

# Communicating with Your Team

Kathie Kentfield  
Director, NEMO  
[www.firstnemo.org](http://www.firstnemo.org)

## **Communicating with Your Team**

Develop communications strategies to reach every member of the team  
Divide the communications roles among the team  
Avoid miscommunications

# Talking with the Animals



## **Develop communications strategies to reach every member of the team**

- Most internal issues caused by miscommunication or lack of communication.
  - If you are the team's contact person it's important to forward messages from FIRST (e-mail blasts) to the whole team quickly.
  - Encourage team to read game manual, keep up with rules updates (should have a rules person on the team), know where to find info on the FIRST website.
  - Encourage team to network with other teams – hold get togethers with local teams, attend FIRST events, volunteer at events, read Chief Delphi
  - Develop communications roles on team to assist you with this aspect of the team.
- In order to communicate effectively it's important to address the different generations reflected in your team's makeup. Communications styles that work for one group of people may not work for others. Older members of the team – "no news is good news"; younger members of the team feel that no news means something is being held back from them and they become skeptical. Older members grew up with top-down communications styles; younger members with bottom-up.

# Yakety, Yak, Don't Talk Back!



## Traditionalists – 60 yrs old+

- value formal communication styles;
- not eager to share their thoughts;
- loyal;
- values formal organization structures;
- values authority;
- hordes “stuff”;
- don't let them feel as though their time is being wasted
- prefers **face to face** or **written communication**;
- **Wants to be respected – Don't Talk Back!**

## Moovin' and Groovin'

---



### **Baby Boomers – 45 years old +**

- success at all costs,
- prefers **planned meetings, memos,**
- wants to build rapport, be recognized.
- Relies on formal procedures and policies.
- Tendency is to micromanage younger members of the team.
- Boomers are the Show Me generation; body language is important.
- **Expect to be asked for details.**
- Present all the options.
- May (or may not) read e-mail
- Strong work ethic – **will mooove the project along at all cost – even if it means working every night on the robot.**

## See Ya Later, Alligator!

---



### **Gen Xers – people in 30s and 40s**

- value efficiency, directness in their communications,
- **don't want unnecessary meetings,**
- expects information when they ask for it.
- Flexible – not loyal to one organization, may come and go.
- Use e-mail to communicate,
- provide continuous feedback,
- use **informal communication style,**
- **short sound bites to keep their attention. Use bullet points in written communication**
- **Values balance in work/life, may not want to devote 4 days a week during build cycle – “See Ya Later, Alligator!”**

# The Eager Beavers



## Millenials – under age 20

- highly collaborative, optimistic, they will want to have their voices heard.
- They have a role in many family decisions and will expect to have the same on the team.
- **Tendency is to avoid face-to-face contact.** May not like spending time at team meetings.
- Seeks positive reinforcement.
- Seek feedback from them on a regular basis and provide it to them.
- Have fun – wants to learn in a humorous environment;
- encourage them to take risks so they can explore new ways of learning.
- **Used to multi-tasking because they've had the technology which enables it. Will be able to communicate in multiple ways –**  
e-mail, text messaging, chat rooms, blogs.
- **Use action words when communicating and challenge them, they love a good challenge!**
- **They want to learn independently. They want to do it “their way” – they are our Eager Beavers!**

# Cowabunga, Dude!

---



## **Styles of Communication**

What is your favorite style of communicating? Do you find yourself using the same method over and over, or do you vary how you send out messages to the team?

# Snail Mail, E-Mail?

---



## Written

### 1. Electronic

1. E-mail – make sure all team members can receive your e-mails; add address to address book so as to not block it from spam filters
  1. who gets e-mail blasts from FIRST?
  2. Are they communicated out to the team? Already being communicated via Chief Delphi – do you want your team members to read it there first, or from you?
  3. E-mail distribution list(s) – who is on it? Mentors, students, parents, sponsors, school administrators, politicians, media
2. Newsletter
3. Website – have section for members controlled by passwords; leave general team communications out of regular portion of website.

### 2. Paper

1. Minutes from meetings – distributed electronically and via paper? Agendas of upcoming meetings?
2. Notices – travel arrangements, permission slips, etc.
3. If students are reluctant to bring home materials, consider snail-mailing them

# Polly Wanna Cracker?

---



## Verbal

- **Repeat things** at meetings for people who do not respond well to written communications or do not read their e-mail
- **Face-to-face** – easier interpretation than over e-mail;



## Tips for Successful Communications

- have an **actual conversation** – a back-and-forth exchange of ideas with a common result as the goal
- **be clear and concise** – think through the problem at hand or the opportunity you want to capitalize on. Communicate that effectively and you will get buy-in from the team.
- **Share the “big picture”** with the team – what is your vision? Where do you think the team should be in the coming year? Does your team have a business plan? What are the goals of the plan? Lead them from the present to that goal – what steps do you envision the team taking to get there?
- **Listen to team members** and be prepared to handle objections to your plans.
- **Have realistic expectations.** Encourage team members to let you know how they are doing on various parts of the project, and ask about when they think their portion will be done. This will help you to keep the team on track to meeting deadlines, as you will be able to oversee the big picture. If one area is lagging behind, step in and offer advice for working more efficiently, or if necessary, eliminate that portion of the project to keep the rest moving smoothly (ie eliminating an arm on the robot if it is jeopardizing getting the rest of it done so the programmers can program, the drivers can drive, etc. before ship date).
- **Share news of early successes with the whole team.** It will bring momentum to other aspects of the team. Share successes with auxiliary members of the team also, such as school personnel, sponsors, etc.
- **Be a positive role model. Be aware that you are the leader of the team and may have to communicate negative decisions, or make difficult decisions.**
- **Consider your message when choosing form of communication** – e-mails should be limited to brief messages; longer detailed messages (regarding travel plans, for example) should be written as document attachments and printed for distribution at meetings. Long detailed instructions can be read verbally, but should be backed up with paper.

# The Sky is Falling, The Sky is Falling!



## Emergency Communications

- **When will you need to have emergency communications with the team?** Snow Days? Morning of travel?
- **How will you communicate with the team in an emergency?**
  - Push and pull communications
  - E-mail – set up distribution list with cell phone numbers as e-mail addresses so you can push a message out
  - phone tree
  - website announcement
  - answering machine message – Google recently purchased GrandCentral
  - emergency alert system like what colleges are using

## Roaring to Go!

---



### **Communicating with Your Team**

It's not too late to improve on your team communications.

- Communicate clearly and promptly, in the correct format for your audience
- Develop team roles to share the work