to assist students and prospective students in obtaining the financial resources necessary to enroll in the institution so that they can complete their educational program and enter the workforce.

Once you have articulated purpose, you then need to seek common understanding and agreement about your operation's purpose from the leadership of your institution. This provides the organization with the information necessary for making strategic decisions related to your operation and for the allocation of resources to your operation.

Your operation's mission statement should clearly articulate purpose. All operational goals must be based upon both the mission and purpose of the operation. The goals of the operation must be clear and well defined and they should be updated and refined frequently. The goal statements should each include a quantifiable definition of success.

Purpose should drive all of the daily activities of your operation. All the members of your operation need to have a clear understanding of the operation's purpose and you need to obtain their personal commitment to it. Each individual's goals and performance should be measured and rewarded based upon how they contributed towards the operation's satisfaction of its purpose statement.

When you submit requests for additional resources, you should insure that they are consistent with the leadership's understanding of the purpose of your organization and you should articulate how these resources will assist the organization in achieving its goals and objectives.

By taking this action, you are actively and consciously creating the roadmap for the future of your operation rather than allowing others to define it for you.