



For Education Leaders **Communicate Kindness**

These are dynamic and often divisive times. Our lives and the lives of our children are pelted daily with conflicting opinions, alternative facts, stories of violence, personal shaming and hateful words. This is the environment in which our children's characters form and behaviors become entrenched.

Attitudes can't be legislated. Kindness can't be graded. Empathy can't be mandated. These qualities grow organically when modeled and cultivated and at the leadership level and dispersed through the communications of every person in the organization.

Educators have the unique opportunity to collaborate with parents, communities and students to elevate the academic and social character of the culture in which we live. The choices are limited: simply observe negative social and environmental trends, or establish a framework within and beyond the teaching and learning environment that nurtures the capacity to step into another's shoes, see the world with a wider lens, and apply discernment to cultural inputs.

Starting Points:

- Do a 360 degree survey of district stakeholder groups. Explore stakeholders' perceptions of the communication characteristics exhibited in the education community people with whom they interact. Potential questions may be presented in a variety of formats; q & a, a range selector, or circle one. Some sample survey possibilities follow:

- Describe your understanding of the school/district process for receiving input, distributing information and/or seeking resolution?
- How frequently do you contact school/district personnel with questions or comments?
- How accessible are the individuals you wish to contact?
- Do you receive timely responses?
- How would you describe your interaction(s) with the person you connect with?
(Check all that apply)
 - Professional
 - Friendly
 - Well-Intentioned
 - Clear and concise
 - Solution oriented
 - Abrupt
 - Dismissive

Circle one: Would you describe yourself as **administrator**, **staff**, **parent**, **student**, **community member** or **other**?

- Synthesize the survey responses and distribute results Highlight the strengths to be built upon and the areas identified for improvement.
- Make consistent and respectful communication an all-school/district goal. Provide regular development opportunities and clarify expectations for thoughtful communications in all circumstances. The way we interact with and about one another forms the bedrock of the environment within which we live, work and educate. Thoughtful communication includes word choice, content and tone, as well as subtleties like eye-contact, focus and authenticity.

Professor Emeritus of Psychology at UCLA, Albert Mehrabian, combined statistical results of two studies and came up with the now famous theory that communication is only 7 percent verbal and 93 percent non-verbal. The non-verbal component was made up of body language (55 percent) and tone of voice (38 percent). He also found that the balance between the type of communications is influenced by how much the communicators like each other.

- Emphasize the importance of all communications in newsletters, staff meetings, signage, employee hiring and evaluations, board meetings, etc.

Sometimes you may think of me as only a number, or perhaps just another small cog in a very large wheel... But like you, I am a human being filled with joys, fears, frustrations, and hopes. I feel, I laugh and I hurt. And, like you, I want to be understood, accepted, and appreciated.

--Eric Harvey and Steve Ventura, Walk Awhile in My Shoes



These materials are provided by
The Minnesota Association of School Administrators

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