



Communication is the Key to Success

Kathleen Walsh

Happy Spring! As the newsletter evolves, we'll be building out themes and asking for willing (and unwilling) participants to contribute a relevant topic. This month there is no better topic than "communication."

Growing up, my automatic defense was always, "You didn't say that." This was regardless of my audience – parents, coaches, and even the nuns at my Catholic schools. By saying that, I thought, maybe, I could turn the situation around and essentially "blame" the other party. I had some meager success, but mostly ended up being sent to my room or told to repent by saying 10 Rosaries and an Act of Contrition. Bottom line, clearly something was lost in the translation of the communication.

Now as a 29-year-old (*give or take a few years!*) YMCA CEO, I have learned that my communication must be near perfect if I want team members to trust me and recognize that my words reflect our goals, our values and direction. And, I must be an example in cases that require me to pause and reset. This is a learned practice that has likely saved me from serious communication consequences.

So before you read any further into this month's newsletter, I simply ask you to reflect on the last professional conversation that you had. Do you feel accomplished in delivering the intended message? I do!

Now if only I could have the same effectiveness when communicating to my dog!

Kathleen Walsh is CEO of the YMCA Metro North. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the North Shore Chamber of Commerce, member of the THRIVE Advisory Council, and proud editor of the THRIVE newsletter.

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Communication Reads & Podcasts

Great books and podcasts that will help you improve your communication skills!

Must Reads

- "I Said This, You Heard That," by Kathleen Edelman
- "Get to the Point! Sharpen your Message and Make Your Words Matter!" by Joel Schwartzberg
- "Lead it Like Lasso," by Stockman and Coniglio

Must Listen-to Podcasts

- Communicate with Confidence, the Blueprint for Mastering Every Conversation, with Mel Robbins
- The Three C's of Strong Communication, with Tom Brady (less than 2 minutes long 😊)
- Think Fast Talk Smart, with Matt Abrahams





THRIVE | Self-Improvement

Improving Communication

Michelle Kempskie
Principal, Kempskie Consulting

How often have you left a meeting with your manager and thought, “What just happened? What does she want me to do? Why am I doing this?”

Managers are the glue that keep organizations together, and they can be the demise of any organization as well. Managers sit in the middle between leadership making decisions for the business and the employees who must carry out these decisions. The key to bringing the two ends together is communication.

Communication is the exchange of information through speech, writing, visualization, and/or behavior. Communication involves a sender, message, and recipient. Sounds like a simple formula for success, right? Not so much.

All communications benefit from planning. Even a minute of thought can increase the likelihood of an effective exchange. During planning, managers can ask themselves what, how, who and why. Document all communications. Send an email prior to a meeting that outlines the agenda and goals for the meeting. If an ad hoc discussion lands on actions for the employee or considerations for a change of direction, follow up with an email or other documentation. This follow-up could include others and could go beyond email to include the collaboration or project management technology being used such as Slack or Teams.

Ask what.

It's easy just to jump into a conversation, especially a random chat. That said, how often do you realize you left something out, wished you had positioned something differently, or missed an opportunity to take advantage of a relaxed situation to weave something in? **Tips on asking what:**

- **Be specific.** Review facts that can be misinterpreted and remove vague language; include details, even if you think they are known; research shows we humans need to hear things multiple times before we get it.
- **Be transparent.** Be clear on what you know and what you do not; include timelines of when information will be available; transparency builds trust.
- **Include background.** Consider helpful background or historical information to support your message; remember that unnecessary details could clutter your message. Every communication is an opportunity to make connections to broader messages.

Ask why.

The intentions of your communications may be obvious to you, but it is not always the case that others understand what's in it for them. Without this vital information, your message is very likely to fall flat. **Tips on asking why:**

- **Set context.** Explain how this message fits into the bigger picture of a project or the organization; use agreed-upon company value and goal language where appropriate.
- **Personalize your message.** Be clear on how the information impacts the person or group you are addressing; tie the message to personal development goals if applicable.
- **Ensure understanding.** Ask listeners directly if they understand ‘the why’; offer probing questions to expand and deepen the discussion.

Ask who.

People have preferred modes of thinking and therefore appreciate information aligned with these preferences. Consider the receivers of your message, and shape your message to resonate. **Tips on asking who:**

- **Firsthand receivers.** Ask yourself how the receiver prefers to hear your message (will they care more about the facts or will concern for colleagues dominate their reaction); individuals will be more responsive if you lead with what they value.
- **Ripple effect.** Although you may communicate directly with an individual or a group, consider who else will be affected, such as other departments or customers. Think about how this message could be translated and how your word choice and positioning could support or hinder this translation. The rumor mill can be more powerful than any official communication.
- **Feelings from facts.** Brainstorm potential feelings that may arise upon receipt of the message; pay attention to non-verbal responses and inquire about them in real-time (remember active listening); use these feelings as an opportunity to understand colleagues.

Ask how.

Timing and modes of communication can send a stronger message than what is being said aloud. Research claims non-verbal messages are “heard” clearer than verbal message anywhere from 60-90% of the time. **Tips on asking how:**

- **Communicate frequently** (real-time when possible). Seek opportunities for ad hoc connections and consider appropriate frequency for more formal communication (weekly meetings can make sense for ongoing work, although daily 1:1s can make sense in the heat of a stressful project).
- **Engage everyone.** Make sure all affected parties are hearing the message; ad-hoc conversations can be effective however recap discussions for others that are impacted; allow for questions and call out individuals who are not typically assertive to ensure inclusion.
- **Establish processes.** Every organization has several modes of communication, so establish patterns to deliver certain types of messages (i.e., Slack channel vs. weekly meeting agenda items vs. formal messages from leadership). Feedback loops should be apparent and active (consider anonymous loops).

One final note that supports all these suggestions: Be approachable and authentic. Do not just say, “my door is always open” — be intentional about opening it. Be true to yourself and be aware of how others respond to you. Communication requires planning to be effective. With consideration of what, why, who, and how, you will more likely have communication success.

Michelle Kempskie is a member of the THRIVE Advisory Council. Reach her at michelle@mkopconsult.com or via www.MKopconsult.com.



Getting To Know The THRIVERS!

Please meet ...

Kathryn Nielsen
Senior Executive Officer
North Shore Community College

Tell us about your journey to becoming the Senior Executive Officer at North Shore Community College.

My journey in higher education began in 2000, as a tutor in the writing center at a private, four-year college in the Northeast. The writing center quickly became a nexus of student life, connecting me to the heart of teaching and learning, literacy, accessibility, and institutional policy. This formative experience placed students at the center of my work and awakened in me a deep commitment to transformative, inclusive education.

While raising four children and pursuing three degrees as an adult learner, I taught undergraduate and graduate students in the School of Education and Social Policy. I was later invited to build and direct a new Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, with a focus on pedagogical innovation and evidence-based practice.

Since then, my career has evolved through mid-level leadership roles into executive leadership, culminating in my current position within the community college system. At North Shore, I have the privilege of weaving together my passion for nonprofit work with institutional partnership-building — all in service of empowering students, supporting families, and uplifting entire communities.

What are your guiding principles as a female leader?

My leadership is grounded in the core tenets of feminist leadership, which inform both how I lead and how I mentor others. These principles include:

1. Power With, Not Power Over
2. Inclusion and Equity
3. Authenticity and Vulnerability
4. Accountability
5. Care and Sustainability

Feminist leadership isn't limited to activism or nonprofit work — it thrives in education, business, and community spaces. It offers a framework for leading with compassion, justice, and transformation at the center.

What would you tell Kathryn at 18 years old?

I would tell young Kathryn that she is already enough — even in the midst of uncertainty, even when things are messy. I would gently urge her to trust her intuition. That quiet tug in your chest, that subtle "no" — it's not weakness, and it's not drama. It's your inner compass. Listen to her. Follow her.

What is in your physical and emotional self-care toolkit?

In December 2023, I was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer — a diagnosis that radically reshaped my life. As someone who was otherwise healthy and happy, the news upended everything I knew.

My healing journey has required an intentional reevaluation of every dimension of my life: spiritual, relational, professional, physical, and mental. What emerged from that examination is something I now call "cancer clarity" — a mindset I now apply to every aspect of how I live and lead.

Here's the secret: every self-care practice I've adopted — restorative yoga, breathwork, stress reduction, healthier eating, intuition-trusting, boundary-setting — these are things we all know to do. We just need to give ourselves permission to prioritize them. That mindset shift is everything.

Name three things that bring you great joy outside of work.

Spending time with my partner and four adult children — in any capacity — is my deepest joy.

My two golden retrievers, Gracie and Bodhi, bring daily doses of delight and unconditional love.

And I find immense fulfillment in creative projects that bring people together for collective uplift and community healing.

If offered \$1 million to use beyond your own family, how would you spend it?

My heart lies in supporting the empowerment, leadership, safety, and justice of women and girls. Paired with my belief in the transformative power of education, I would create scholarship pathways that allow women and girls to access those very opportunities to find their voice, follow their dreams, change their lives and the world in turn.

What do you hope your legacy will be?

When my name is spoken years from now, I hope it is remembered with warmth — as someone who chose love over fear, again and again. Someone who showed up with presence and care. Someone who raised and mentored humans who went on to thrive and make a difference of their own.

Kathryn Nielsen is a member of the THRIVE Advisory Council.

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Market Your Business at the **THRIVE** Summit 2025

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Looking for a great way to market your business? Become an **exhibitor** at the **THRIVE Summit Marketplace!**

We have a few tables left for Marketplace exhibitors and we give preference to women-owned and women-led businesses. Space is limited to 12 booths. The \$350 cost includes 1 ticket to the Summit, valued at \$150.

If interested, please email Karen Andreas at karen.andreas@northshorechamber.org. Provide details about your business, the theme of your booth, and your planned raffles/giveaways or items for sale.

We look forward to hearing from you!



Golf for Thrivers! (A few spots remain.)

May 5-June 2 (4 Mondays, No Memorial Day Class) \$225, Paradise Family Golf, Middleton, 4:15-5:15 pm

WEEK 1: Full Swing Fundamentals - Irons

- Discuss the basics of irons, grips, mechanics and swing

WEEK 2: Full Swing Fundamentals - Driver, Fairway Woods, and Hybrids

- Introduction to the full swing with these clubs

WEEK 3: Short Game & Putting Fundamentals

- Discuss short game and putting fundamentals, chipping and pitching mechanics

WEEK 4: On-Course Playing Clinic using Trackman Software

- Discuss basic Rules of Golf & proper etiquette, playing strategy & course management



Registration is due by May 1. Please email the Chamber's Events Manager, Patti Baker, to reserve your spot: patti.baker@northshorechamber.org.

Payment is due at the first class, with checks made to Phil Cornetta Golf School. Space is limited to 8 women so sign up soon!



For your Calendar



Come mix and mingle with fellow THRIVERS and other Chamber members at the **May 29 After Hours**. We'll meet from 5-7 PM on the deck at Ferncroft Country Club, 10 Village Road, Middleton to enjoy drinks, good eats, and good conversation. Tickets are \$25 for Chamber members, \$35 for non-members.

Sign up at www.northshorechamber.org.



Be sure you have the **THRIVE Summit** on your calendar for Thursday, **June 18**, 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Peabody Marriott. Don't miss our annual Signature Event, and be sure to bring a friend, colleague or daughter! Tickets are sure to sell out again, so buy them soon.



Let's get a THRIVE foursome ready to go for the Chamber's annual **Golf Tourney** on Monday, **July 21** at Ipswich Country Club. Email Karen Andreas if you're interested in playing as a team this year!



The Chamber's **Diamond Awards**, honoring exceptional women in business, is set for Thursday, **August 21**. The Chamber will be accepting nominations soon, so please start thinking about deserving women to nominate!



North Shore Chamber of Commerce

Have an idea for content for the THRIVE monthly newsletter? Please email **Kathleen Walsh** at kwash@metronorthymca.org.

Be sure to share this newsletter with your network, and encourage others to sign up for THRIVE!