

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

Anchor: Good day and welcome to the League of American Orchestras' Four Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras webinar. All participants are in listen-only mode. We invite you to submit any questions in the Q&A box on your screen. It is now my pleasure to turn the call over to John-Morgan Bush, you may begin.

John-Morgan Bush: Good morning everyone or good afternoon rather. Welcome to one of our first digital learning pilots that the League of American Orchestras. My name is John-Morgan bush. I am the director of learning leadership programs at the league. One of the things in my portfolio is our new Digital Learning Initiative. Last year, we had a very comprehensive strategy planning on digital learning. We decided that this year, we will be launching five pilot programs of which this is the first.

We're thrilled that you're joining us today. If you can't join us today, and you're going to check out the recording of this after today's webinar, we'll make sure that you get that very soon.

We will ask everyone who's attended today to fill out a survey that we will send you by email. Please take the time to do that, because that's going to help us inform our digital learning strategy for the rest of this year and moving forward. Without further ado, and wasting any more of your time, I want to turn it over to my great friend and colleague at the Nashville Symphony, Sonja Thoms. She's going to do an introduction of herself and jump right in. Thank you all for being here today and enjoy today's webinar. Thanks so much.

Sonja: Hi, everyone. I'm Sonja Thoms. I'm the Senior Director of Operations and Orchestra Manager here at the Nashville Symphony. This is my 14th season working for a professional orchestra. My background is an oboe performance and after getting my master's in music, I found my way into orchestra operations through an internship at the Kennedy Center at the National Symphony.

From there, I worked at the Pittsburgh Symphony for nine years, and have been at the National Symphony for five years. In 2017, 2018, I was actually a part of the League's Emerging Leaders Program where I discovered my love for teaching and reaffirm my commitment to the work of orchestras.

Now before we dive in, I would like to have you all do a virtual introduction so that we can have a sense of who is joining us today. A few quick questions will pop up and you can click the answer that applies to you. We will be able to see together the makeup of our group today. The first question, which will come up on your screen, is if you know your group size of your orchestra, please select one below. They're going to tabulate; I'll be able to see a little bit of the makeup of our group today. We'll wait a couple more seconds. We've got about 27—hi, welcome.

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

Speaker 4: Hi, I'm not getting anything on my screen is Flynn Sorkin from the Chicago Symphony. It's saying, "preparing the room", so I have nothing on my screen so I can't.

Anchor: I'll reach out to you separately. Thank you so much for joining.

Speaker 4: Thank you.

Sonja: We can see that we've got a variety of our group representation. This is awesome. This is a good varied group. Thank you so much for answering that question. I also want to say hello to you in the cities across the USA, Canada, abroad. What a great list of people we have here today. We've got orchestras represented in Washington, California, Montana, Calgary, Pennsylvania, New York, Florida, and so many more. Thank you all to anyone here who's working for an opera, a ballet, a community orchestra, or if you just love your city's orchestra. We've got a great group and I'm very excited to be with you today.

Before we go forward, we're going to do one more question. We're going to pop that up for you to be able to click on the answer, please identify what role or roles you fill at your orchestra. You can select as many as possible that apply to you.

Excellent, we've got some musicians, executive, operations, heavy on the operations. Those are my people, development, education, marketing, PR, HR. We've got some of every one of you; thank you so much. I think we can all agree this is an important topic of fostering an open communication culture for our orchestras. This work is not easy and requires endurance, but the progress we can make together is worth it. In my first role at the Pittsburgh Symphony, I learned pretty quickly that the work of operations-

centers around supporting the musicians of the orchestra. I had dreamt as a young oboist to be in an orchestra. I definitely had a foundation of respect for the musician's artistry.

As I started working in operations, the daily definition of support, for me look like email schedules, announcements and backstage presence. A few years into my career, I started to attend orchestra committee meeting, and the definition of support gained much more depth. As I know many of you can relate.

When CBA negotiations came along, I had a seat at the table where raw discussions took place. I began to more fully understand how the history of those daily interactions built up over time, and how our daily work can influence the discussions at the negotiation table. After my second, third and fourth CBA negotiations my work in our operations was no longer just about email, scheduled, announcements, driving directions and tour books. I started to view my work with orchestras as relationship management.

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

For instance, in the year leading up to our most recent CBA negotiations at the Nashville Symphony, I committed to resolving as many daily concerns as possible within those 12 months in the hopes that the list of issues would be minimal by the time we got to the table.

I thought we succeeded in a way because the list of the table was shorter and more concentrated on the core issues rather than lists of work role changes.

However, even though we felt the negotiations were successful, the work of building trust and managing relationships never stops. Now, I recognize that so many more departments than just operations, interact with our musicians. Depending on the size of your orchestra, every member of your staff might have that close interaction. I'd like to pause and ask another question of you if you can click the answer on your screen. To what degree would you say that daily communications with musicians are contributing to the overall work of your orchestra?

Great, so strongly agree category, some strongly agree, somewhat agreed, disagree. Okay, so we have a variety of feelings about how important these daily communications are.

Well, in my experience, I've seen how daily communications can matter, they can contribute, or the opposite, to the work of our orchestra. Why is that? I wanted to think more deeply about that. I believe it's because communication is the foundation of relationship. Relationship is the foundation of teamwork and is only for teamwork that we will overcome the challenges our orchestras face, both big and small.

Now I love working for an orchestra, because experiencing musical performance connects us more deeply with people. However, behind the scenes and off the stage, I have often found that establishing and sustaining harmonious connections between people is very difficult. Sometimes it even feels impossible. I don't remember learning anything about that in music school. How we are with each other may just be one of the biggest barriers or assets to the success of our organization. It is critical that we prioritize and pursue effective open communication each day. I'm so thankful that you have all joined our discussion today.

In our short time together, I'd like to talk a bit about a couple of things. This definition of effective communication: I have a communication checklist that I would like to share with you. Also, some observations about the cycle of communication, a cycle that has four steps, and I believe it can help us strengthen our relationship.

We will have plenty of time for questions, so please enter those in the Q&A box as they come to you. You'll find that in your lower right-hand corner. We definitely

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

want to know how our discussion can best serve you. Before we dive into our communication checklist, I wanted to share a definition of the word communication that I found. It started really helping me think about what the goal would be, and communication is defined as the imparting or exchanging of information or news.

Now reading this I have to admit I was pretty underwhelmed by the definition, because I don't think that possesses the depth or the height of expectations placed on you and me in our work each and every day. If only it was as easy as imparting or exchanging. As I spent a little more time--

reflecting on the definition, perhaps it suggests there's a spectrum between imparting and exchanging. Imparting is the time when we need to maybe be a little less personal and have just one-way communication. Exchanging is relational and two-way communication. As managers and musicians, I think we can agree that no one end of the spectrum is ideal for all situations, but it also takes time to customize communications for every situation.

I was thinking I wish there was an app and probably someday someone will create it that could help me craft that magical combination of comprehensive detail packaged in the fewest words possible with the maximum versatility for all learning types. I would pay for that, but I know it doesn't feel like we have time to wordsmith when so many of us are just trying to survive each day. However, I'm hoping that in our time together today, I can create some concrete steps that will give us tangible daily progress towards effective open communication, and ultimately build trust with our musician.

Whether we are aware of it or not, each of us likely utilizes a mental checklist for communication. I'm going to ask Kayla to pop up this box where you can enter an answer and jot down some of the criteria you use when crafting a communication to your musicians and for the musicians in the group, maybe submit the elements of communication that are most important to you. Concise; honesty; directness; collaborative; tone is important; short and to the point; succinct; is it clear? Is it correct? Timeliness; comprehensive; avoid hot button words; short; clear; factual; thinking about the audience; what type of issue is it? Suggestive questions: these are great. Positive. Detail. That's a lot, a lot to be thinking about within every communication but we do have these mental checklists.

Thank you so much for sharing those with us.

Whatever your checklist contains, I think its goal should be to support you in being effective with your communication. I've definitely learned the hard way that ineffective communication requires me more time to clean up and doesn't necessarily accomplish what I set out to share in the first place. I just wanted to look up the definition of effective too, to help me center around this and it's defined as successful in producing a desired or intended result.

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

Therefore, if we combine those definitions, a definition of effective communication could be imparting or exchanging of information or news in a way that successfully produces a desired or intended result. Okay, we've well established that that feels like there's not enough time in the day but that daily communications really can play a role in our work, but I think it's therefore to our benefit to maximize our impact and efficiency through effective open communication. Like many things in life, achieving that is easier said than done.

If you don't already have a checklist, I have a starter checklist to share with you today that will be focused on the goal of making our communications effective. I like the simplicity of who, what, where, when, why and how but in the spirit of Simon Sinek, I'm going to start with why. Why, who, what, where, when, and how? Let's talk through each of these criteria to see how it might apply to our work and if you have any questions as I'm walking through the checklist, you can submit them through the Q&A box to the right of the presentation and we'll take a moment after the checklist to answer any questions you might have about it.

Okay, why do you need to communicate? Who is the audience? What do you need to say? Where will the message be shared? When is the best time to send it and how was the response last time?

Why do you need to communicate the information? I think it's important to put this criteria first because it will help to focus and simplify our communication. Now the answers for why could be many things.

Number one, it could be simply to satisfy contractual requirements. Our communications are full of these when we have to distribute schedules on a timeline, maybe there's notifications of recording, any number of contractual requirements that we have to satisfy. That's a simple one. Answers for why could be to request an action for the audience.

If we're talking to the musicians or the orchestra, maybe there's an opportunity for them to come meet and greet donors in the donor lounge after a concert, maybe we need them to fill out a survey or there's opportunities for volunteering, some action that we might need to require from them. We might need to state a new policy or procedure. Also, we might need to make some reminders. We're hitting into about midway point of the season, which is a great time for reminders for all of us.

Stating a new policy or procedure might be a new protocol moving forward, whether it's, "Hey, now this is how you can request your ticket," or parking updates or building access, any number of one of the things, where it's really critical that we push it out to a wide group. Why might also be to engage in discussion or solicit feedback. This will probably be not for the full orchestra. It could be but it will probably be to more of like a committee sized group.

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

There's probably many other ways to establish why but I feel like when I ask this question of myself, it really helps me to focus my message. I've also found that in some cases, providing insight to why can help keep the communication open because it gives the reader a connection to the bigger picture that they might not otherwise have. That's why.

Who? Who is the audience? The answer is usually pretty obvious to this question as there will be a pre-identified group or individual. However, I found that sometimes, it is good to ask, "Who else needs to know what I know?" Or, "Whose help do I need in supporting this message?" It's important with any group communication that we cast a net only as wide as needed. Of course, if we are receiving a communication, I know we all think twice before hitting Reply All. Reply all responses should further discussion that includes the full group and never be used to add spectators to a smaller conversation.

Now, I wanted to share that one thing we have at the Nashville Symphony is a monitored musicians@nashvillesymphony.org email address. It's how we push out those group communications, but any email or reply sent to this address also requires approval from an admin before recipients receive it. In my experience, we've only had to deny a reply when it's apparent that someone didn't mean to hit Reply at all, or the answer wasn't relevant to the full group.

The second level of approval can be useful in cutting down on unnecessary emails to a larger group. I find that balancing the distribution list in the right way can help you keep communication open because unfortunately, exclusion can breed resentment. Okay, so why and who.

What? What do you need to say? This is probably where we spend the most time. We all know how many emails we get and how precious our time is. One way to help support your message in reaching its intended result is to make sure you're maximizing your words.

Usually less is more, but not necessarily at the expense of providing detail that can deliver an above-average impact, save you time later, and possibly build more trust with your musicians. Here are some things to consider including if you want to go above and beyond in what you need to say.

Number one, provide insight into your thought process used to arrive at a decision. Any email we're sending is backed up by probably meetings, timelines, discussion via email, in-person discussion. Anything that warrants an email to the full group, notifying the musicians of something, it is representative of a lot of discussion, a lot of thought, a lot of decision making. I found that it's actually valuable to share some of that with the musicians in these emails because it may answer proactively some questions they have, but I also find that it can defuse a situation that might otherwise feel like a surprise or might warrant some more explanation. It really shows the value of our time we spend putting together these

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

decisions and the meetings that we have and the discussions we have with each other. Providing insight into your thought

process really can be a helpful way to go above and beyond in the communication.

Number two, I would say is recognize the possible challenges of the information that you're sharing. This is, again, trying to get ahead of and also being empathetic to whatever position the musicians might be in given the information that you're sharing. A very simple example that I could share is, we own our own venue. We have a rental business and sometimes a client will rent the entire building, the entire venue. Which include the musician's area, the musician's lounge where their lockers are, where their access to the library folders are. In particular, in the fall, there is a venue client that rent the whole building for an entire week.

What's going to roll out because the orchestra is not on vacation, we are still working and outside the hall. It meant that for five, six, seven days, they aren't going to be able to access their lockers. We really had to think through the communication. Also, I felt like just go out there and say, "Hey, I know this is the disruption to your normal work flow, let's think about this ahead of time, let me know what concerns you have, I'll address them because it's going to be absolutely impossible for you to be able to access your locker." Recognizing the possible challenges of that information that you are sharing and voicing them within the email can sometimes help to diffuse or answer questions ahead of when they're asked.

Number three, going above and beyond is just keeping an open-ended offer of a follow-up opportunity for questions or conversation. Also, I find on the flip side if I ever make an announcement in front of the orchestra on stage at a rehearsal, I like to follow up with an email because acoustics on stage or I didn't bring my projecting voice that Tuesday morning. It's hard to hear on stage but also people might just miss it. Always offer the follow-up opportunity for questions or conversation.

I feel like opening up the content of our message to be transparent, empathetic and really open-ended to dialogue can help build more trust around the environment of communication. Why, who, what, where?

Where will the communication be shared?

Now, deciding if your message should be an email, a meeting, a phone call, a backstage conversation is one of the critical crossroads for open communication. Depending on the group size, your answer maybe simple but depending on the intensity of the message, your answer might be different.

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

Here's where putting yourself in the audiences' shoes maybe the key to reaching your desired outcome. Also consider if you will be soliciting discussion in the message or not. Some discussions over email are effective and I rely heavily on them because I need a written record to refer to or I'm going to search back to see what we said, what we agreed to. However, I think we all recognize the value when we can identify when we'll have to switch from one medium to another. Where an email conversation is tipping over into that realm of, "Shouldn't we all just get in a room together for 10 minutes and finish this conversation?"

Number one, identifying the appropriate initial conversation platform: whether it's email, phone, in-person meeting. Then recognizing when you may need to switch to make it even more appropriate for the way the conversation is adjusting.

When is the best time to send it? Before I talk about when to send a communication, let's talk a little bit about when not to send a communication.

Honestly, I learned something about this just last week. A musician approach a staff member on my team and was very upset about something. The emotion of the conversation quickly took over and the conversation was not productive. It's hard, these things happen. Later, I followed-up with the staff member and the musician separately. Time and space had passed, the emotion was not nearly as hot-tempered with either of them. We were able to have a calm conversation, separate conversations where I learned more individually about their viewpoints, the valid concerns they had and what we could each do differently in the future to help. With such a strong illustration to me as I realize after those two separate conversations, tone matters, volume matters. My conclusion was, "When should we send the communication so that we are fostering open conversation?" "When we calm down." I want to also say that we can require someone else to calm down before we address their concerns. They have valid concerns but-

it's so hard to have a conversation when it's heavily weighed down by emotion. I am saying this reminder for my benefit as much as yours and for the benefit of my six-year-old son.

That said, as I've been working in orchestra operations longer and longer, my answer is evolving to this question of, "When should I send a communication?" I know we're all pushing 100 miles hour in our work, blasting through our to-do list, but I'm realizing that I need to give more lead time in some of my communications in order to ensure their effectiveness.

I don't know about you, but I have been conditioned to spend time crafting messages and not sending until I can put a pretty bow on top or until everything is refined and I have all the answers to questions that might possibly be asked. However, more recently, I'm finding specifically with my work with the orchestra committee, it is to the benefit of the outcome if I can give the earliest communication, even if I have only 60% to 70% of the information.

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

I know this is difficult and I'm still learning, but my current theory is that we can actually build trust with our musicians if we bounce the timing in a way that sees them as partners in the work. Earlier communication to the leadership of the musicians can also empower them with the answers they might need to answer questions from their own membership.

Now, I do want to acknowledge that there is a difference in the pace of communicating with staff and communicating with musicians.

With our coworkers and staff, we can walk down the hall, pick up the phone, fire up emails at a fast pace communication, almost an instant messenger's pace. However, as I have been, in trying to involve musicians more and more in communication because there is value in it, I have been frustrated at the difference in pace. I have to remember that they don't work in the office down the hall, they are reading the emails between gigs or lessons, and with the work of a committee, I know they won't officially respond until they've talked with everyone.

When I need discussion or approval from the orchestra committee, I figured out that I need to manage my time in a way that gives them about a week to discuss. It's been a difficult and long and slow adjustment, but it's already been worth the effort.

Focusing on when to send communications so that the information is most helpful to the musicians has really helped to open up communication with the orchestra in my daily work. We're almost at the end of the checklist. Why, who, what, where, when, and how.

How was the response the last time? This question just serves as a check for ourselves to make sure that we aren't using the same methods and expecting different results.

That was a lot of information on our checklist. I don't know if you have any questions about the checklist. I'm just going to check in and see.

Okay, great, simple enough. A checklist like this can be a very useful tool on crafting communication intended to be effective. However, once you hit send, the fun begins. That is where the rubber meets the road. The proof will be in the pudding. That's when I think the cycle of communication begins and where we can really impact the culture of our orchestra for better or for worse.

When the league asked me to prepare this webinar presentation, I spent a lot of time thinking about communication over the lifetime of my career. What transept surfaced? What lessons have I learned the hard way? Is there a disciplined method that can actually improve our culture? In my career, I have observed that there is a cycle of communication. How well I have exercised the full cycle has determined if I build trust or it's been eroded. I'd like to share those observations

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

with you today and hope that together, we can support our efforts to promote an open communication culture within our orchestras.

As you can see on the slide there, I think there's four steps. We start at the top of the circle. Each of these steps presents a crossroads where the choices we make can build or erode the culture of open communication we desire.

Step number one is the information we communicate. We begin the cycle when we communicate a message where, hopefully, we've crafted it according to our criteria that promotes success in reaching an intended result. We discussed this step

in detail already. That's the why, who, what, where, when and how. When we push out that communication, we hit step number two, and that in the cycle is the reaction that we get from our communication. This is possibly an instant marker of how effective or ineffective we were, how well did our intent match our impact? It is likely this is where our blood pressure rises. It might be the reason you don't check work email on your phone when you're home.

You might even be getting sweaty palms like me right now when you think about the reactions you received from communications you've sent; it's okay. If I can give you and I any hope remember this, no matter how much thought or lack of thought we've put into our communication we can't control how people react but what we can control is how we respond to the reaction. I have to admit sometimes I've stopped the cycle after step two, after I received reaction. Maybe it's been a positive one and I just filed it away, "Okay that worked," but when it's been a negative reaction, I sometimes don't want to deal with figuring out why.

When we move with curiosity and humility to step number three, we will learn how to be more effective next time and be on our way to building a more positive culture.

Step number three is evaluation. After any communication whether it was received positively or negatively it is important that we take time to evaluate how we achieved our goal or missed the mark. Sometimes I found this is as simple as taking some time for reflection.

We might find that adding five to 10 minutes of reflection in our checklist will solve the issue next time but sometimes we are blind to the explanation so we will need to seek clarification from the audience to understand how our intent didn't match our impact. This process takes humility and curiosity to better understand the impact, but it can directly contribute to areas where trust needs to be rebuilt. I have often felt that this evaluation can take place in orchestra committee meetings, backstage, through emails or phone call and a great resource to support you in this step is a book that I love by Edgar Schein called, *The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling*.

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

In the book Mr. Schein talks about listening with curiosity to actually resolve an issue that you might be blind to the explanation as to why something didn't work out. Listening with curiosity requires me not to talk, not to think about what I will say next. Rather, I need to actually listen with curiosity to learn what the other person is thinking and leave space for an open-ended result. I personally feel like I'm living in this space often right now. Meaning, I'm not understanding why the impact of communications isn't really matching the intention. I don't know if I need to slow down, if I need to insert that reflection but I feel more and more, right now, I'm personally living in this space and it isn't comfortable.

It can be actually disorienting, frustrating and sometimes even threaten confidence when our intent doesn't match our impact. However, I'm committing to ensuring that I always move past step two past this reaction and I live in step three as long as it takes because the goal is actually just to get to step four.

Step four is adjustment and it's so critical that we do not get just stuck in the step of evaluation. Eventually we must move on to action.

I wish I could hear your answers but has anybody heard of the OODA loop? The OODA loop is a cycle developed by military strategist and United States Air Force Colonel John Boyd. I have heard that OODA loop described in great detail by a former United States Marine Corps fighter pilot and top gun instructor David Berke. There are many resources you can find online describing the cycle in more detail, but I'd like to explain it briefly today. OODA stands for Observe, Orient, Decide, Act and it's a decision-making cycle.

Boyd says, "Our decision making starts with observation or taking in of information. Next, we orient ourselves with respect to those observations in order to prepare ourselves to respond. We have to decide our next move based on those observations and how they relate to us, but it is not until we act that we actually close the loop. If we do not get to that final step of act our problem solving is not complete and we relinquish what little control, we have." Therefore, the A in our communication cycle, which stands for adjustment could also stand for act. After we send the communication, we receive a reaction we choose to learn through evaluation. We can seal the deal with making a meaningful adjustment to our communications moving forward. Now, just keep in mind like the OODA loop, the communication cycle automatically starts over the minute we finish step four.

This can be exhausting or seen as a repeating opportunity to improve with every incremental communication. Now, the cycle is fragile and at times unpredictable because people are involved, but if we are disciplined in completing the cycle, I believe we can make incremental improvements towards a more positive and open communication culture.

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

When we get to step four and have made meaningful adjustment to our approach, we are respecting our reader as partners and seeking to close the gap between intent and impact. For those days where the cycle gets broken, grace is necessary for ourselves and for others. All any of us can do is try to start fresh the next day.

Let's check in on our questions. Do you have questions or comments, observations about the communication cycle? If you have questions that have come to you about the checklist, that's okay, too but you might even have just general questions about what do we mean by open communication culture. I'm going to check in over here and see what we have.

The name of the book was Edgar Schein's, *The Gentle Art of Asking Instead of Telling*. It's great. [chuckles] Let's see what these others. John Morgan, did you want to pop up any of these? I can't quite see those, or I could just start heading down the list.

Now we're a couple moments for any other questions you might have. I see a couple coming up here. I'm going to pick one of these. Oh, yes. I'm going to pick this one right here. What can you do when musicians just do not respond and/ or read emails? That's a good question. It's a large group. That comes back to you can't customize your email for 83-- We have 83 musicians in the orchestra. I think that one of the challenges of communications, let's say to the whole orchestra job is tailoring it in a way that hits the middle ground.

I think that what you're speaking to, Olivia, is how do we hold people accountable for what's being read? I think that is a challenging thing, but I think that's what it comes down to, is the accountability and sometimes it's as simple as pointing a person to where that information is shared and gently reminding them when to expect those communications.

I think that that is challenging, though, because we feel like we are crafting these good communications and putting them together. There's a lot of thought behind it, but I think that is the challenge of how do we hold people accountable? I think sometimes it might just be even worth a reminder to the whole group that that is where stuff is going to be shared, and we're not going to be able to do individualized communications beyond that.

Okay, here we go. Let's see the next question. Can you explain in more detail, the orient step in OODA loop, I'm not too clear on what that means? I'm no fighter pilot, but if you are in a fighter jet, you might be upside down, you might be sideways, that you have to first understand where you are. The orient means orienting where you are, so you have maybe a fixed point that you can then in the observed, then how do you relate to that fixed point? I am no expert on the OODA loop, but the orient, if you think about the fighter pilot mentality, they really

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

have to first just pick a starting point of how to then begin that decision making process.

What are your strategies when you are responsible for a communication error? How do you redevelop trust after making a mistake? Well, number one, if there's an error, I take ownership, I have to take ownership over it. It doesn't do anybody good to cast blame anywhere. Number one is taking ownership. Because ultimately, if I send out a communication, I'm responsible for all the information in that communication. Or if one of my direct reports sends out a communication and there's error in there, I'm ultimately responsible for their communications.

I think pressing pause, taking a step back, better understanding. Number one, what is the right information? Because there might be a timeliness issue, you need to get the right information out there. Taking ownership, possibly talking about sorry, not-- Well, again, we're not going to cast blame, but definitely figuring out where the error could have been corrected. More importantly, if you take ownership over it and you say, you know what, I found a solution to prevent this from being miscommunicated in the future. That can actually help to build that trust.

Yes, we are dealing with schedules and dates and times of concerts and rehearsals and especially in operations. If there's an error on a schedule, it is the real problem. Taking ownership, but then finding a solution and then communicating that solution. Sometimes switching to a different mode of communication also works because if you send out an email, maybe you get up in person in front of the orchestra and say, "Hey, this was wrong. I want to draw your attention to it. I'll send it an email with the correct information." Going above and beyond to hit it on a couple different levels. Okay.

We have a representative for the musicians regarding the CDA. Excellent. I'm wondering if there is a separate committee in most organizations. Yes, I think you might be referring to the orchestra committee if there's any clarification, you can provide in your question if you asked it. I'm not sure. I'm wondering if there's a separate committee in most organizations.

We have an orchestra committee, sometimes it's called the players committee. It is the orchestra musicians, the orchestra elect and self-elect that committee that we then meet monthly, but also in daily communication with the members of that committee, because they are the representative bodies that it helps enforce the contract. We are the representative department that helps enforce the contract. I hope that answers your question.

What are some things methods or ways that have helped you mend relationships that were previously broken by past staff members of an organization? This is a really good question, and I think many of you who work in orchestras are in the same position is I think one of the things I struggled with is whenever I'm-- The

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

orchestras I've been at, I don't hold the longest institutional memory. Many of us staff members don't, usually, the musicians do. Usually, the musicians are a lot of times the ones that have the longest standing members of the organization.

There's oftentimes where I don't even know when I'm about to step into a hot spot, or some-- I almost call them scars or wounds of things that have not ever been resolved. I think that the worst thing we can do is dismiss them, but the next best thing we can do is listen and ask and inquire more and really have an open-ended conversation. I think it's also important not to cast the blame, but just always the problem solving-focused, solution-focused because I think that will help to contribute to the positivity of the environment. It's so easy to get bogged down in the blame and the negativity. If there is something that hasn't ever been resolved, let's resolve it. I really feel that this is something we're always going to deal with, and it is frustrating at times, because maybe you had nothing to do with the origin of the issue, but what we can do is listen, truly seek to understand their position, why this unresolved concern of maybe even a decade or two ago because sometimes it really is, is still impacting today. Because I want to find a solution so we can overcome, get past it and move forward. That is the goal. Being solution-oriented after you listen and fully understand their position can be really helpful.

Okay. Important one, appreciate the focus on conversation with musicians. What about board conversations? That is an excellent question. I think that absolutely, there's going to be things that we need to tailor to the group that we are talking to. I also think that there is some of these universal concepts because we are all people that hopefully will translate. I think all we can do is-- I think people want it - They want contacts, they want to understand the bigger picture.

I think that when people are cut out of decision making, they want to understand why and that if they are caught out of decision making, then that can breed resentment and honestly, erode some of that trust. I would say board members, staff, patrons, the board members, I know that they hold these leadership positions in our organization. That it can be very tricky. There can be even some internal dynamics that are even trickier.

I think when in doubt, I try to just be the same with all people, meaning trying to adhere to these core values, these core universal values, I try to always maintain ownership and accountability to my work, and also holding people accountable to the decisions we've made about how we're going to communicate. Otherwise, it's hard. It's a very good question. I think it's ongoing and we are going to have to take measures to make adjustments. Ultimately, if there's a way that we can give people enough information so that they have buy in and can see the benefit of communicating together more openly, that hopefully will really encourage the partnership that we need to run our organizations.

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

Okay. How do you help to make sure that there's clear communication between the orchestra and the orchestra committee? That is a challenge. Because I think maybe what you're alluding to is sometimes I feel like we have some really great conversations in our orchestra committee or in your development committee, in your board committees, things that are shared, where there's musicians involved. Then the dissemination of that to the wider broad, the membership. Sometimes it feels like there might be a disconnect in certain places.

One of the things we started doing for orchestra committee, which actually, we just picked up again, I hope will be helpful, but I don't really have a good read on it, is we always take minutes of our orchestra committee meetings. Those are the monthly meetings that I have, and there's an agenda, and we meet with them and talk about a whole host of issues.

We take very detailed minutes, and then we collectively collaboratively edit those so that they are accurate. Then what I started doing but now I pass it off to the union steward actually, because he and I have a great working relationship, is summarize those into a one-page summary that now the orchestra committee is emailing to the membership. There's some version of at least what we're talking about with the orchestra committee that is being disseminated to the members.

The other thing that I'll say is, it also has prompted me in daily communications to try to get ahead of certain things and always try to talk to the orchestra committee first, whether it's a heads up or a hey, I want to talk to you about this before other communication goes out to the musicians. Because then when we're communicating with the full group, the musicians have questions to the committee, and if I can provide them with the thought process, the decision making, environment, whatever information that they've also can have so that there's a unified message because the members really do come to them.

Okay, great questions, guys. I'm just going to scroll up here. I'm interested in learning more about what you cover in your monthly meetings with the orchestra committee. We have one but don't meet regularly. We each populate agenda items, so the orchestra committee and myself, and then we have some standing items that are required. Mostly in the area of electronic media, where signatories to the integrated media agreement. I always have probably on there, "Hey, what upcoming reporting budget do I need you to look at?" Or here's some upcoming electronic media projects we're talking about.

Also, we have a clause in our contract about off contract gigs. For instance, this week, our development team is having a patron party at a house. Those are governed by our CBA. There's some standing items. We've talked about scheduling things that might be coming down the road, a lot of the feedback is a debrief, in a way, of what has happened, if there's things that didn't go well, that we need to find a better solution to the next time. A whole host of concerns, generally centered around the CBA, but also there's other--

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

Because it just happens to be the most formal meeting that the musicians have with management, it might be everything to, "Hey, the lights are out in the locker rooms, how can we get those fixed?" Then we institute the process that can help them get these daily things taken care of, but a lot of times it's discussion, and usually is a debrief to something that might have happened.

How do you feel about anonymous surveys? I've heard of companies now that don't do anything anonymous? Is it better for open communications and transparency? I guess the surveys where the person taking the survey is anonymous. I think that maybe to some degree, I think there should be an opportunity for people to be anonymous, because they might be more open, you might actually get more honest feedback that way. The process can't ever stop there. I think it hopefully it would be upfront if there's something that you need to talk about, but if some honest feedback does come up, then you can maybe address it with a more full group.

I do think there is a time and a place for anonymous survey, if that's what you're asking, because I think sometimes people want that anonymity so that they can speak more freely.

Communication seems to hit roadblocks when what is intended as a general communication can be taken personally. How do we manage the personal individual reaction? How to achieve balance between communicating work goals, but also need to account for the individual's perspective? Okay. Yes. We all work in professional environments, and sometimes things are taken personally.

I want to tuck the second question first, achieve a balance between communicating work roles, but accounting for the individual's perspective. I think a lot of that work in our orchestra sits within the personnel department. To be honest, we have a collective bargaining agreement, which is supposed to cover and establish the provisions under which we can work our 83 musician, but our personnel manager from where he or she sits, is going to say, "Well, then there's 83 people who want exceptions to that CBA at certain times," that's absolutely what happens.

I think that balancing that individual's perspective is really a judgment call. Number one, if I say this is going to harkening me back to my tour days with the Pittsburgh Symphony, because we had to deal a lot with group and individual accommodations.

If I couldn't say yes to 100, then I really shouldn't be saying yes to one. Is this a precedent that you're willing to set, and can you maintain if you are personalizing something, can you maintain that? The answer is no. The answer needs to be no, I think, because unless there is some extraordinary circumstances. I think that it really is about administrative capacity too. Sometimes people want their information delivered in a specific way. Well, for instance, we have our

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

contractual posting place of the schedule for the musicians is on an internal musician's website, password-protected website in the CBA, that is the contractual posting place.

We have PBS there on this web page, but we also post them backstage. There is not paper copies available, but we also as a courtesy above and beyond that, which is a personal accommodation, but it's very useful is, now we have a digital calendar which is in a Google calendar.

There are some that we can consider that if they're going to be more widespread useful, we can address those, but we have to be very, very careful because we will set precedence and if we can't sustain them without going crazy, [chuckles] then we really just need to hold the line in that.

I think when a communication has been taken personally. I think there is more to the story. If someone is personally reacting to something that you send out or you announce, I think it's probably worth pulling that person aside just to have a private conversation to learn more. There is something more there. A lot of times it might not actually even have anything to do with what you just said. [laughs] I think that's a good rule of life for life in general. It is really hard, but I think that we also just maintain our composure and we continue to try to just be professional in all those communications.

I think there is real value in pulling that person aside and say, "Hey, let me understand the impact that this communication had on you." I think one of the ways we can take ownership over our communications is recognizing that intent is different than impact.

Intent is what we hope will happen, but impact is actually what happens. When we recognize that there is a difference, and we can fully understand that the impact on someone is not what we intended, we can validate their feelings about the situation by accepting that we impacted them in a way that we didn't intend. Intent versus impact is a big topic that I would love to talk more about. [laughs] Let's keep moving. These are great questions. I think we're going to wrap up pretty soon.

How do departments cultivate open communication? Are there weekly, monthly, daily meetings? Is there another platform for cross-departmental communication? I think that talking a lot, and also, I'm going to try to give a pretty streamlined answer here is I feel what we really hold is kind of a core value is teamwork. What I mean by that is, I talk to my interns about having your antennas out, always scanning for what you know and what someone else-- Who needs to know what I know is a question that I have.

Sometimes I've had it as a post-it on my monitor. I feel like there is really a culture of teamwork and collaboration. That spills over into meetings and emails

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

and everything, and of course, no day is perfect, and no communication is perfect. I think that we are always striving for that teamwork and see the value in collaborating and the value that we all bring to the problem-solving.

I think really opening the awareness to who needs to know what I know, but also really better understanding the jobs that your colleagues are doing and understanding their needs. I think all that contributes to a much more open communication.

Let's see if we have time for one more. [silence] "Hi, Yumi. Would this forum benefit from a musician or panel selected musicians to give feedback on best practices of general communication?" Absolutely. That's part of opening this up. Yes, we are all party to this conversation. I know we have a variety of people on today. I think that, again, it's only through teamwork that we're going to really achieve all of this. We all play a role in that.

I want to ask one more question before we close this out and Kayla's going to bring it up on the screen. To what degree would you say that you can impact the overall work of your orchestra through your daily communication? Great. Yes, we're all agreeing and the majority of us that answered are strongly agreeing. That's how I think we make it manageable in our daily interactions.

It can feel like an overwhelming problem, and we can get paralyzed by it, but I try to just remember what can I do today to make it better? As our time comes to a close, I would like to thank you for joining us today. Thank you to the league for supporting digital learning and for my opportunity to lead our discussion today.

When I started working for an orchestra after studying to be a performer, I felt like I was starting over. There was so much to learn about being on staff, and the business of orchestras, but there was also so much to learn about working with people.

I want to encourage you and whatever your challenges are right now that the answer is why in leadership and teamwork. Leadership as in the action not necessarily the position. It is only through leadership and teamwork that we will achieve what we want to achieve in our orchestras and communities and effective leadership and teamwork are only possible when we prioritize relationships. Daily communication is the foundation of building those relationships.

Expand your working definition of who is on your team. If we believe that we are all the same team working towards the same goals, we can work out the messiness of how to accomplish those goals with a culture of open communication. The future is bright for orchestras in our communities, if we can strengthen our partnerships with each other. I hope this information was helpful, let's definitely stay in touch, keep this conversation going. Please don't hesitate

4 Steps to an Open Communication Culture for Orchestras

to email me or we'll jump on League 360, keep in touch. I'm also on social @orchestracareers or you can give me a call. Thank you so much. Have a great day.