

IN BOARD OF SUDBURY SELECTMEN
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2015
5:15 p.m. – 7:05 p.m.

Present: Chairman Patricia A. Brown, Vice-Chairman Susan N. Iuliano, Selectman Robert C. Haarde, Selectman Leonard A. Simon, Selectman Charles C. Woodward, Interim Town Manager Maryanne Bilodeau and Jon Wortmann of Novel Communications

The statutory requirements as to notice having been complied with, the meeting was convened at 5:15 p.m. in the Goodnow Library Historical Room, 21 Concord Road.

It was stated at the beginning of the meeting that this meeting would not be recorded.

Meeting Minutes

Jon Wortmann began the second meeting by stating the evening's session would include covering the Seven Communication Tendencies, triggers, which occur in the group that create tension, and the best practices and tools to use to decrease tension and stress in the group. Covering these items was important so the optimal culture is present at future Selectmen and Town Meetings, and the meetings are civil and productive.

Communication Tendencies

The first exercise for the evening involved getting feedback from each member as to what they felt were successes from Board meetings held since the group's June session with Mr. Wortmann. A majority of the Board felt the Selectmen meetings went well. Conversations were civil between members during the meetings. If the group got off topic, they were rerouted by the Chairman back to the issue being discussed. There were some good debates on a couple of town issues where there was no tension present among the group. The members agreed the interviews for the new Town Manager went well. There was a successful 5-0 vote on the decision to hire the new Town Manager; something that does not always happen with the Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Wortmann mentioned that individuals will have different values on the many issues being discussed during meetings. Individuals will either feel comfortable or feel tension depending on the communication style that is being heard. He explained there are seven communication tendencies. These tendencies impact whether people like each other or not. If there are triggers, this creates tension and stress in the group.

The first communication style mentioned was whether an individual was an internal thinker or an external thinker. A person showing internal characteristics would think before speaking and pause in between thoughts. An external thinker would display physical actions such as bobbing of the head, excitement when speaking, or thinking out loud. A discussion followed as to whether each member thought his/her fellow member was an internal or external communicator. Mr. Wortmann said that under different circumstances people tend to show both tendencies. He felt a majority of this group are external communicators. He said it was very important to give a person the chance to communicate and to pause or slow down in order to keep stress to a minimum at the Board meetings.

The second communication tendency described was inductive vs. deductive styles. An example of inductive style of communication is when a person gives many details/information before getting to the point. A deductive style was explained as getting to the specific point without a lot of detailed information being shared. The Board members were then asked to identify whether their fellow members were inductive or deductive communicators.

Next the Board was asked whether each member used many words vs. a few words to communicate during meetings. During this exercise, Mr. Wortmann pointed out how everyone was being mindful and aware of how each person was communicating with each other during this discussion.

The next tendency explained was debaters vs. pleasers. Mr. Wortmann described debaters as people who want to be right, and pleasers as people who want to be comfortable in a meeting or situation. People who are pleasers might hold back during a meeting since they want to avoid creating conflict and tension.

Literal vs. metaphorical communicators were described next. For the metaphorical communicator, Mr. Wortmann used the following example: a person who plans to take a neighborhood walk, takes the walk and is fine. A literal communicator would need to elaborate on the plans for the walk, where they are going on the walk, why they are going and what time they are returning.

The last communication tendency discussed was whether an individual was a fast talker or a slow talker. Each member was asked to identify whether their fellow members were seen as a fast talker or a slow talker during meetings.

The second part of the meeting focused on triggers the group experienced since their last meeting with Mr. Wortmann. Some members felt they were intentionally being excluded from important meetings, specifically goal setting and executive sessions. This triggered feelings of tension, disrespect and being left out of the loop, especially when important decisions needed to be made. This has happened repeatedly in the past and has created much tension and stress between members. Mr. Wortmann asked the group if it would be helpful to decide beforehand which meetings required all members to be present and to schedule these meetings at a time when the entire Board could attend.

In concluding the session, Mr. Wortmann commented that all the Board members are great communicators and have gotten stuck in a cycle of triggers. They all have the power to change the triggers. Each person needs to pay attention to their language, tone and volume so they do not go backwards to the old ways. The cycle needs to be broken in order for the members to move past this and work together, they need to recognize communication styles and accommodate them. The members agreed to try to put past conflicts behind them and to move forward.

Mr. Wortmann thanked the members for their honesty during this session, for participating in the exercises and for going into some uncomfortable areas during the discussions.

Future Meeting Dates/Times with Jon Wortmann

Mr. Wortmann said he was open to having conferences with individuals before the next session. There was a discussion about how to best utilize the two remaining group sessions with Mr. Wortmann. The Board agreed the next meeting should include the new Town Manager in order to discuss goal setting. This meeting would not take place until December or January.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Attest: _____
Maryanne Bilodeau
Interim Town Manager- Clerk