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THE ART OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Legendary management guru Peter Drucker said managers manage three things: anxiety, resources and information. Of those three, managing information flows among their distinct audiences may be their most challenging responsibility, requiring equal amounts of engagement, knowledge and experience.

Club communications are a potential minefield of confusion, embarrassment and inaccuracies that can have serious consequences. Too often we see written and verbal communications filled with endless, mind-numbing sentences that ramble on with no apparent point. Often without intention, communications come off as far too negative when the need is actually to inspire improved performance. We also forget that everyone doesn't know what we know. As a result, we get out-of-sequence communications that leave staff scratching their heads and wondering what they're supposed to do. Then there are those times when the communication is factual incorrect or misleading.

There are shelves full of advice dedicated to the subtle science and marvelous art of information management. While every club management professional must find his or her own style and system, here are four guiding principles that can help streamline information management in a wide range of situations.

If you're responsible for managing information up the organization ladder, remember three S's.

Be specific. Get to the point quickly and be sparse with your words. Earnest Hemingway compared a well-written sentence to a clenched fist: "Everyone knows what it means."

Keep it simple. Refine each message point to its essence. Use straightforward and professional language, avoiding jargon and unfamiliar terms.

Bring solutions, not problems. In each management specialty, the manager should be a problem-solver.

If you're responsible for managing information downstream in the organization, think of the letter E.

Offer **encouragement** in real time and in real terms. Recognize your people for their accomplishments and celebrate a job well done. Everyone appreciates – and is motivated – when recognized. Keep up the **energy**. State goals and needs in an enthusiastic and can-do manner. Let your energy lift up your teammates and staff. Set

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expectations. Communicate goals and objectives clearly; set timelines so everyone understands the deadlines that accompany the milestones.

If you're responsible for informing the board of directors, use a three-step process:

1. Communicate in simple terms with sufficient background to help everyone understand what is required of them. For example, "The pump for the well is broken. Repairs require an expenditure of \$20,000. I have everything arranged for repairs pending your approval today."

2. Communicate ideas that are aligned with the vision and mission of the club and are consistent with the expectations of the board.

3. Be patient with questions and answer each one in clear, simple terms. Before moving on to another question, make sure the person who

asked the question understands your response.

If you're communicating to multiple audiences, align your messages to each audience segment and communicate with each independently.

Inform members so they understand the answer to the question, "What's in it for me?" Your members expect that you're looking out for them and their needs. Your communications should reflect your commitment to that expectation.

Inform peers of issues, opportunities and needs with clarity and simplicity. Recommend solutions without dumping your problems on others. If you need help, say so.

Inform subordinates with respect and understanding. Staff members depend on the honesty, concern and integrity of their bosses. If their request or need goes beyond your authority, say so. And commit to making sure the request will be communicated to the person who does have the authority to make a decision.

When communicating in writing, be aware of who will be reading your messages. Aim for the center of the audience, keeping in mind that those who receive the message first and easiest – as well as those who receive it last and with the most difficulty – represent the edges of the classic bell-shaped curve. Ask a colleague or a member of your intended audience to review the message before it is distributed to see if it is potentially confusing or might be misinterpreted.

Managing information is an endless task. Recognizing communications as one of your most important responsibilities and approaching the job with diligence and attention to detail can help each memo, letter and report deliver its intended message and move your audience to the desired behavior or outcome. **GCI**