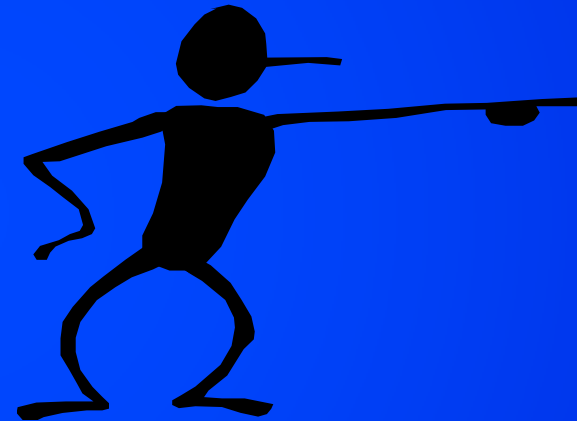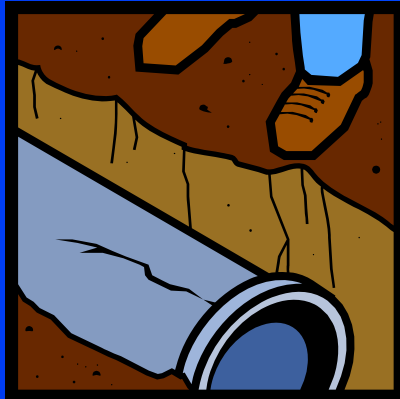# Channeling Success:
How Communication Practices and Processes Can Move Your Congregation Forward

St. Lawrence District Assembly
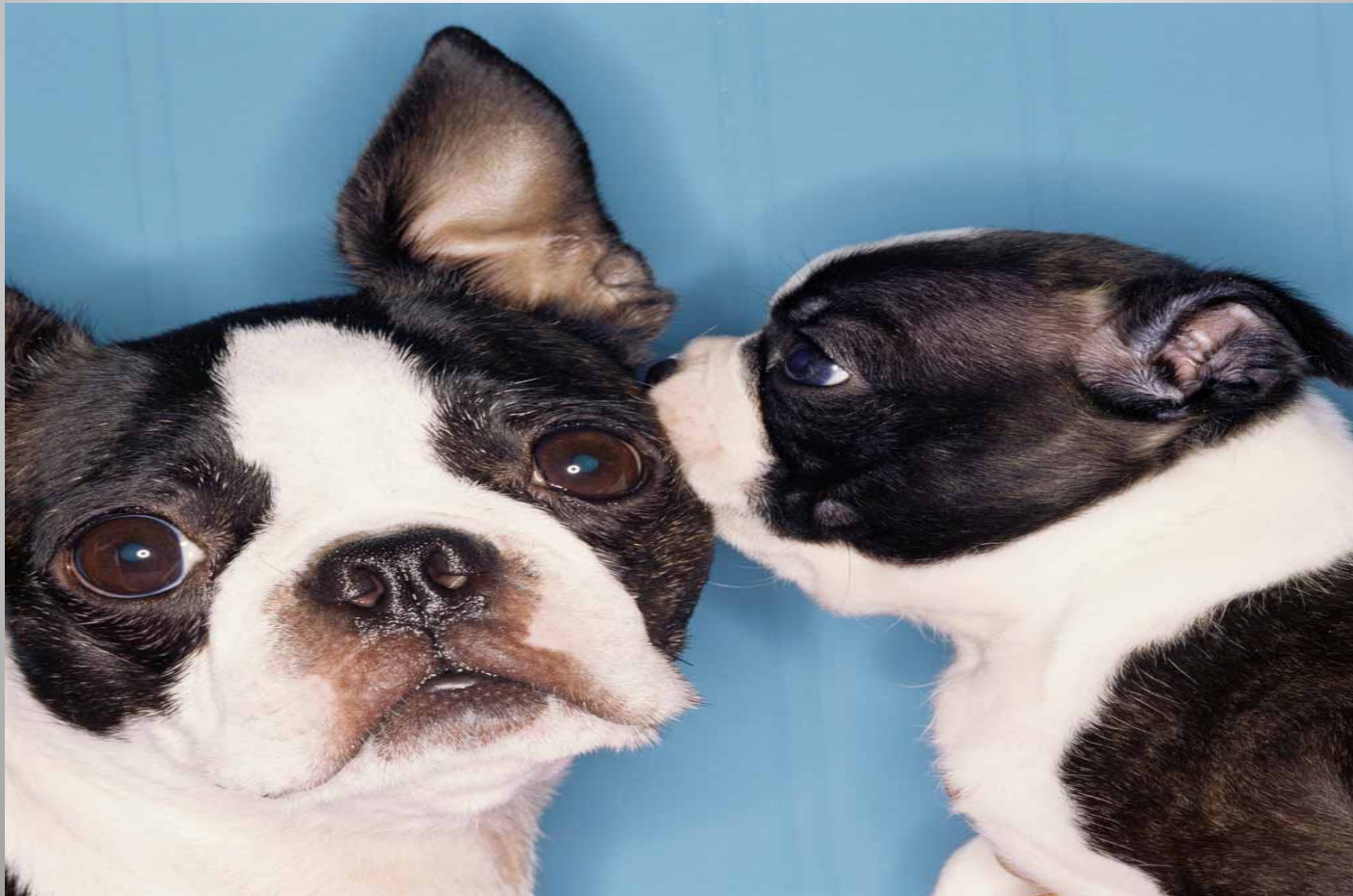
Rochester, New York

April 28, 2012

Mark Bernstein

"Communication works for those who work at it."
John Powell

Things to Talk About

- What does systems theory have to do with it?
- UUs behaving badly: all about rumors, gossip, and leaks (oh, my!)
- The responsibility of leaders in dealing with said rumors, gossip and leaks
- Communication in the congregation: some examples of what not to do
- Countering bad communication habits
- The critical importance of TRUST

This is really dynamic stuff!!!!

➢ Congregations, intentionally or not, do not always want to grow toward healthier functioning

➢ Systems tend toward "homeostasis"—that is, they like to return to things as they were before.

➢ When a congregation makes a change toward healthier functioning, either through changes in leadership roles or introduction of a new way of doing things, some in the congregation may try to persuade (or even force) the leader(s) to resume previous roles, positions or standards.

One of the ways in which some members of the congregation "push back" is through the use of inappropriate and sometimes damaging communication processes, like…

Rumors

eaking Information

ird-party complaint

Anonymous Communication

Stuffing up the toilets

"*Transparency breeds legitimacy.*"

John Maxwell

- ✓ Speak the truth
- ✓ Don't hide bad news
- ✓ Never over-promise
- ✓ Do what you say you will do
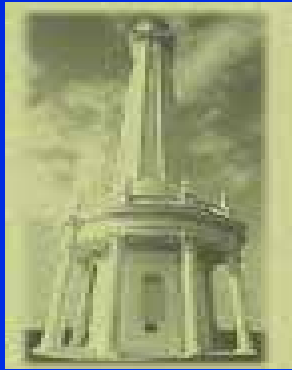
Leaders who live in Ivory Towers...

Live in isolation

Play it safe

Appear mysterious

Manage others

Make decisions based on second hand information

Are unclear about where they stand.

Leaders who live in Glass Houses...

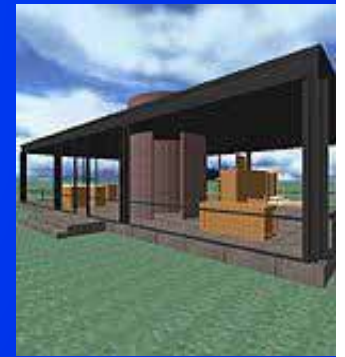Are involved and informed

Allow themselves to be vulnerable

Are transparent in everything they do

Inspire others

Make decisions based on first hand knowledge

Espouse clear values and vision

Where do your leaders reside?

Did you hear what I heard???

- **Rumors** are misinformation that is fabricated in the absence of accurate information.

- Rumors are an attempt to provide structure in an uncertain situation, bring a sense of closure, and simplify complex situations.

- Rumors abound in a time of high anxiety or great change

- Gossip is information that may be more accurate but becomes problematic because it is spread outside formal informational channels.

- Gossip fills an information void, but it is also a way to bind people and communities together. It is talk with a social purpose.

- It is when gossip is deceptive, arbitrary and mean-spirited that it begins to break down a community.

In a congregation where rumors and gossip flourish, leaders need to ask:

- Do congregants not feel safe communicating directly and truthfully?

- Do rumors or gossip hint of high anxiety or negativity in the congregation?

- Do the rumors or gossip indicate that necessary information is being concealed?

- Do the rumors or gossip require a response from ministerial or lay leaders?
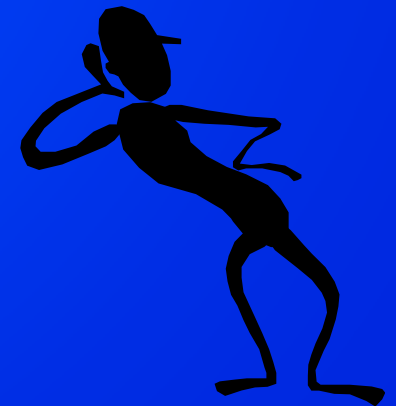
It is tempting to point fingers at people who gossip, spread rumors, anonymously accuse or leak information. But such behavior exists only if the system itself permits and enables it.
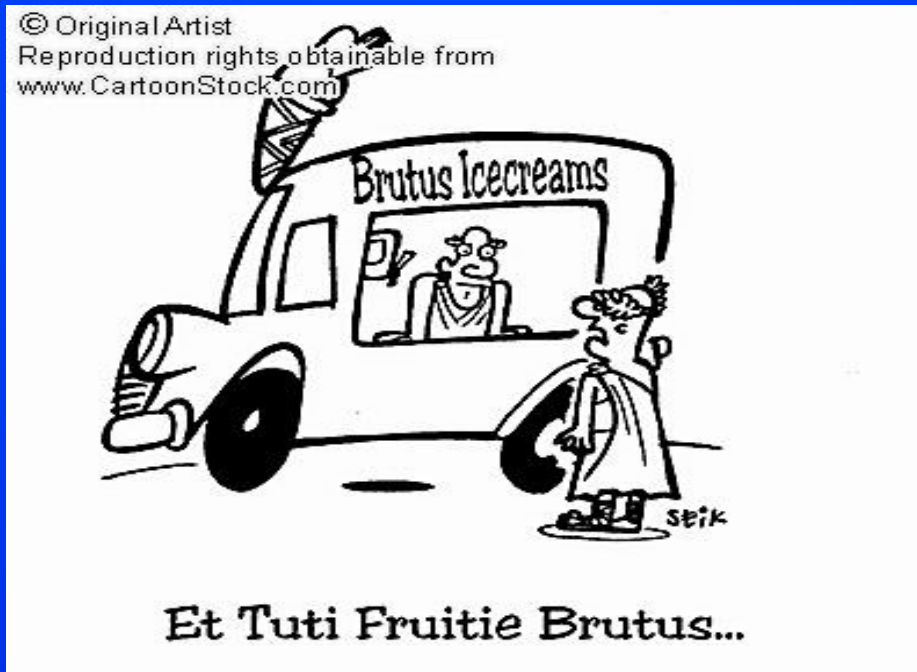
Dealing with Rumors and Gossip and Other Behaviors that Go Bump in the Night

Individual

- Don't keep secrets about secrets
- Name and address the unhealthy behavior
- Don't spread the virus
- Maintain a "non-anxious" presence
- Don't take it personally: remember systems theory

Organizational

- Provide prompt and accurate information about processes and decisions
- Cultivate "dead-enders"
- Create a communication roadmap that outlines appropriate channels for finding out needed facts, expressing concerns, and relaying information

A word about leaking

- Leaking is information that is released in spite of relevant and agreed upon boundaries to keep it contained.
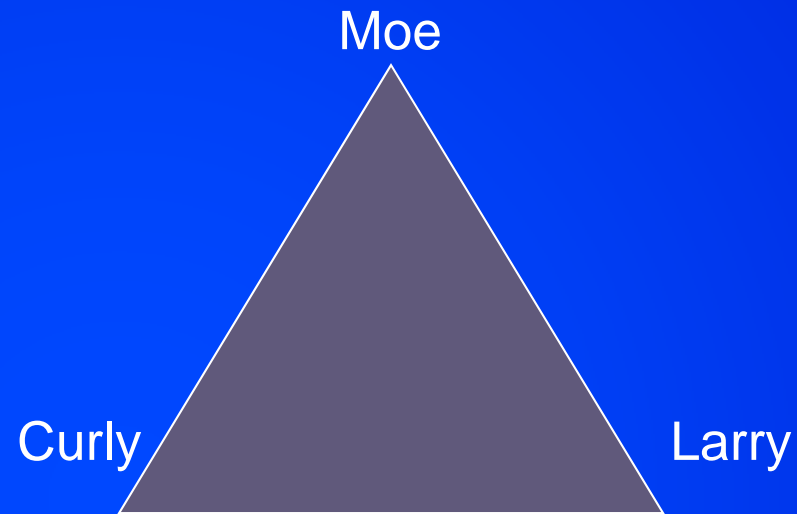
- Leaks are breaches of fiduciary responsibility.

Here comes the disclaimer:

When it comes to dissemination of information, leaders need to consider issues of…

- Right to know
- Need to know
- When information needs to be revealed
- Legal issues

Bad Communication Practices

1. Triangulation

Moe

Curly   Larry

2. pass-through communication

3. anonymous feedback

Countering Bad Communication Habits

- speak directly to the person or committee that the issue concerns
- refuse to carry a message from one person or group to another
- if two people talk with you about each other, offer to meet with both of them together or to find them a mediator
- if a person complains to you about someone else but refuses to talk directly with the person to resolve the problem, ask them to stop talking to you or others about it
- listen first and then ask what the person will do to resolve the problem
- do not take nonspecific or anonymous feedback seriously

Building Trust
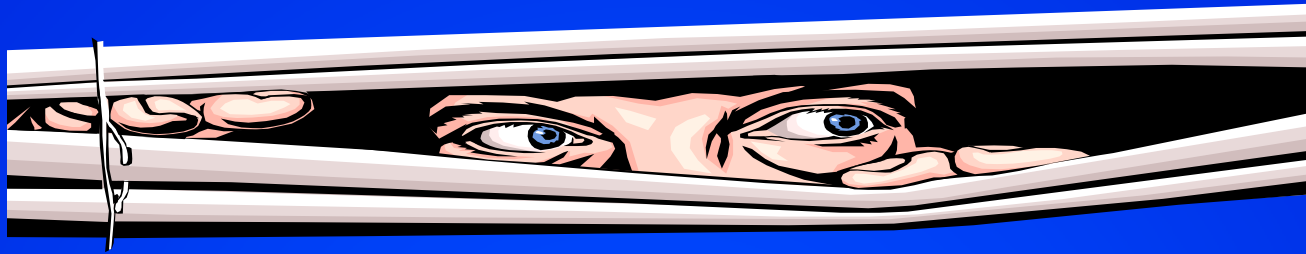
Trust is the emotional glue that binds leaders and followers together.   Warren Bennis

Few things help an individual more than to place responsibility upon him, and to let him know that you trust him.   Booker T. Washington

When I'm trusting and being myself, everything in my life reflects this by falling into place easily, often miraculously.   Shakti Gawain

4 Cores of Credibility

1. **Integrity:**
   It's integratedness. It's walking your talk. It's being congruent, inside and out. It's having the courage to act in accordance with your values and beliefs.

2. **Intent:**
   Our motives, our agendas and our resulting behavior. Trust grows when our motives are straightforward and based on mutual benefit, when we genuinely care not only for ourselves but also for the people we interact with, lead or serve.

4 Cores of Credibility

3. Capabilities:
   The abilities we have that inspire confidence: our talents, attitudes, skills, knowledge and style. They are the means we use to produce results. Capabilities also deal with our ability to establish, grow, extend and restore trust.

4. Results:
   Our track record, our performance, our getting the right things done. If we don't accomplish what we are expected to do, it diminishes our credibility. On the other hand, when we achieve the results we promised, we establish a positive reputation of performing, of being a producer, and our reputation precedes us.

The 13 Behaviors for Cultivating Trust

Character	Competence
Talk Straight	Deliver Results
Demonstrate Respect	Get Better
Create Transparency	Confront Reality
Right Wrongs	Clarify Expectations
Show Loyalty	Practice Accountability

The 13 Behaviors for Cultivating Trust

Character and Competence

Listen First

Keep Commitments

Extend Trust

The quickest way to decrease trust is to violate a behavior of character, while the quickest way to increase trust is to demonstrate a behavior of competence.

Sources

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"Setting an example is not the main means of influencing another, it is the only means. "

Albert Einstein