



*Strengthening Oklahoma's Safety Net,  
One Community At A Time*

## **Board Bulletin**

*Volume 9, Number 2 • February 2011*

### **Communication: Easier Said Than Done**

Never before has mankind had so many tools with which to communicate. Sadly, failure to communicate is still a common challenge faced by organizations. To have a strong community health center (CHC) board, members must learn to communicate openly and effectively with each other and management. Albert Mehrabian, 1960s researcher, developed the 7%-38%-55% communication rule widely used today - 7% spoken word (verbal); 38% tone (vocal); and 55% body language (visual). While researchers differ as to actual percentages, all agree that nonverbal communication is by far the strongest method by which people communicate. This is a bit scary given that emailing and texting seem to be the communication method of choice these days. It is not uncommon for people to text one another or even send Facebook messages while sitting in the same room together. Furthermore, researchers say that meaningful communication requires a congruency of the verbal, vocal and visual. Communication, while seemingly natural, takes practice and concerted effort to be effective.

#### **Communication Considerations**

The stewardship job required of a CHC board depends on a body of at least 9 up to 25 members working together as a team. Communication is the foundation of a team. How many NFL teams having communication problems make it to the Super Bowl? To ensure effective execution of plays, intense communication practice happens to the point that a simple gesture is understood and the team responds accordingly. The following considerations for improved communication, adapted from HRSA Learning Team notes, offer insight:

- ***Influential Communication Basics*** – The feeling of disrespect or a general attitude of not caring about what others think will kill communication. If boards are truly interested in improving communication, an investment of time is required to better understand what each member cares about. Once the team understands where each member is coming from and respects differing opinions, healthy conversations that lead to problem-solving will become the norm. Conflict is not bad. In fact, it is required to break out of status quo. Failure to communicate to resolve conflict destroys organizations. Healthy boards agree to disagree – in a respectful, caring manner.
- ***Listening Skills*** – Because most people think they are better listeners than they actually are, this is an area all should practice. It is most difficult to hear someone else if you are busy formulating your response when they are talking. If you are spending mental time questioning someone else's motives, not only are you not listening but also risking that your body language is communicating negativity. Conversely, if you truly listen to what others say, common points shared with the speaker can be identified from which to build conversation.
- ***Managing Time*** – The 'warp speed' nature of our world has most moving so fast to complete work that we become ineffective, creating a cycle that leads to mistakes and creates even greater time pressure. Another byproduct of our rapid communication environment is failure to 'think out' responses. Board members must also show respect for time constraints of others by showing up for meetings at scheduled times and turning off cell phones or other devices - putting the outside world on hold long enough to have an effective board meeting.
- ***Meeting Preparation*** – Another aspect of respectfully managing time requires adequate meeting preparation. Issue-focused agendas should be distributed to members in advance. Without a solid plan to address issues, meetings drag on and CHC boards risk losing valuable volunteers. Agendas should also allot a time period for each topic of discussion to prevent one issue or one person from derailing the entire meeting.
- ***Quality of Relationships*** – Team strength depends on the quality of its member relationships. It would be most difficult to find 9 people that agree on all issues – and quite dangerous to a CHC if board members were so complacent that there were never differing opinions. Having a quality relationship depends on being able to discuss difficult issues in a respectful way without fear of resentment or retaliation. If a member knows that others truly care about individual feelings, they are much more likely to communicate openly to seek resolution.

Communication is truly easier said than done and improvement requires continual practice. By having an environment based on open, honest communication, CHC boards can rise from mediocrity to excellence. To review the entire series, visit [www.okpca.org](http://www.okpca.org) and click on the home page *Board Bulletin* link.

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