

Respect is the bottom line

How to disagree in a way that doesn't stop progress

Use this handout as a guide for dealing with relationships

Choose Your Method of Communication Carefully!

Shooting off an email may feel like the most efficient and effective manner of communication but it can cause more harm than good. Communication via email (or social media) can leave tone open to interpretation and in situations that are often emotionally charged this can be damaging. Emails are a great method of communication to summarize in person meetings, or to ask clarifying questions post meetings. But please reconsider emails as the go-to method of communications especially with people with whom you do not have strong relationships. Ask yourself the following questions when deciding how to communicate:

Can you meet in person to discuss this first?

If you cannot meet in person can you schedule a phone call?

Take Responsibility for Making Things Better by Listening

As leaders, we are accustomed to identifying problems and making decisions. In relationships, this can lead to short sighted assumptions. When you are working on a relationship, can you ask questions and listen to understand rather than to respond? Most people want to be heard and can't move towards solutions until that need has been met.

Identify Similarities First

We often forget that in animal welfare we have more in common with our colleagues, volunteers and other groups than differences. Keeping our similarities front and center in our mind helps us also assume good intentions. We do not need to agree on the minutiae in order to see the good in each other and work towards progress together. To build trust and partnership, can you find commonalities to partner on rather than expecting 100% agreement on all views?

When working with someone you might have had issues with in the past can you ask yourselves these questions:

Can articulate what you and this person have in common?

Is there opportunity to really focus on one of these commonalities?

Find Wins

Succeeding in partnership with other individuals or groups creates trust and shared sense of accomplishment. There will always be work that needs to be done within a community and no person or organization is perfect. Instead of waiting for one person or group to change, can we work within the reality we live and find wins? Focus on one small area that you can work together on. Even just working together on a project and agreeing on a plan is a win within itself. Don't try to change the world in one project, focus on the first step of finding common grounds. When trying to find wins ask yourself these questions

Did you meet in person to discuss the future?

How can you both accomplish more by working together than working separately?

When working with this person, do you have a similarity that could lend itself to a project?

Recognize Different Responsibilities

Sometimes it's difficult to put yourself in someone else's shoes especially within animal welfare because we make the assumption that everyone has the same priorities. It's important to realize each organization plays its own role in the community and the people within that organization have responsibilities of which you may have no understanding. While one person may place 1 particular animal as their top priority another person in another organization may be trying to balance 100 animals and staff. It's important to realize that as individuals we each have specific responsibilities that make up our role within the community and it's impossible for everyone to understand the depth of those responsibilities without living in your shoes. Just as you wouldn't want others to make assumptions about you, try to not make assumptions about others. Try asking these questions to help understand responsibilities.

Am I making an assumption about their time, bandwidth and resources when I speak to them?

If we don't work in similar organizations, have I taken the time to try to understand their role?

Have I done a good job of helping him/her understand my role and responsibilities?

Reflection/Personal Growth Plan

Identify a relationships within your community that you would like to strengthen.

What is my communication style? What are my strengths? How does the other person prefer to communicate? What are their strengths? Do you have the language to talk about these?

Some resources around communications preferences and strengths:

Quick Assessment Tools:

Clifton Strengths (StrengthFinder 2.0), Strength Based Leadership
Everything DISC Workplace Assessment
Emergenetics; Work that Works by Gail Browning, Ph.D.

Can you identify areas you have in common with the other person? Are there opportunities to build on commonalities?

What are 1-3 ways you can focus more intentionally on listening to understand rather than listening to respond?

What can you commit to doing in the next 30 days to move this relationship forward?

What is one way you can utilize these skills within your organization?