

Workshop Four

COMMUNICATION AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Objectives

- To analyze personal communication styles and practice key skills for effective group communication.
- To explore the characteristics of leadership and the relationship between leadership and power.

Outcomes

- Participants will begin to analyze their personal styles of communication in a group setting.
- Participants will begin to analyze their personal styles of dealing with conflict and its potential impact on their participation in groups.
- Participants will begin to identify and use “I-messages” and communicate their feelings to one another.
- Participants will begin to assess their personal leadership qualities.
- Participants will begin to analyze and reflect upon their personal attitudes toward having power.

Before You Begin

Workshop Four is designed to introduce participants to some of the ways in which their communication styles impact group dynamics. The skills introduced in this workshop require significant time and practice. It is important that facilitators emphasize that skill-building in these areas will be a core component of their ongoing work together.

I. Welcome and Review of Session Three Homework (20 minutes)

After welcoming everyone, check in and see how they are feeling. Ask group members to share some of their experiences while conducting one-on-one interviews with people of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Did they learn some things about the cultural group that they did not know? Did they learn anything about their own community that they did not know? Ask group members to consider how what they have learned might

help them later when they begin to identify and implement a community action agenda.

POINTER – As you check in with group members about their experiences during this second round of one-on-one interviews, begin to link the interview process to the future work of engaging in community action. Ask participants how this process might benefit their work in building relationships with other residents.



II. Agenda Review (10 Minutes)

Let the group know that you will be trying to cover a lot of ground during this session, which focuses on two interrelated issues—communication and leadership. Point out that the group has already spent some time practicing specific communication skills—particularly those related to listening. While listening is one of the most important components of relationship-building, working together in groups, also requires solid communication skills. Explain that when individuals form a group, things can

often get a lot more complicated than in one-on-one relationships. Many community groups fall apart because the participating individuals have not learned how to work together effectively. One of the things that is particularly important when we work together in groups is to have a clear understanding of our own group behavior. Tell the group that this session will focus on analyzing some of our own styles of interacting within a group. The session will also begin to explore issues related to leadership—a critical factor in an effective community action group—looking both at some of the generic characteristics of effective leaders as well as some of our own personal experiences and feelings about leadership.

Participants should understand that the success of community action is based, in part, on the ability of groups to effectively act and move an agenda forward. Your facilitation of this training should model the skills that are being introduced. Many local action groups fail because the group leader cannot effectively delegate tasks and keep work moving forward. The landscape of community action work is littered with organizations that fell apart because members stopped coming when they felt their time and energy were not being used effectively. It is important that participants understand that effective leadership brings the best out of everyone in the group, blending their energy and commitment.

III. Analyzing Our Group Communication Styles

(30 minutes)

Break the group into groups of five to six members. Ask each group to use a microlab approach to respond to the following:

In general, when I am in a group I _____.

If I were to be asked to lead a group, I would _____.

If I disagreed with something that another person in the group was saying, I would _____.

If a conflict arose in a group, I would most likely _____.

After each of the groups has shared with each other around these themes, lead a brief discussion about these issues with the whole group. Note that our behavior when we are in a group is often different than when we are in pairs. Our behavior will also be different depending upon how well we know the other group members, and our willingness to trust the other people in the group.

POINTER – When discussing the results of the microlab exercise, try to surface how participants' group behavior differs from their one-on-one interactions. Use yourself and personal examples as a catalyst to help clarify these themes. Listen for statements that might reflect participants' fears or ambivalence about working in and running groups, and try to link them to their experiences. Validate their concerns and point out how the training is already helping to make this kind of interaction easier.



IV. I-Messages

(15 Minutes)

Explain that while each of us has our own style of group participation, groups are more successful when members of the group speak from their own perspectives. In the ground rules presented in Workshop Two, this was called speaking in “I-Messages”.

Note that one of the challenges that people often face when communicating with each other is that they try to tell other people how they should behave or use “put-downs” when they get angry or disagree with another person’s point of view.

Ask the group:

What is a “put-down”? Get several examples from the group.

What’s wrong with “put-downs”?

What is an I-message? An I-message is a way of expressing how someone or something makes us feel which allows others to understand the impact of the situation on us. In an I-Message, we speak from our own perspective and not as though we are offering “general truths.”

VII. Practicing I-Messages

(20 Minutes)

Hand out the I-Message practice sheets (Hand-out #1).

Have the group give you some examples of “put-downs.” Using the I-Message formula at the top of the I-message worksheet, translate these “put-downs” into I-Messages. Then have each person fill in the I-Message worksheet. Have some people share their responses with the larger group to check for understanding and correct any of the responses that are not in I-Message format. Answer any questions that people may have.



POINTER – Be careful to listen for “put-downs” in the discussion and be sure to model the use of the I-Message when you correct the participants’ use of them.

A Cautionary Note on I-Messages

Anger is an ongoing element of group process. Group leaders must be able to handle conflict and anger. The I-Message is a tool that can help this process. I-Messages provide a vehicle for expressing disagreement while minimizing the risk of significant disruption of the group. However, I-Messages do not solve all conflict situations and do not eliminate the need to treat others with respect and dignity. I-Messages may also have a negative reputation from their over-use in the '60s and '70s when the approach was used to justify saying anything to another person as long as it was “owned.” You may encounter some resistance to this concept as a result of past experience. A statement such as “I think you are full of it and what you are saying is wrong and will ruin our group” is a “put-down.” The fact that the sentence begins with the word “I” does not make it okay. A better use of the I-Message would be, “When you say that I feel concerned because if we take that course of action it may harm the group.” The key to the I-Message is ownership of the thoughts and feelings that you want to express.

BREAK

15 minutes

VIII. Characteristics of Effective Leaders

(30 Minutes)

Make a transition from the first section of the workshop. Point out that the communication skills that we have been practicing are but one component that helps to build effective groups. Another component is leadership. All groups need good leaders. Note that all of the group members have been identified as individuals who possess some of the qualities needed to be effective leaders. Start by exploring some of

these qualities generally. Then, before the evening is over, each participant will begin to explore some of his/her own leadership qualities. To start this process, break the group up into small groups of no more than three to four people. Have each individual in the group share personal stories about one good group leader they have known or worked with and one person who they felt was not a good leader. Next, ask the groups to list on a sheet of chart paper the characteristics of the different leaders they described. After a few minutes, ask the group to divide the list into columns of positive and negative characteristics.

After five minutes, ask each of the small groups to share with the whole group the characteristics and observations about leaders that were identified. After this is completed for the large group, the facilitator should ask the group to think about the relationship between the positive and negative characteristics of leaders. Can they be considered along a continuum? See if characteristics can be linked in a fashion similar to the following:

<i>tell stories</i>	<i>opinions on everything</i>
<i>likes other people</i>	<i>likes themselves</i>
<i>stimulating to be around</i>	<i>boring</i>
<i>sense of humor/perspective</i>	<i>humorless, always serious</i>
<i>reflective</i>	<i>keeps talking, doesn't listen</i>
<i>has anger, but controlled</i>	<i>apathy, accepts everything</i>
<i>imagination</i>	<i>does not have dreams, vision</i>
<i>secure, confident</i>	<i>insecure, needy, ego needs</i>
<i>experienced</i>	<i>ineffective</i>

Note that “good” and “bad” characteristics of leaders often depend on the context of the organization in which the leader is working. On a battlefield, a good leader may look very different than a good leader in a corporation or community group. Leaders in community groups are working with people who are volunteering their time, are very busy and,

As you listen to the group, identify the qualities of good leadership and be prepared for participants to identify a good leader as someone who “gets the job done.” In some communities, leaders may come from the ranks of retired corporate executives, retired military, or other leadership positions. Sometimes, individuals who come from these kinds of professional backgrounds may lack delegation skills but do, in fact, “get the job done.” It is critical that you help the group differentiate between skills that may be beneficial in some groups, but could harm consensus-building within a community action group. Your own style may come into play here and will make it easier for you to see some participants’ comments as problematic while missing others that deserve mention. Be aware of your own issues and leadership style throughout this exercise and work to identify the diversity of qualities that are critical for strong leadership.

often, are disproportionately impacted by society’s most pressing problems.

Given the different qualities required for leaders in different contexts, what constellation of characteristics is appropriate for community groups like Free to Grow? (Use Handout #2 as a reference.)

Allow time for reflection and sharing with regard to this question and then transition, when appropriate, into the next leadership training segment.

IX. Personal Leadership Qualities (30 minutes)

Have group members form small groups of five to six individuals and identify one member as the facilitator of their discussions. Ask all group members to remember a specific situation in which they took a leadership role. (These situations could be among family members, friends, colleagues or within the community.)

- 1) Have group members share with each other what those leadership roles were. Share some general information about the context of that leadership role.
- 2) After all group members have shared, ask them to identify two or three specific qualities that they brought to their roles as leaders in the above contexts.
- 3) Finally, have group members share how they felt about being in the role of the leader. What felt good about it? What was hard? What did they learn about themselves as they assessed their behavior?

After the small groups complete this exercise, process with the group as a whole and summarize the key qualities that group members identify as necessary to be good leaders, as well as some of the challenges and difficulties inherent in the leadership role.



POINTER – As you process the comments from the small groups, stay alert for leadership traits that some may identify as positive, but that might harm a community action process. As the situation permits, use your own experiences in leadership to bring out qualities that the group might have missed or to demonstrate potential problems with particular leadership styles.

X. Leadership and Power (30 minutes)

Before ending for the evening, explore one other critical aspect of leadership—the relationship between leadership and power. Note that many people have very complicated feelings about power and introduce the metaphor exercise, which is designed to unearth some of these feelings. Ask the group to provide you with four things: the name of a machine, the name of an animal, the name of a vegetable and another common household object. Take these responses and write them on a chart tablet—then quickly divide the group into four parts (they do not physically have to move) and assign each group one of the words. Ask each group to conduct a brainstorm using the following sentence:

Power is like a _____ (the word they were assigned) because....

Tell the group to come up with as many responses to this metaphor as they can. Give the groups five to ten minutes to do the brainstorm. Judge the amount of time needed for brainstorming based on whether people are still coming up with new ideas. When everyone is done, ask each group to read their lists. As each list is read, have the larger group analyze the metaphors that have been offered—are the metaphors positive? Negative? Ambivalent? After all groups have shared their metaphors, let group members discuss the feelings about power that have surfaced. What do our attitudes about power have to do with our leadership ability? With our ability to work together effectively around a community change agenda? How do we assess what is the effective use of power and the abuse of power? Note that these are very important and complicated questions, but that answering them, and developing a leadership and group structure that effectively utilizes power is a critical component of community action work .

There is no more complex issue than “power” in community action work. “You have too much power” or “You don’t know how to use power” or “He/she is power hungry” are the kind of comments we hear when working in the community. Sorting out leadership and power is one of the most important aspects of good leadership. It is important that the group come to understand that personal power is a positive trait, but also that power can be abused in the group process. In this exercise seek to understand the group’s comfort level with power and try and help those participants who are uncomfortable with the concept reassess their feelings about power by providing examples of ways in which power can be positively utilized.

XI. Closing Activity

Ask group members to share one thing that they learned about themselves during this workshop with the person sitting to their left or their right. Thank everyone for their hard work.

XII. Homework for Workshop Four

Ask group members to practice using active listening and “I-messages” with a family member, friend, or colleague during the week. Have members try to do it consciously at least once a day, paying particular attention to their taken-for-granted communication styles within various relationships. Have group members use the worksheet to write down some of their observations about this process.



POINTER – As you describe the homework assignment be sure to ask the participants to be aware of any unease or embarrassment they might feel using I-Messages and make note of it for discussion in the next session.

If Your Community Action Group Is Already Up and Running

The skills focused on in Workshop Four can be practiced at any point in the community action process. Thus, this workshop can be conducted without significant modifications in ongoing training rounds. If existing members of your community action group help with the facilitation of new rounds of training, consider having them use examples of what they have learned about effective qualities of leadership, power, etc. to make the connections between the training and community action work.

WORKSHOP FOUR

Handouts

Workshop Four – Handout #1

I-Messages

FORMULA:

I feel (state the emotion)
when you (state the specific behavior)
because (state the effect the behavior has on your life)

Complete the following examples:

- 1) Your best friend has a conversation with an acquaintance and shares a personal experience of yours that you asked her to keep secret.

I feel
when you
because

- 2) Your supervisor has been giving you new projects every week. You are already handling a number of projects that are beyond the scope of your job description. This morning, she walks into your office and asks you to take responsibility for another program.

I feel
when you
because

- 3) Your teenage son/daughter has a midnight curfew. He/she has been repeatedly late. This Saturday night, he/she does not come home until 2:00 a.m.

I feel
when you
because

Workshop Four – Handout #2

Leadership Responsibilities

Leaders have been defined in relational models of organizing as “those who have a constituency.” This definition stresses that leaders have their own networks and their own set of relationships with community members.

The important thing about this definition is that it emphasizes the tasks and responsibilities that come with the leadership role. Ultimately, leaders are people who:

- ◆ do one-on-ones;
- ◆ listen (that is, really listen with the active listening techniques we learned);
- ◆ understand the needs and self-interest of their own network or community;
- ◆ work to take action that responds to the self-interest of their community;
- ◆ challenge their network to participate and take responsibility for change in their community; and
- ◆ care enough about their community to help each member of that community grow, develop and participate in the organization.

This definition, then, represents the minimum responsibilities of a leader. As leaders work together in a team, there are many responsibilities. These, however, are fundamental.

Workshop Four – Homework Assignment

During the week, practice active listening and using I-Messages during your ongoing interactions with family members, friends and colleagues. Try to put aside at least an hour a day when you commit to practice. As you practice, reflect upon the ways in which the skills of active listening and speaking in I-Messages are part of your everyday communication patterns. In your reflection, consider the following:

1) What did the experience of practicing active listening feel like in your everyday life?

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2) In what circumstances was it easy to speak in I-Messages? In what circumstances was it hard?

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3) Was it easier for you to practice these skills with family, friends or colleagues? If you noticed a difference, what do you think accounts for it?

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