

St Patrick's Parish
School
Community Council
Resource Materials

Prayers for Meetings

All School meetings start with prayer. School communities are encouraged to develop their own specific meeting prayers that reflect the particular charism, context and spirit of their own community.

Included below are some sample prayers and a list of suggested reference materials, which may be useful for meetings.

PRAYER TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

**Be present with us, O Holy Spirit,
for it is in your name
that we are specially gathered together.**

**Come to help us in our affairs, and be
pleased
to enter into our deliberations.**

Instruct us in what we should do.

**Let it be you, first of all,
who inspires our suggestions.**

**May you who love justice let us not offend
against justice or charity.**

Grant also that we may act intelligently.

**Keep us by the gift of your grace
in harmony with your will,
so that we may act as one with you,
who with the Father and the Son live and
reign.**

God for ever and ever.

Amen.

PRAYER FOR GUIDANCE AND WISDOM

**Lord look lovingly
on this group gathered here.**

**During this meeting
as we discuss and deliberate
on issues of importance to this school
help us to be guided by your Spirit.**

**May we be wise in our discernment
balanced in our judgement
fair in our decisions
and visionary in our planning.**

**Though we may, at times,
have differing views
May we listen to one another
and be guided by our common goals.**

**May we always be mindful
in our words and actions
of what is best for all children
in our school.**

We ask this through Christ our Lord

Amen.

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS PRAYER

**Jesus, Good Shepherd,
Teach us through your Spirit
to walk your way of light,
to live your way of truth
and in all things to act with love and
compassion.**

**Help us to come to the Father
by knowing you, loving you
and serving you in each other.**

**May our schools be places of wonder,
learning and peace where the lessons of
today
prepare us for the challenges
of tomorrow.**

**May your Mother, Mary,
guide our footsteps as she guided yours.**

This prayer we make in faith.

Amen.

A PRAYER OF ST IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA

**Teach us good Lord to serve you as you
deserve: to give and not to count the cost;
to fight and not to heed the wounds; to
work and not to seek for rest; to labour and
not to ask for any reward, save that of
knowing that we do your will.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.**

A PRAYER OF ST AUGUSTINE

**Lord, you are the light of the minds that
know you, the life of the souls who love you
and the strength of the souls that serve you.
Help us to know you that we may truly love
you, so to love you that we may fully serve
you, whose service is perfect freedom.
Through Christ our Lord Amen**

An Aboriginal Prayer for Strength and Wisdom

O Great Spirit whose voice I hear in the winds,
And whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me.

I am before you, one of your many children.
I am small and weak, I need your strength and wisdom.

Let me walk in beauty,
And let my eyes ever behold the red and purple sunsets.
Make my hands respect the many things you have made,
My ears sharp to hear your voice.

Make me wise so that I may know the things you have taught my people,
The lessons you have hidden under every leaf and rock.

I seek strength, O my Creator,
Not to be superior to my brothers,
But to be able to fight my greatest enemy - myself.

Make me ready to return to you with clean hand and a straight eye,
So that when life fades as the setting sun sets
My spirit may come to you without shame.

SUGGESTED BOOKS FOR MEETING PRAYERS

Gabriele, E.F. ACT JUSTLY, LOVE TENDERLY, WALK HUMBLLY, St Mary's Press, Minnesota, 1995.

LIFT UP MY EYES. PSALMS OF GLORY AND HOPE, Eagle Publishing, Guildford, Surrey, 1994.

Maggs, W. PRAYER FOR EVERYDAY USE, St. Paul Publications, Homebush, 1991.

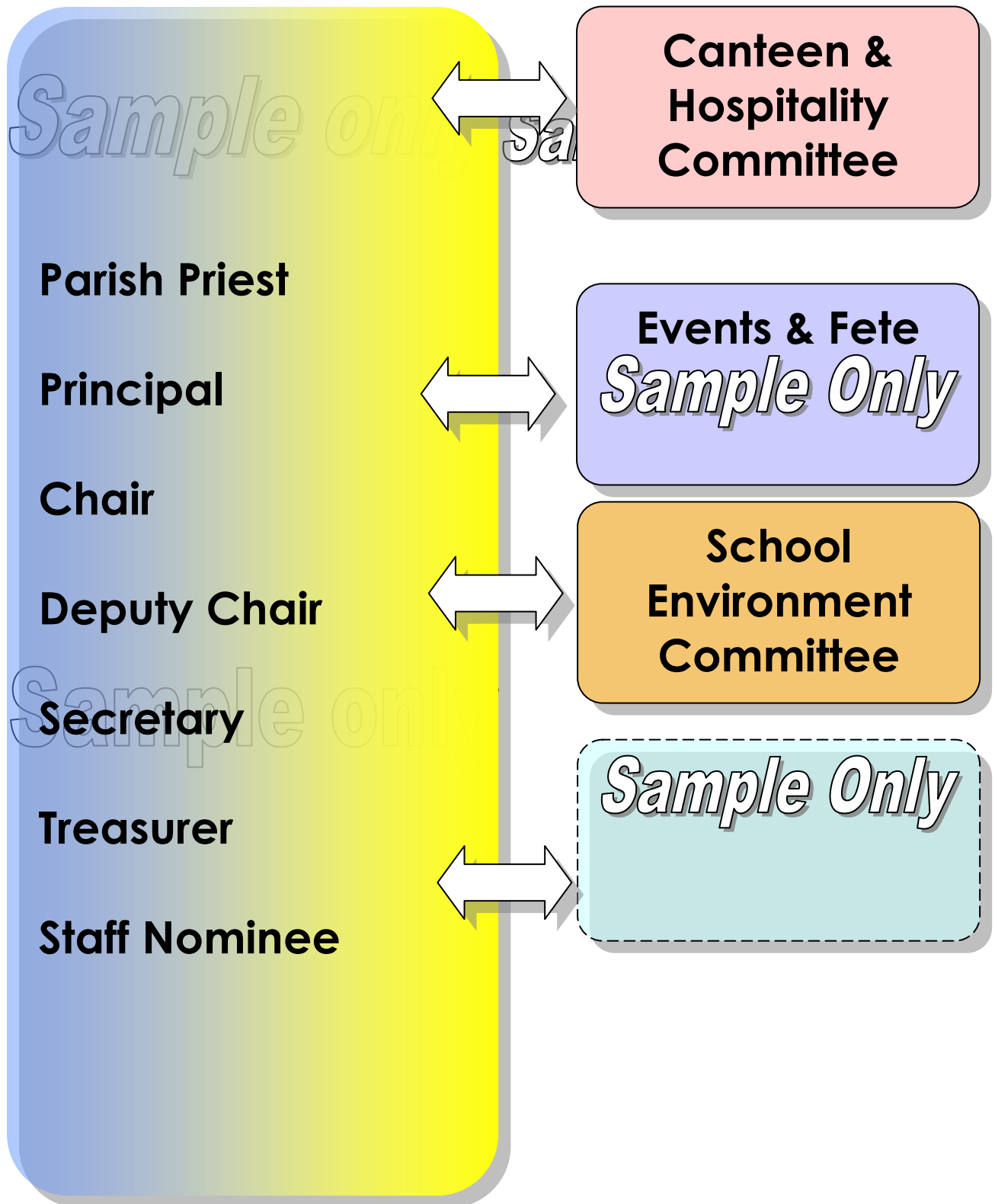
Moody, D.L. STILL WATERS: Spiritual Refreshment for Every Day of the Year, Marshall Pickering, London, 1994.

Podlich, A. AUSTRALIAN IMAGES, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1989.

Prewer, B.D. AUSTRALIAN PSALMS, Lutheran Publishing House, Adelaide, 1990.

Ringma, C. DARE TO JOURNEY WITH HENRI NOUWEN, Albatross Books, Sutherland, 1992.

Structure



Election Timeline

Election Process for a Community Council

The following process is suggested for the replacement of a Council member whose term of office has expired.

Should a member whose term of office has expired wish to stand again they must fulfil all requirements of the Constitution and renominate for election.

A candidate for the Council is elected by the community to the Council as an Executive Member. At their first meeting, the Executive will appoint the Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary and Treasurer from the elected Executive. The process for electing executive positions is to be determined following discussion at the first meeting and may include a secret ballot.

Recommended Timetable

Timing	Activity
7 weeks out	Announce vacancy on the Council Distribute the Election Timeline Call for nominations to fill the positions Formal nominations should include a brief biography for publication
4 weeks out	Nominations Close* Announce and distribute nominations (include biography) to community
2 weeks out	Distribute Ballot Papers to the community (eg. two votes per household) Set up Ballot Box in the School Office
Election Day	Election closes at publicised time.
Following the election	Returning Officers count votes Successful and unsuccessful candidates contacted and thanked Principal makes formal announcement to the community.

* Should the number of nominations received equal the number of vacancies received then the Principal may announce that there is no need for an election and declare all the nominees elected to the Executive unopposed.

This timetable is a suggested format. Individual communities may vary the process according to local circumstances as long as the community is informed in writing of the timetable and sufficient time is allocated for each phase of the election process.

Meeting Format

Order	Agenda Item		Facilitator	Time (min)
1	Welcome and Prayer		Rostered	5
2	Introduction		Chairperson	
3		Apologies		1
4		Adoption of Minutes of previous meeting		2
5		Business Arising		5
6		Ordering of the Agenda		2
7		Correspondence		5
8	Matters for Information		Chairperson	
9		Committee Reports	Co-Coordinator	10
10		Finance	Treasurer	5
11		Parish Report	PP or Rep	3
12		Principal Report	Principal	3
13	Matters for Discussion		Chairperson	
14	Matters for Decision		Chairperson	
15	Review Action Decisions		Chairperson	3
16	Preview next meeting's Agenda		Chairperson	3
17	Evaluation of meeting		Chairperson	3

Agenda/Minutes Template

Welcome and Prayer

Introduction

Apologies
Adoption of Minutes of previous meeting
Business Arising
Ordering of the Agenda
Correspondence

Matters for Information

Committee Reports
Finance
Parish Priest Report
Principal Report

Matters for Discussion

Matters for Decision

Review Action Decisions

Preview next meeting's Agenda

Evaluation of meeting

Committee Report Template

Committee:	Committee Members:
Report Date:	
Key Matters for Information	
Matters for Council Discussion and Decision	

Committee Terms of Reference Template

It is strongly recommended that each committee of a School Community Council be clearly defined in writing. This promotes understanding of who is in the group, what they aim to achieve, and how the committee relates to the Community Council Executive and the school community. Below is a detailed template of what such a committee charter or definition sheet might include. Each Council should customise this format to best match your group's unique needs and tendencies.

Committee Terms of Reference

Name: *(Official name of the committee or working group)*

Members:

- *Name of Co-ordinator*
- *Name of Committee Representatives (listing specific roles/responsibilities)*

Goals:

1. *(primary)*
2. *(secondary)*

Deliverables: *(Specific outputs required/requested from the committee.)*

Scope / Jurisdiction:

(What are the bounds of responsibility and authority of this committee? What do they need to address and what is outside their area of concern? What can they decide on and what needs Council input?)

Guidance from the Board / Lead Group:

(Initial direction and suggestions from the School Community Council.)

Resources and Budget: *(e.g. equipment, materials, funds available to the committee.)*

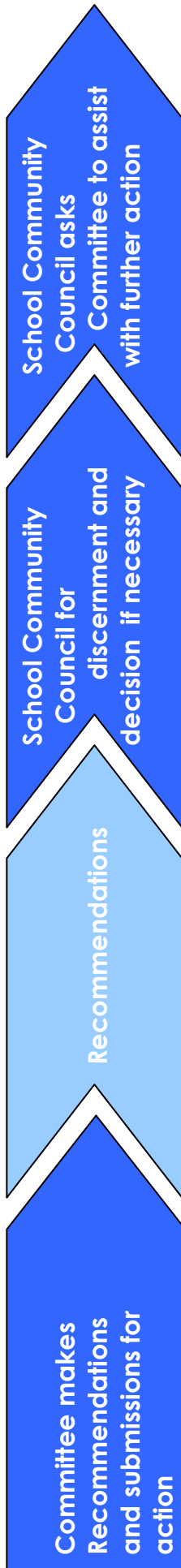
Governance and Reporting

(Decision-making technique, e.g. consensus, 2/3 majority vote or chair's authority, etc. Process and frequency of reporting to the Community Council.)

Additional Notes: may include:

- *Relationships to other committees*
- *How communications outside of meetings will be conducted, e.g. phone or email.*
- *Where shared information, such as plans and contact information, will be stored.*
- *History of the committee.*
- *Schedule or meetings and/or other important timelines.*

Committee Decision Making Process



Position	Name	Commenced	Phone Contact	Email
Co-Ordinator				
Member				
Member				
Member				
Member				

Qualities of a Good Chairperson

What are those qualities that make someone a good Chairperson?

Temperament

If a Chairperson is the person who is expected to lead and control meetings which is, essentially, the business of the School Council, then, surely, the personality of Chairperson has an influence on the whole structure and tone of the meeting. If the Chairperson is friendly and affable, then others will follow suit and the general atmosphere will be friendly and co-operative. If, however, the Chairperson is brusque and unapproachable, there will inevitably be cliques, factions and a disunited Council.

A calm and even temperament is a great asset in a Chairperson, as this creates a feeling of stability, whereas if there is too much volatility, the reverse is the case. Such a person is also more likely to remain unperturbed by a challenging meeting or difficult committee, and it is often only the efficiency of the Chairperson that prevents a meeting from being productive and remaining focussed.

Guidance

The Chairperson has to be the person who can think clearly and objectively, especially in committee work.

In order to maintain control of the meeting, the Chairperson needs to be aware of all the ramifications of the business on the agenda, and it is the Chairperson's duty to put all sides of the question to the members of the Council and its committees, before a decision is reached. By withholding information, emphasising one point understating another in the initial stage of discussion, or by a biased summing-up, the Chairperson can influence the result – a power that is open to abuse, unless controlled by clear thinking and an open mind.

It is very easy to influence peoples' decisions if one has a knowledge and strong feeling about the matter being discussed. The wise Chairperson will only disclose their personal views if asked and will express the case clearly, leaving the meeting to make its own decision.

Meeting control

If a Chairperson is to carry out his or her role effectively, knowledge of the appropriate procedure for that meeting is essential. The Chair must be available to meet regularly with the Principal to ensure open, clear and consistent communication. Determining a suitable meeting format can generally be assessed by viewing the Agendas and Minutes of previous meetings as well as other publications.

It should be emphasised that, in addition to general procedure, the Chairperson should possess a good knowledge of the function and operation of a Parish Catholic School within the Archdiocese, as published within Policy,

Organisation and Rules.

A meeting will get through a far greater amount of business, waste less time and give more time for effective discussion and decision and sound decisions if correct procedures and information are used as a reference point, so that everyone knows the point of the issue.

Humour and self-control

Perhaps, one of the most difficult things with which the average Chairperson has to contend with is when discussions get 'heated'. Humour can be the Chairperson's best tool when wishing to diffuse rising tempers during a meeting. As has been said, the meeting often takes its tone from that of the Chairperson. Tempers can easily become frayed from all sorts of outside causes, but nothing has a more stabilising effect than a Chairperson who refuses to get rattled by peoples' angst. Obviously, this should not be taken to the extent that, whilst the meeting is 'actively' discussing an item on the Agenda, the Chairperson is happily saying '*Did you hear the one about the dog who walked into the pub*'..., such practice does have a tendency to frustrate other participants and bring discussions to a complete halt.

Personal Discipline

The Chairperson who has a personal sense of responsibility for their role will be a success. Having the personal discipline to assess what the meeting requires of them and preparing for all possible outcomes will benefit the meeting and, ultimately, the outcome of the point being discussed. One of the main factors is actually starting the meeting at the publicised time and setting a finishing time which should be adhered to, whether matters have been fully discussed or not. This provides a rigid structure of which everyone is aware. Committee members get to know that the meeting will start when it should and that they should be there for that time. It also provides a time structure for discussing items on the Agenda. If the Chairperson is seen to be organised, the meeting will be organised, beneficial and productive.

Relationship with the Principal and the Parish Priest

The Council Chair, the Principal and the Parish Priest must develop a mutual relationship of respect and support. Developing a strong partnership built on trust and deference will ensure the best possibility for a harmonious, focussed and highly effective Catholic School community. The Chairperson must have the time to be available to meet with the Principal frequently and at short notice. The planning of Council meetings is the responsibility of the Chair and the Principal who is the Executive Officer of the Council.

Effective Council and Committee Meetings

Tips for productive meetings

1. Don't meet for meeting sake!

Avoid a meeting if the same information could be covered in a memo, e-mail or brief report. One of the keys to having more effective meetings is differentiating between the need for one-way information dissemination and two-way information sharing. To disseminate information you can use a variety of other communication media, such as sending an e-mail or posting the information on the school website. If you want to be certain you have delivered the right message, you can schedule a meeting to simply answer questions about the information you have sent. By remembering to ask yourself, "Is a meeting the best way to handle this?" you'll cut down on wasted meeting time and restore your group's belief that the meetings they attend are necessary.

2. Set Objectives for the Meeting

Set objectives before the meeting! Before planning the agenda for the meeting, write down a phrase or several phrases to complete the sentence: *By the end of the meeting, I want the group to...* Depending on the focus of your meeting, your ending to the sentence might include phrases such as: *...be able to list the top three new ideas for engaging the parent community, ...have generated three ideas for increasing exposure in the media, ...understand the plan for developing facilities, ...leave with an action plan, ...decide on a new ICT supplier, or ...approve the new school logo.*

One benefit of setting objectives for the meeting is to help you plan the meeting. The more concrete your meeting objectives, the more focused your agenda will be. A second important benefit of having specific objectives for each meeting is that you have a concrete measure against which you can evaluate that meeting. Were you successful in meeting the objectives? Why or why not? Is another meeting required? Setting meeting objectives allows you to continuously improve your effective meeting process.

3 Don't Set Yourself Up As The Complaints Department

Dealing with complaints and problems is an important facet of any public institution. It is important to set up channels for this to be handled on an ad hoc basis by members of the Council. It is important to listen to other parents in the community and to respond. However, you need to be careful that you are not used as a go-between for every issue and complaint, people will gladly give you their problem and pretty soon you have a full-time job listening to complaints. It is amazing how the intensity of a complaint eases when people are advised to put it in writing and suggest a possible solution.

4. Provide an Agenda, Reports and Background Papers Beforehand

In accepting their position, Council members undertake to prepare for each meeting. In order for them to prepare effectively, they must be provided with an Agenda, all Committee Reports and any background papers well before the meeting starts. Tabling papers at a meeting should be a rare occurrence. The Agenda needs to include a brief description of the meeting objectives, a list of the topics to be covered and a list stating who will address each topic and for how long. When you send the agenda, you should include the time, date and location of the meeting and any background information participants will need to know to hold an informed discussion on the meeting topic. The most important thing you should do with your agenda is to follow it closely!

5. Assign Meeting Preparation

Give all participants something to prepare for the meeting, and that meeting will take on a new significance to each group member. For problem-solving meetings, have the group read the background information necessary to get down to business in the meeting. Ask each group member to think of one possible solution to the problem to get everyone thinking about the meeting topic. Using the format of Items for Information, Items for Discussion and Items for Decision will allow you to identify what topics need to be prepared well.

6. Assign Action to Items

Don't finish any discussion in the meeting without deciding how to act on it. Listen for key comments that flag potential action items and don't let them pass by without addressing them during your meeting. Statements such as *We should really..., that's a topic for a different meeting..., or I wonder if we could...* are examples of comments that should trigger action items to get a task done, hold another meeting or further examine a particular idea. Assigning tasks and projects as they arise during the meeting means that your follow-through will be complete. Addressing off-topic statements during the meeting in this way also allows you to keep the meeting on track. By immediately addressing these statements with the suggestion of making an action item to examine the issue outside of the current meeting, you show meeting participants that you value their input as well as their time.

7. Examine Your Meeting Process

Assign the last few minutes of every meeting as time to review the following questions: What worked well in this meeting? What can we do to improve our next meeting? Reviewing processes will enhance the effectiveness, operation and function of the Community Council.

8. Don't Get Caught Up In The Little Things

The main role of a Council is to look to the Big Picture. What is this Catholic school trying to achieve? What are we working towards in the future? Are we putting everything in place to create an effective Catholic School?

The Principal's role is to manage and administer the school and to take advice from the Council.

The 5 Whys Tool for Problem Solving

Quickly Getting to the Root of a Problem

Why use this tool?

The **5 Whys** is a simple problem-solving technique that helps users to get to the root of the problem quickly. The **5 Whys** strategy involves looking at any problem and asking: "Why?" and "What caused this problem?"

Very often, the answer to the first "why" will prompt another "why" and the answer to the second "why" will prompt another and so on; hence the name the 5 Whys strategy.

Benefits of the **5 Whys** include:

- It helps to quickly determine the root cause of a problem
- It is easy to learn and apply

How to use the tool:

When looking to solve a problem, start at the end result and work backward (toward the root cause), continually asking: "Why?" This will need to be repeated over and over until the root cause of the problem becomes apparent.

Example:

Following is an example of the **5 Whys** analysis as an effective problem-solving technique:

1. Why are the parents unhappy with the changes to the reading program?
Because there is inconsistency in the delivery of the program.
2. Why is there inconsistency in the delivery of the program? The changes were too big too soon.
3. Why was the task too big? Because we underestimated the complexity of the job.
4. Why did we underestimate the complexity of the job? Because we made a quick estimate of the time and budget needed to implement the task and did not list the individual stages needed to complete the project.
5. Why didn't we do this? Because we are implementing too many projects at the same time. We clearly need to review our strategic plan with realistic timelines and resources.

Remember

The 5 Whys strategy is an easy and often-effective tool for uncovering the root of a problem. Because it is so elementary in nature, it can be adapted quickly and applied to most any problem. Bear in mind, however, that if it doesn't prompt an intuitive answer, other problem-solving techniques may need to be applied.

Active Listening

Hearing What People Are Really Saying

Listening is one of the most important skills you can have. How well you listen has a major impact on your job effectiveness, and on the quality of your relationships with others.

We listen to obtain information.

We listen to understand.

We listen for enjoyment.

We listen to learn.

Given all this listening we do, you would think we'd be good at it!

In fact most of us are not.

Becoming an Active Listener

There are five key elements of active listening. They all help you ensure that you hear the other person, and that the other person knows you are hearing what they say.

1. Pay attention.

Give the speaker your undivided attention, and acknowledge the message. Recognize that non-verbal communication also "speaks" loudly.

- Look at the speaker directly.
- Put aside distracting thoughts. Don't mentally prepare a rebuttal!
- Avoid being distracted by environmental factors.
- "Listen" to the speaker's body language.
- Refrain from side conversations when listening in a group setting.

2. Show that you are listening.

Use your own body language and gestures to convey your attention.

- Nod occasionally.
- Smile and use other facial expressions.
- Note your posture and make sure it is open and inviting.
- Encourage the speaker to continue with small verbal comments like yes, and uh huh.

3. Provide feedback.

Our personal filters, assumptions, judgments, and beliefs can distort what we hear. As a listener, your role is to understand what is being said. This may require you to reflect what is being said and ask questions.

- Reflect what has been said by paraphrasing. "What I'm hearing is..." and "Sounds like you are saying..." are great ways to reflect back.
- Ask questions to clarify certain points. "What do you mean when you say..." "Is this what you mean?"
- Summarize the speaker's comments periodically.

4. Defer judgment.

Interrupting is a waste of time. It frustrates the speaker and limits full understanding of the message.

- Allow the speaker to finish.
- Don't interrupt with counter arguments.

5. Respond Appropriately.

Active listening is a model for respect and understanding. You are gaining information and perspective. You add nothing by attacking the speaker or otherwise putting him or her down.

- Be candid, open, and honest in your response.
- Assert your opinions respectfully.
- Treat the other person as he or she would want to be treated.

It takes a lot of concentration and determination to be an active listener. Old habits are hard to break, and if your listening habits are as bad as many people's are, then there's a lot of habit-breaking to do!

Be deliberate with your listening and remind yourself frequently that your goal is to truly hear what the other person is saying. Set aside all other thoughts and behaviours and concentrate on the message. Ask questions, reflect, and paraphrase to ensure you understand the message. If you don't, then you'll find that what someone says to you and what you hear can be amazingly different!