

David Luther
Director of Communications, MASA
Executive Director, MOSPRA



Five Tips in 45 Minutes

SCHOOL-COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND THE SUPERINTENDENT

EXPECTATIONS AND INTRODUCTIONS

- ✖ Advantage of being last on the agenda
- ✖ Today is more than Communications 101 (let's say, 301)
- ✖ Few “revelations” – rather a time to think about communications and public relations
- ✖ Usable Tips
- ✖ A discussion, not a lecture
- ✖ Names, Districts, Experiences

THE OLD SAGE SAYS...

✕ Survival and Success

- + A curriculum mix-up -- forgivable
- + An error in the budget – probably survive
- + A little botulism in the cafeteria – not pretty, but life goes on
- + Inability to effectively communicate – *get your resume ready*

FIVE TIPS IN 45 MINUTES

- ✖ Develop a Communication Plan
- ✖ Communicate from the Inside Out
- ✖ Build Relationships & Listen
- ✖ Develop the Message & Support It
- ✖ Be Transparent & Deal with the Tough Issues Now

Applicable for districts of all sizes

DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION PLAN

✖ Advisory Team

- + Staff: representatives from all walks
- + Parents
- + Community: think of your demographics

✖ Planning Process:

- + Identify Audiences
- + Research: phone surveys; discussion/focus groups, key individual interviews
- + Message/s and Delivery
- + Build the plan and refer to it
- + Build project/issue based communication plans
- + Make sure plans align with the district strategic plan

DEVELOP A COMMUNICATION PLAN

Develop project-based communication plans

Message	Internal/External Audiences	Comm Tools	Person/s Responsible	Evaluation
Implementing “pay to play” program	Superintendent; Director of Secondary Ed.; Activities Director; Coaching Staff	Small & larger committee meetings; Athletic Dept. meetings; Principal meetings	Director of Secondary Ed.; Activities Director; Communications Director	Follow-up discussions; survey of coaching staff
	Students; parents; others ?	Student and parent meetings; Email; hard copies home; press releases; other?		Parent discussions; parent and student survey

COMMUNICATE FROM THE INSIDE OUT

- ✗ *If the house is on fire, tell those who are in it first.*
- ✗ *Staff and Board first – every time*
- ✗ *Get out to the buildings*
- ✗ *A well-informed staff:*
 - + *Knocks down rumors*
 - + *Is a powerful PR force*
 - + *“When the eagles are silent, the parrots will jabber.” – Winston Churchill*
- ✗ ***Scenario: District finances are becoming increasing tight. Staff reduction is likely.***

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS & LISTEN

- ✕ Listen – Less talk and more listening
(especially during the first couple of years)
- ✕ The face of the district
 - + Get to the buildings and school events of all kinds
 - + Attend public meetings and events
 - + Host and attend small group meetings and gatherings
 - + Invite key players to lunch (and Joe Citizen too)
 - + MAKE A DEPOSIT IN YOUR GOOD WILL ACCOUNT

DEVELOP THE MESSAGE & SUPPORT IT

- ✗ Develop message
- ✗ Define yourself or someone else will
- ✗ What is your message?
 - + Full version
 - + Bumper sticker
- ✗ Who delivers the message?
 - + Does it rise to the level of the superintendent?
 - + Communication Director, Principal, Others?
- ✗ Support your message at every turn

DEVELOP THE MESSAGE & SUPPORT IT

Sample: “Our schools assure great educational opportunities for all students in a safe learning environment.”

Be prepared to support it with specific examples. Make sure your Board has the resources to speak confidently on the message. (Consider a index card or app with 4-5 supporting examples.)

BE TRANSPARENT & DEAL WITH THE TOUGH ISSUES NOW

- ✗ Dealing with the Media (another session), but...
 - + Hundreds of great stories won't get covered
 - + A negative story will get covered
- ✗ When bad things happen:
 - + Tell those on the inside first
 - + Learn the art of **bridging**. Linking positive actions to potential problems.
 - ✗ Sample: How could Mizzou bridge from President's resignation to something positive?
 - ✗ Scenario: Poor decision by a student
 - ✗ Scenario: Poor decision by the district (that would be you)
- ✗ “Bad news is a lot like fish – it doesn't get better with age.” – Jody Powell, President Carter's Press Secretary

FIVE TIPS IN 45 MINUTES (REVIEW)

- ✗ Develop a Communication Plan
- ✗ Communicate from the Inside Out
- ✗ Build Relationships & Listen
- ✗ Develop the Message & Support It
- ✗ Be Transparent & Deal with the Tough Issues Now

CONTACT INFORMATION

David Luther

Director of Communications, MASA

Executive Director, MOSPRA

david.luther@mcsa.org

573.638.4825

