



CONTROL THE MESSAGE, CONTROL THE PEOPLE

I am reminded of political pundits who are charged with keeping their agenda and their candidate on message. Their mantra is simple:

"He who controls the message, controls the people."

This political truth has been known for ages. In the new age of unending news and instantaneous information available via the World Wide Web, there has never been a more important time to control your community message. As community leaders, we can learn a lot from political experts and use their techniques to make our communities better.

In the microcosms we call community associations, we have created scaled-down political worlds with the same challenges and opportunities that exist in larger arenas. We elect board members to represent homeowners and conduct the business of the community in much the same way that voters elect council members to represent them in their city or town council. Savvy politicians know the power of message control. It is often the difference between success and failure to their community and their career. We can learn a lesson about message control from them to help make our communities better and our leadership more effective.

These days, it is easier than ever to get your message out to your community members. Costs associated with simple communication tasks like newsletters and informational flyers are reasonable. The 24-hour availability of the Internet and the relatively low-cost of launching and maintaining a community website are additional ways to allow community leaders to control their message.

Why do community leaders miss out on the advantage of controlling their message to make their communities better? Lack of time and lack of commitment are the two leading factors, followed closely by lack of experience in communication. All these are understandable, but all are correctable. Message

control is a skill that can be learned, just like accounting, budgeting, planning, and many of the other skills possessed by successful board members.

Lack of time can be overcome by streamlining the message delivery process. If your community hasn't already begun a regularly produced newsletter, you should begin there. Your newsletter can be as simple as keeping your fellow homeowners informed of the activities of the board by publishing major items from the board of directors meetings. You already keep minutes for these meetings; so converting those notes into a news story should be quick and simple. The time saved by getting the message out correctly is time that will be saved by not having to explain plans or dispel rumors later.

Lack of commitment can be overcome if the results of good message delivery are made clear. Good communication gets community members involved because it encourages dialogue between homeowners and board members. Once the board sees the benefits of good message delivery, they're unlikely to consider functioning without it. In fact, communities that communicate their message well often find an extra benefit from good message control. The message control is actually an additional source of community pride, which reinforces commitment.

Lack of experience in communications can also be overcome. While there are publications and other resources that can help you get started, your personal growth will come over time. As you develop more dialogue with your audience you will undoubtedly learn what works and what to avoid. Time will give you the experience you seek. Avail yourself of the resources to get started.

Control the message, control the people. Even if you have no higher goal of seeking elected office outside of your own community, you will benefit from this time-tested truth.

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