Amplifying Our Voice: Leading Boldly for Our Students, Our Professions, and Our Union

COM310

Power Trifecta – Communicating, Advocating, and Organizing to Build Local Power!

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NEA Leadership Competency: COMMUNICATION

• We will have theory, examples, and discussion of the principles and tactics of communication at the Foundation (Level 1) and Power-building (Level 2) levels.

• Regarding the Communication Domain, we will:
  • Develop our communication approach and style to fit our audience
  • Learn to act as an effective speaker
  • Understand how to communicate effectively to be an advocate for our organization
  • Learn to identify and coach effective messengers

• Finally, we will tie this into advocating for our students and members, and strengthen our internal and external relationships
NEA Strategic Goal & Organizational Priorities

NEA Strategic Goal

• building the capacity of our local, state, and national union leaders to ensure the success of public education. We must be the defenders of public education, and we must win this never-ending fight.

NEA Organizational Priority

• My School, My Voice. We will become stronger advocates and organizers by communicating more effectively.
Goals/Expected Outcomes

You will be able to:

• Communicate more effectively regarding public education
• Become a better advocate by being a more effective communicator
• Organize more effectively through more effective communication
• Increase the strength and influence of your organization!
Who is this guy, and why are we listening to him? Good questions!

Personal and professional background

- 47 years, but only 18 feet
- 21 years, 20% release
- 25 seasons tennis coach, clubs, committees ad infinitum
- Lots of union hats!
- Think-pair-share – How would intro yourself – grab a partner – 4 minutes total!
Communicator, Advocate, Organizer

- WEAC Summer Leadership Academy Communications trainer 4 years
- NEA Member Voices and Ed Votes.
- AFL-CIO, IAF, One Wisconsin, etc.
- I’m still learning!
Common understandings:

• What are some forms or categories of communication?
• What are different types (not just situations) of advocacy?
• What kinds of organizing do strong organizations do regularly?
• Here are some broad categories, for all three:
  • Internal/external
  • Kids/members/issues
  • Formal/informal
These competencies don’t exist in silos!

COMMUNICATION

ADVOCACY   ←   →   ORGANIZING

Think about the blades on a helicopter...
We increase our success by consistently building our brand, our credibility. More opportunities come to consistent, credible communicators/advocates/organizers.

Foundational things to do – you and your member leaders

• Business cards
• Social media and traditional media presence
• Internal communications – President’s Reports, calendar, newsletter, etc.
• Trainings for you and others, like this!
• Educate ourselves – read, read, read, listen, listen, listen!
Putting it into practice – Concrete steps and examples to build your credibility (power) and increase your organization’s strength (membership).

• Media presence – this is huge!
  • Establish a relationship with your local media people – TV, radio, print
  • Help them write the stories -- Vergara decision –
  • Be proactive – Women’s March – “Local protester”...

• Internal – Monthly President’s Report or Newsletter

• Diane Ravitch, Linda Darling-Hammond, Curmudgucation, etc.
Let’s look at one of the blades of our propeller: Communication

- For effective communication, 4 things must align
  - Message
  - Messenger
  - Audience
  - Method / Vehicle
- When we align these, and combine that with advocacy and organizing, our helicopter rises!
External example -- Joint Finance Committee listening sessions.
I went to two of them, with other member leaders, about 2 weeks apart, and asked for 2 things: voucher costs be listed on property tax bills, and a statewide referendum on vouchers, since they have NEVER been approved by voters anywhere in the country! Let’s focus on the second session.

• Vehicle – 2 minutes – 85 testimonials – What were my TWO vehicles?
  • Primary – JFC hearing
  • Secondary – Earned media and social media

• Audience – Who were my TWO audiences?

• Message – We need to stop the voucher program that voters don’t even want, that is draining millions of dollars out of our public school system.

• Messenger – My name is John Havlicek. I am …. What do you think I said about myself to establish my credibility? How would you establish your credibility?
How does this tie to Advocacy and Organizing? What about the other “blades”?

**ADVOCACY**

- The message was that vouchers hurt our students and schools – I am advocating for ALL CHILDREN in Wisconsin and TEACHERS know these are bad for kids.

- BLM shirt drew attention to the issue that this hurts our students of color the most – most money lost is in Milwaukee.

- Vouchers have never been approved by the public – I am advocating for the public’s voice to be heard. Ended with “If you are so sure, put vouchers to a state-wide vote.”

**ORGANIZING**

- I took other members/leaders with me to testify.

- We received testimony from 85 other people, mostly members – people felt like they were doing their part; people want to feel empowered!

- When we talk with potential members, this is something we can point to: “What does the union do?”.

- It definitely helped me to grow my own network around the state, and I push people to other education pages so hopefully that grows their networks also.
What were the results?

- Senator Taylor – selfie and livestream – 1000s of FB/Twitter
- This generated 3 interviews -- 2 local TV and a newspaper
- Democrats introduce referendum legislation
- 100s of social media likes/shares
- More people are willing to speak up!
What does this mean back home? You can start anywhere, really, then build your campaign. Let’s think about message and vehicle, then take a few minutes to come up with a first step, then share with a neighbor.

**Let’s start with the message**

- We need to close down these unaccountable, failing private charter schools!
- Now, identify the messenger, the audience, and the method (vehicle).
- Confer with a partner, you have 3-4 minutes. Then, I will look for 2 volunteers to share messenger, audience, and method (alignment).

**Let’s start with the vehicle**

- There is a public hearing by the Blue Ribbon Commission on school funding
- How might you use this to communicate your message on school funding? What counter messages might you be up against?
- Who will be your most effective messengers?
- You have 3-4 minutes, then I will take 2 volunteers to share their alignment.
Let’s switch gears a bit – Remember the different types of communication, advocacy, and organizing? Let’s take an internal example.
ACT 10 – 2011 in Wisconsin -- The gift from Scott Walker that keeps on giving

1. $880 MILLION CUT – insurance, pension, class size
2. CPI-U only -- .12% -- 2.2% increase
3. No dues deductions, effectively “RTW”, can’t bargain working conditions, etc.
4. Statewide membership fell to about 40% in three years; La Crosse fluctuates around 85%.
5. Traditional bargaining → Meet and Confer
6. 60 page contract reduced to one page, and then a “handbook”.

High School work load was our issue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status quo</th>
<th>New reality</th>
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<tr>
<td>• 5 classes + 1 duty – about 125 – 150 kids</td>
<td>• “New” hires (after 2001) had an unpaid overload and would eventually include all teachers</td>
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<td>• Additional class = additional pay</td>
<td>• HS teachers frequently above 180 kids (classes got bigger)</td>
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<td>• Expected to help / monitor kids in study hall / duty</td>
<td>• We added Educator Effectiveness (Charlotte Daniels) = massive increase in paperwork</td>
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<td>• We had time to get to know and support kids individually, contact parents, etc.</td>
<td>• Kids can’t get individual help – more kids, less time</td>
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<td>• Teachers simply can’t meet the expectations</td>
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Two things to keep in mind:

Four things have to align for effective communication:

1. Message
2. Messenger
3. Audience
4. Vehicle

Communication → Advocacy → Organizing

We need to make the helicopter rise!
Communication strategy

1. Message – had to be student-centered – we used the district language of building relationships, 1:1 instruction, individual help, getting kids “across the finish line”.

2. Messenger – in some settings, it was LEA leadership. In other settings, we had specific teachers, and other times we “swarmed” them.

3. Audience – we targeted district administration in private, and BOE members in public.

4. Vehicle – we have something called “Joint Leadership” and we started regularly registering to speak at BOE mtgs. We also used two different tactics at BOE mtgs.
This was a long-term communication plan! It took 2 years. We had 2 main vehicles; one was completely internal, and the other was internal/external.

**Joint Leadership - Monthly**

1. On the agenda every month in some form
2. Use district language
   1. Too many kids = class size
   2. Individual / Personal help = better graduation rate
   3. Build relationships = fewer students and more time
3. Engage “6 class people” and “5 class people” in the fight

**BOE mtgs – 2-pronged approach**

1. 142 HS teachers signed the letter – “both” groups of teachers agreed, both high schools agreed
2. 217 kids = no personal help
3. Stayed focused on kids = things we won’t be able to continue to do...
4. Started bringing “positive” speakers as well, to make it harder for them to turn us down
What was the result?

1. “If the teachers say they can’t do it, why are we even having this discussion?”

2. We set up a committee to pick the teachers

3. We got a 5–year phase-in to put all HS teachers back to 5 classes

4. We conceded to slightly lower overload pay, but EVERYONE got that pay!

5. It took us just over 2 years of communicating → advocating → organizing, but 2020-21 will be the last year that anyone has an unpaid overload (for teachers hired that year).
What are the top internal issues that your members want the union to address?

Can you identify, with confidence, the issues that are most important to your members? How could you do this? Take 2 minutes to come up with at least 3 different ways. What are the pros/cons of different methods?

Take 5 minutes (10 if there is time) and discuss with a partner. I will take 2 volunteers to share out briefly:

1. What is one internal issue that you can build into a campaign?
2. What are the communication elements (message, etc.)? And/or...
3. What are the advocacy and organizing tactics? How will you use this issue to organize your members?
The content from this session can be used in the following ways in your current position/role:

- Communicate more effectively regarding public education
- Become a better advocate by being a more effective communicator
- Organize more effectively through more effective communication
- Increase the strength and influence of your organization!
In Closing...

• Please complete the evaluation for COM310 by using the NEA Summit Mobile App!

• Please visit the Leadership Development Resources website at www.nea.org/leadershipdevelopment

John Havlicek