SAY IT!
Like a Leader

How Admins Influence, Take Initiative, and Build Trust Through Their Words

Learn How to…

- Resolve Office Conflicts
- Write More Effective Emails
- Take Ownership of Projects
- Connect with Other Admins!

Like a Leader

Who are we?

If someone is a “good leader,” what do you actually see or hear them doing?

- **“They communicate clearly”**
- **“They listen”**
- **“They explain things well”**
- **“They keep people informed”**

Leadership is communication.

CASE
STUDY

A department coordinator emailed several faculty members asking them to “send over your updated syllabi when you get a chance” so the office could post them before the semester. The message did not include a deadline, submission instructions, or note that the syllabi would be published on the department website. Several faculty assumed the request was informal and planned to update their syllabi later in the week.

Two days later, the coordinator sent a follow-up saying the website update was already underway and that the materials were “supposed to be in already.” One faculty member, Jordan, felt the message was unfair given the vague request. Frustrated, Jordan replied to the entire email thread criticizing the tone of the follow-up and pointing out that no deadline had been given.

“How might this interaction have unfolded differently?”

“What communication skills could have helped?”

THE THREE Cs

Clarify

Connect

Commit

Communication IS Leadership Behavior

- ✓ Leadership behaviors are expressed through communication
- ✓ Influence is built through communication
- ✓ Initiative is recognized through communication
- ✓ Accountability is reinforced through communication
- ✓ Leadership is a behavior, not a title
- ✓ Presumption of positive intent

Clarify

Ensure messages are understood as intended

- Use precise language
- Reduce ambiguity
- Confirm understanding
- Provide actionable information

Connect

Preserve trust, rapport, and shared purpose

- Maintain relational tone
- Signal respect and collaboration
- Foster psychological safety

Commit

Create clarity about expectations, next steps, and follow-through.

- Establish timelines
- Define responsibilities
- Close communication loops

“The medium is the message.”

Not just WHAT we say.

Also WHERE and HOW we say it.

Email

Documentation, formal requests, record

- Decisions or approvals that need a paper trail
- Sharing structured information (policies, summaries, attachments)
- Communicating with multiple stakeholders who need a reference later

Teams Chat

Quick coordination, small questions, updates

- Short clarifications or logistical questions
- Status updates or quick confirmations
- Low-stakes collaboration that doesn’t require a permanent record

Scheduled Meetings

Alignment, complex discussion, collective decisions

- Working through ambiguous or multi-stakeholder problems
- Building shared understanding across teams
- Making or confirming decisions after discussion

In-Person Conversations

Nuance, trust-building, sensitive topics

- Delivering difficult feedback or discussing interpersonal issues
- Reading tone and body language
- Relationship building and informal problem-solving

Back Channels (Phone / Text)

Urgency, discretion, candid perspective

- **Time-sensitive issues that need immediate attention**
- **Off-the-record context or early sense-making before formal discussion**
- **Checking alignment with a trusted colleague before escalating formally**

Communication Filters

Clarity Filter

Is my intent obvious?

Temperature Filter

What emotional tone am I transmitting?

Impact Filter

What reaction will this likely trigger?

Feedback / Tension

A: “We need to talk.”

B: “Can we take 10 minutes to align on expectations?”

Accountability

A: “I’ll try to get to that soon.”

B: “I’ll send that update by Friday.”

Initiative

A: “This process is confusing.”

B: “I’ve noticed students struggling with this step - could we simplify it?”

Clarifying

A: “That’s not what I meant.”

B: “Let me clarify what I was trying to communicate.”

HANDS-ON ACTIVITY

WRAP UP

A department coordinator emailed several faculty members asking them to “send over your updated syllabi when you get a chance” so the office could post them before the semester. The message did not include a deadline, submission instructions, or note that the syllabi would be published on the department website. Several faculty assumed the request was informal and planned to update their syllabi later in the week.

Two days later, the coordinator sent a follow-up saying the website update was already underway and that the materials were “supposed to be in already.” One faculty member, Jordan, felt the message was unfair given the vague request. Frustrated, Jordan replied to the entire email thread criticizing the tone of the follow-up and pointing out that no deadline had been given.

What changes when we view this interaction through a leadership communication lens?

TAKEAWAYS

Pause → Filter → Respond

✓ Clarity → Be specific

✓ Temperature → Regulate tone

✓ Impact → Anticipate reactions

Clarify → Connect → Commit

✓ Reduce confusion

✓ Preserve trust

✓ Move forward productively

Every interaction is a leadership moment because leadership is heard before it is seen.

Questions?
Challenges?
Recommendations?

Thank you!

Check out the Admin Senate Resources page for more!

Join us for future sessions on other leadership topics!