

Be assertive in your communications

The three most common requests we get for leadership workshop topics are: recruiting and motivating volunteers; managing meetings; and communicating effectively.

Assertive communication is an important component of all three topics. "I"



messages are the cornerstone of assertive communication. "I" messages allow us to speak for ourselves, directly and honestly. These messages have three major parts.

Feelings: direct and honest expression of the emotional impact of the unacceptable behavior on you.

Behavior: brief, nonjudgemental, precise description of the specific behavior you find acceptable.

Effect: short, concrete, logical statement of how the person's behavior affects you.

Chuck Bokor



EXAMPLE: "I'm confused and frustrated. I feel you are pushing our meetings along too fast and not allowing enough time for discussion. As a result, I don't feel very committed."

Wording is crucial. Avoid "you" statements disguised as "I" statements, such as "I think you should..." or "I know how you feel" or "I wish you would...". If possible, construct your



statement beforehand and rehearse it with a trusted friend.

Reinforce your verbal message with appropriate nonverbal behavior — eye contact and leaning forward. Avoid "mixed messages", for example smiling when you feel angry.

An assertive response is neither aggressive nor passive. Aggressive responses are blunt, attacking, sometimes labelling and often overreacting. A possible response to behavior that is personally offensive may be silence or dismissal of the behavior as unimportant. Being assertive on the other hand, means that you are telling the other person how **you** feel, and why.

Whether or not you are communicating with family members, friends or fellow members of your organization, be as direct and honest (assertive) as possible.

Practice makes perfect. The next time someone else's behavior is bothering you, take a second to put together an appropriate response. Say how the behavior makes you feel and how it is affecting your own behavior. You will be pleasantly surprised by most responses to your assertive communication.

Chuck Bokor is leadership specialist with the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Guelph.



How well do you come across to an audience?

When you make a presentation, do you just think about the subject, or do you also think about how you come across to your listener? Use this checklist to increase your awareness of **how** you say **what** you say.

* What do you do with your hands? Put them in your pockets? Clutch your notes? Or gesture?

* When do you move to another location? Never? At scheduled intervals? When you go on to a new subject? How fast do you move?

* Where do you move? Back behind the lectern? Toward your audience?

* Where are you looking? At your notes? At the audio-visual material? To

a spot on the back wall? Or at the people you're talking to?

* When do you change voice volume? When no one understands? When no one seems to be listening? When the idea is important?

...continued on page 16