

5 HABITS FOR SUCCESS

Some basics to get you started being an even more AWESOME nonprofit communication professional

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1 BREATHE



Right now, just take three deep breaths. How do you feel? I can pretty much guarantee that whatever you are dealing with, no matter how life and death it may seem will still be there after you've taken these three breaths. So why is this the number one habit that leads to success? Here are a couple of reasons. Adding oxygen to your body will help your creativity and flexibility, which in turn will make you a better employee and more productive. Add in a brisk walk which increases blood flow for an extra boost.

Self-care in the nonprofit arena is something that is just now being researched and talked about. I strongly advocate jumping on this bandwagon and finding ways to practice self-care on a daily basis. Starting with those three deep breaths is a simple way to bring your consciousness in line with your inner and outer self.

2 LISTEN



Naturally extroverts, communications professionals also need to embrace the habit of listening to others. Gathering information and different perspectives on issues and topics from others is essential in creating, planning, executing and evaluation your work.

For internal listening, there are a variety of ways to get started. Connecting with staff and volunteers at all levels of your organization (in person if you can) is the essences of internal communications. Consider a deliverable that will regularly allow you to interact with staff and volunteers such as a newsletter, blog or intra-website, may seem to be work with no purpose, but in actuality, this is a great example of the journey being the destination. You never know what great idea or amazing story you will discover by building and maintaining these relationships. For a communications professional you could (and probably will) hit content gold.

3 PLAN



Whether you prefer an old-fashioned paper calendar, whiteboard or digital tool, organizing information is a habit that will never loose its importance. Having the information about what is happening on a regular basis as well as special programs or events will help inform your workload and give you the peace of mind to sleep at night.

There are a whole range of computer-based tools such as Asana, Trello, Google Drive and DropBox that can help you both get and stay organized but also share your plans with others. Figuring out what works best for you can be trial and error, but regardless of what planning tool(s) you employ, staying on top of your calendar and projects is essential.

It's also helpful to plan for what you don't know you don't know. Give yourself space to tackle those last-minute Holy Mary plays or shiny objects that will certainly appear on your path.

4 ENGAGE



This habit is a two-fold practice. First, foster your own sense of curiosity and find ways to ask open-ended questions. Try to learn new things about your organization, it's people and your community. Second, be open yourself to both new people and information. Finding ways to keep yourself open-minded and level-headed allows you to be approachable by others.

At some point, you will be asked to figure out "public opinion" about something. To do this you will need an understanding the different ways to gather this information as well as the benefits and limits of each method (from focus groups to surveys to social media). Regardless of your method, engaging your target audience to give you feedback means you need to be already practicing this habit regularly.

5 REVIEW



Forward! is the cry. Forge on, do more great stuff, change the world. No matter what sector of nonprofit work you are taking on, a hallmark of our shared perspective is the push toward progress and change. It's what draws many people to this field and what can also be an underlying Achilles heel.

In every great endeavor you plan and execute, make sure you add some time to reflect. Celebrate your successes and see if you can figure out exactly what the special sauce was that made things turn out so well. In the same breath, what didn't go as planned, where did you fall down, get blocked or just plan crash and burn? Keeping a frame of mind that failure is part of growth and progress is incredibly helpful and, I would argue, a critical shared value that nonprofits should embrace. So go ahead and add to the project budget some money for a pizza party or to buy your staff a round of lattes and take the time to celebrate, review and reflect before you head off to conquer the next peak.

Onward to progress!