

# JAMAICA FIRE BRIGADE

TRAINING DEPARTMENT



## BRIEFING

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## 1. WHAT DO PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW - AND WHY?

People need to understand:

- how their efforts contribute to the aims of the organization: if they are to be able to commit themselves.
- their tasks - what is expected of them and to what standard; if they are to apply their efforts usefully.
- how well they are doing: to reinforce success and create a feeling of achievement.
- the conditions under which they are employed and any changes to them.
- what policies and changes have been decided upon which will affect them; if they are to cooperate with them. They need to understand the reasons for decisions, including the economic facts influencing them.

People also need the opportunity to contribute their ideas for running the enterprise better. This both makes the organization more effective (management has no monopoly of wisdom) and creates greater satisfaction,

Failure to communicate is costly. Time, cooperation, commitment, morale and effectiveness are all at risk. Frustration sets in and 'the Grapevine' fills the information vacuum. Even when it gets the facts right, the grapevine produces cynicism because the reasons are not explained and are then denigrated (belittled).

## 2. COMMUNICATION AND ITS PURPOSES

Communication has been defined as the process of transmitting information and understanding from one person to another or group of persons and vice versa. In order to be effective it must fulfil three (3) requirements, it must be understood; it must be believed; and it must be accepted. Communication systems are the mechanisms which bind organizations together. Communication is the process by which management takes action. Just as the best communication will not compensate for poor plans, the best of planning cannot be implemented without effective communication. The general purposes of communication can be classified into the following areas

- a. Becoming informed or informing others.
- b. Judging the performance of self and others.
- c. Directing others or being directed.
- d. Influencing others or being influenced.

### 3. THE IMPACT OF COMMUNICATION

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Communication systems can broadly divided. into 2 types:

a. One Way communication (Closed System). This takes place when a superior passes information in one direction to his /her subordinates without providing the opportunity for opinions to be expressed or questions to be asked. He/she assumes that subordinates understand, believe and accept the information passed to them and will act effectively as a result. This system is usually quite fast and, when it is dealing with familiar matters or drills, it is normally successful. However, when unfamiliar or complicated issues are involved, it is likely to result in misunderstanding and consequently poor results.

b. Two Way Communication (Open System). This means that the communicator takes care to ensure that the information he/she is passing is understood by everyone involved. He/she does this by encouraging questions from anyone who is in doubt. This system is naturally much slower than a. the one way system and can make life uncomfortable for the communicator if he /she is not doing an effective job. However, when dealing with new or complicated information, it is far more likely to result in getting a task completed well than with the one way system.

### 4. BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

Very often, communication between individuals or departments breaks down because of the difficulty of conveying an accurate meaning with words. When a person passes a piece of information he/she cannot always assume that it will be received in the sense that he/she meant it. The reasons for this are numerous and include such things as timing, overload, short-circuiting, distortion and the different perceptions of people according to their background or roles. We all filter information through layers of bias created by our group, age, role, experience, etc. For example, to a manager who believes that work must be unpleasant to be productive, laughter and joking from his/her people may communicate to him/her that time is being wasted. To a manager who believes that contented employees work harder, the same laughter may indicate that he/she is succeeding very well as a manager. To the manager who is personally insecure, the same laughter and joking may communicate that his/her people are

making fun of him/her.

## **5. OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS**

### **Feedback**

Perhaps the single most important method of improving communication is through feedback. All of us use the principle in our human communications without realizing it. In casual conversation, in a teaching situation, or when issuing orders / instructions; we as senders of information are constantly aware of cues, verbal or nonverbal, as to whether or not we are being understood. Feedback can therefore be defined as a response by the receiver to the sender's message. The sender may take account of feedback in modifying subsequent messages. Thus feedback makes communication a dynamic two - way process, and attention to feedback makes a communication system more effective.

## **6. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

If people are to give of their best to the service, they must know what is happening and why. The six (6) key steps for effective communication are;

### **Sending**

Saying something only after giving careful thought - "engage brain before opening mouth"

### **Receiving**

Is showing that conditions of timing, noise, proximity and the ability of the person receiving is such that they have heard what you have to say.

### **Understanding**

By questioning, check that there is understanding - always remember that short simple messages / instructions are far more likely to be understood than lengthy statements laced with jargon.

### **Acceptance**

People do not need to agree with decisions in order to co-operate, but they must know why. Acceptance to act will vary depending on the level of understanding.

### **Action**

Resulting from any communication requires that people not only understand and accept but also have the capability for carrying through the instruction.

## **Feedback**

Do not be vague. Always indicate the feedback you were looking for and the time scale in which it should be given.

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### **7. THE BRIEFING**

A briefing is a means of giving orders and instructions together with sufficient background information to motivate the team / audience / subordinate. It must be clear and concise - easy to understand and remember.

### **8. FORMAT**

The basic elements of a successful brief are:

- S** - Situation
- M** - Mission
- E** - Execution
- A** - Ask questions
- C** - Check of understanding

### **9. SITUATION**

An initial outline of the situation is required before going into detail. It should contain only sufficient information to motivate the team and enable them to understand the rest of the brief.

### **10. MISSION**

The mission or task must be clearly stated. It should be singular and have the minimum qualifications, normally only time and place.

### **11. EXECUTION**

The execution phase will consist of the following details at least

Plan how the plan is to be implemented.

Appointment of sub-leaders

Allocation of tasks

Details of resources / limitations

Contingency plans.

### **12. ANY QUESTIONS**

Always allow for questions to be asked, unless time precludes.

### **13. CHECK OF UNDERSTANDING**

Check everyone's understanding by asking questions ( remember pose, pause, pounce ). Ask only about essential facts: this adds emphasis to their importance.

### **14. TEAM BRIEFING**

The communicator's job is to influence and be influenced by others. The failure to communicate effectively very often leads to misunderstanding, lack of commitment, a "them and us " attitude and a grapevine running wild. If this is to be overcome there needs to be regular briefing and, for this to be effective, it must be systematic, simply a systematic drill which ensures that communication takes place. Each department, watch, or station will be organized differently dependent on the number of people involved at different levels and the working patterns. The crucial element is that the information briefed should be relevant to the group e.g. progress, people, policy, points of action and general information.

### **15. HELPFUL HINTS ON TEAM BRIEFING**

- a. Plan what you want to say and keep it simple.
- b. Use examples and make the message relevant to your team.
- c. Keep to the subject. Encourage questions on the information briefed.
- d. Remember you are briefing the management view.
- e. Recall questions you cannot answer and then get the answer back to the questioner.
- f. Brief absentees immediately they return to work.

### **16. CONCLUSION**

The entire operation of the Brigade depends on effective communication. Success in many instances will depend on the ability of officers to communicate to others about what needs to be done, how it will be done and the importance of doing it. Always remember that effective communication - through explanation - leads to understanding - results in ACTION.