

Public Relations for the Educational Office Professional



National Association of
Educational Office Professionals

**National Association of Educational
Office Professionals**

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Preface

This publication is prepared by members of the National Association of Educational Office Professionals to promote and encourage professionalism in the workplace.

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Public Relations for the Educational Office Professional

What is Public Relations?

Good public relations is the art of creating a better understanding that breeds greater public confidence and good will for any individual or group.

The people you deal with every day in your job represent the public. They are the public your administrator/supervisor deals with and you are their representative. Good public relations will make more friends, avoid more misunderstandings, eliminate more criticism, secure more support, build better morale, maintain higher performance, and make the daily job more pleasant. The impression many people have of your administrator/supervisor is through their initial and sometimes continuing contact with you.

How Do You Develop Good Public Relations skills?

The answer is simple. You earn good public relations by working at *it*. Five simple ways are:

1. Never, never forget the “thank you.” It’s the magic of the “thank you” that keeps the door open for a return call. Say it as many times and as many ways as you can. “Thank you” is the cornerstone of any public relations program.
2. Watch your telephone manners. Remember, people may never see or meet you or your administrator/supervisor, but over the telephone they hear and, too often, they get an impression of what you or your administrator/supervisor must be like.
3. Be respectful of all job classifications. Their job classifications may be lower than yours, but they are members of the team. A co-worker may hold the key to the success of a given project.
4. Make sure your administrator/supervisor shares his/her appointment schedule with you—especially when out of the office. Nothing irritates a visitor or a caller more than to have an educational office professional who does not know the administrator’s/supervisor’s whereabouts, expected return time, or where to reach the administrator/supervisor if necessary.
5. Be nice to everyone, even when they don’t deserve it.

Work at developing your public relations skills, a little each day, until a matter of course becomes a matter of habit. Remember, public relations for the office professional means being a good representative for your administrator/supervisor and educational institution.

Public Relations Self-Evaluation

Public relations plays an important role in the lives of the school administrators/supervisors and office professional. Public relations is the art of getting along with other people.

1. How does your attitude toward yourself affect your public relations?
2. How does your attitude toward others affect your public relations?
3. Are you really interested in others and their problems?
4. Are you willing to listen and to learn from others?
5. Do you understand the importance of teamwork and of working together for a goal, of helping and not criticizing?
6. Do you understand others’ points of view, how and why they feel, think, look, and act as they do?
7. Have you the desire to learn and to help others?

8. Do you express enthusiasm when you talk with others?
9. Are you willing to change, experiment, try new ideas, be flexible?
10. Do you want to grow, to do a bit more than is expected of you?
11. Have you a sense of humor so you don't take yourself too seriously, or think you know too much?
Can you get fun out of work?

Ten Commandments of Good Public Relations

1. Speak to people. Nothing is as nice as a cheerful word or greeting.
2. Smile at people. It takes 72 muscles to frown, only 2 to smile.
3. Call people by name. The sweetest music to a person's ear is the sound of their own name.
4. Be friendly and helpful. If you want to have friends, be friendly.
5. Be cordial. Speak and act as if everything you do is a real pleasure.
6. Be genuinely interested in people. You can like almost everyone, if you try.
7. Be generous with praise—cautious with criticism.
8. Be considerate of the feelings of others. There are usually three sides to a controversy: yours, the other person's, and the right one.
9. Be willing to give service. What counts most in life is what we do for others.
10. Add to the above a good sense of humor, a big dose of patience, and a dash of humility, and you will be rewarded many times over.

Educational Office-Community Relations IQ Quiz

1. How do you answer the phone?
2. How do you communicate with visitors in the hallways?
3. What kind of directional help is there in your building?
4. How are the visitors greeted at the office counter?
5. What do you do to welcome new students and their parents or visitors during that important first contact?
6. How do you report a student's positive progress?
7. How do you report bad news to parents?
8. How do you explain the mission of your educational facility?
9. How do you involve people from the community in the regular life of your school community?

Hands united in a common effort—the education of all children—remind us we have more commonalities than we have differences. To recognize and accept this fact enables us to work together to achieve a common goal.

Public Relations in the Educational Office and the Educational Office Profession

The Human Touch

Public relations programs can be more effective if there is human touch. Although a comprehensive public relations program can be most sophisticated, it can also be cold and lifeless without a certain amount of human involvement. Face-to-face, person-to-person contact is the most effective method of communicating.

Listening Skills

Educational personnel can improve their listening skills; staff members must be willing to hear people out. Everyone is eager to present their problems to others. Employees should develop the ability to listen with interest and understanding because what people are relaying in conversation is of great concern to them. The staff member who dominates a one-to-one dialogue or a group conference may not allow the other participants to fully express or vent their feelings. An unheard parent may be frustrated and embittered.

Communicating with the Public

Staff members must never become caustic or arrogant when working with parents. Citizens are the stakeholders of the school organization. They are also the customers the school must serve. Staff members must guard against being drawn into arguments or heated discussions with parents.

Responding to Parent Criticism

The ability to field public criticism with poise and diplomacy is an art. When a parent makes a complaint, it is wrong for school staff members to become defensive, justify the school's position, cut the parent off, or classify the parent as a maverick. The public relations oriented staff member patiently and courteously hears a parent's criticism and either makes corrections based upon the complaint or explains the school or school system's position.

Frequently, this request has to be passed on to another individual to handle. Be sure to explain why this is happening afterwards to make sure a response was given.

A comprehensive study of each parent's complaint is very time consuming. The investment of additional time and energy to study parent's complaints, however, can pay tremendous dividends. An arrogant rebuff of a disgruntled parent can produce waves of negative public relations in a community. Dissatisfied and angry parents can destroy school support. Questioning parents are as sincere about their positions as the staff members are of theirs. The parents deserve respect, patience, and an explanation of the school's position.

Remember, to the public YOU are the school district and YOUR attitude and response to a public need may be those that are remembered! Be positive, caring, and confident.

Way to Develop a Pleasing Telephone Personality

When receiving a telephone call, answer promptly.

Identify yourself and your school or department. Example: "This is Miss Jones." "East Side School, Miss Jones speaking." "This is Mr. Brown's office, Miss Jones speaking."

Speak distinctly and pleasantly. A friendly voice makes friends. You will find your callers will like you and will call again.

Explain the waiting period. If you must leave your desk to get information, tell your caller how long you will be gone and offer to call back. If the caller wishes to wait, get his/her attention when you return, and then give the information requested.

Screen calls tactfully. A polite way of asking who is calling is, "May I ask who is calling?" or "May I tell Mr. Brown who is calling?"

Know where your administrator/supervisor is. If your administrator/supervisor is out of town, make sure you know the expected time of return or where he/she can be reached in an emergency.

Take messages willingly. Note the name of the caller, the telephone number, time, and whether the caller wants a return call. Repeat the information to make sure it is correct. Deliver the message promptly.

Transfer calls only when you definitely know the correct person or number to which the call should be transferred.

When placing a call, be sure of the number. Wrong numbers can be embarrassing. If you're in doubt, you will find it pays to look up the number before calling. Allow enough time. After you dial a number, give the person you are calling at least a minute to reach the telephone.

Be ready to talk when the person called answers the phone. As most calls go through without delay, this is not only courteous but also saves you time.

Keep a telephone log; it's a good reference when checking on a question.

Ask if it is a convenient time to talk. You would not break into a conference in an office. This same rule of etiquette applies over the telephone. It's a matter of courtesy to inquire of the person you call whether or not it is convenient to talk.

Don't raise your voice. Shouting distorts your voice over the telephone. Identify yourself immediately to the first person answering your call.

Be attentive. The person to whom you are talking will appreciate your listening politely and attentively. You would not interrupt in a face-to-face conversation. The same rule applies in telephone conversations.

Use your caller's name frequently. There is no sweeter music to others than the sound of their own name.

Plan an effective conversation. Get your thoughts in order before you call. Try to complete your business with one call by securing the information you want or by leaving a message.

Apologize for mistakes. When you receive a wrong number, do you bang down the receiver, or do you apologize for calling by mistake? It is equally courteous to be pleasant when someone calls you by mistake.

Who should end the call? Usually the person who originates the call ends the conversation.

Hang up gently. Slamming the receiver may cause an unpleasant noise for your caller. It is as discourteous as slamming the door.

If it is necessary to use voice mail, adjust your system to let the phone ring only two or three times before the message begins. Make certain the messages and options callers must listen to before leaving a message of their own are as clear and brief as possible. Because some people still resent being relegated to voice mail systems or answering machines, always give callers the option of speaking personally to someone immediately.

Voice mail is a wonderful tool if used properly. When leaving a message, say your name and number slowly and distinctly.

Also, if the purpose of the call is to request information, use the voice mail message to make the request. This allows the recipient to gather the information and be prepared to return the call. It's a very efficient use of technology.

IMPROVING YOUR SCHOOL'S PUBLIC RELATIONS

- Hold an annual workshop to explore the public relations role of office professionals.
- Work to emphasize the fact that office professionals are a major public relations contact for the school system/organization.
- Maintain a file of public relations ideas and suggestions to which all staff members contribute.
- Exchange ideas with office professionals at other institutions.
- If the staff is large, develop a bulletin of public relations information.
- Get together for social functions and don't outlaw talking shop.
- Establish some form of award or recognition to honor staff persons for outstanding work.
- Make an event out of personal achievements and awards involving staff persons.
- Prepare an effective staff handbook that covers the nuts and bolts procedures in your office setting.
- Develop a clear-cut policy of professionalism.
- Attend faculty meetings, if invited. Attend board of education meetings occasionally to watch the deliberations.
- Request that administrators/supervisors explain finances, organizational plans, and school board procedures and policies.
- Make sure each person on the staff has the right materials on hand to be an effective communicator (directories, maps, schedules).
- Have a procedure to call brief meetings to solve impending problems before they get out of hand.
- Learn and keep handy information about the boundaries of the school, the functions of each department, school bus rules, safety procedures, etc.
- See that office professional events are included on the school calendar or organization's master calendar.
- Try to have office professional workshops held during working hours.
- Develop convenient ways for administrators/supervisors and teachers to keep you informed of their schedules.
- Make sure vital information is routed to all office staff members.
- See that the office staff gets the word quickly when there is a personnel change.
- It's the staff's own responsibility—personally and as a team—to go out of its way to foster a good climate in which to work for the whole "school family" or "district" or "office."