



Governance Toolkit
Module 1 – Board Communications
Video Transcript

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00:00:00:00 INTRODUCTION

Hi, everyone. Sylvia Groves, president of Governance Studio here. Welcome to today's session, Module One, Board Communications, brought to you by CUES in collaboration with Stabilization Central Credit Union and Governance Studio.

As we're getting started here, I want to let you all in on a little secret: A lot of people really want to know how to get their board to stick to strategy and risk. In other words, stay out of the weeds.

You're not going to be really happy with what I say next. One of the biggest factors is the content and the quality of information that we, the management team, are providing. It is often too focused on operational details and not focused enough on strategy and risk.

Today, we're going to look at ways to improve vital communications with your board.

00:00:01:00:22 WRITING FOR THE BOARD

We're going to start off with writing for the board. I'll give you a little bit more information on the kinds of things boards of directors have a hard time with. The feedback that I get from directors—and I talk to a lot of directors and a lot of organizations—[is that] the materials that they receive are often problematic.

A lot of organizations don't provide briefing notes or memo summaries, or whatever you happen to call them in your organization. Those that are provided are often too long and far too detailed, aka weeds.

They're inconsistent a lot of times in terms of the content that's provided, the length of the documents, and the ease of understanding. The longer and more complex they are, the more they discourage directors from reading everything. They can also be very repetitive.

Our purpose here, in trying to develop better materials, is to enhance the board management relationship. At the end of the day, we're a little bit like special teams in football. You've got offense, and you've got defense, and then you've got the kicking squad. They all have different purposes, but at the end of the day, they're all moving toward the same goal.

Even though the board has a very different purpose than the management team, we're all still working toward the same goal. We want to make sure that we're bringing value to our members.

The other thing is, when we get good board materials and have a good relationship, we're looking good to the board. We're making an impression that they can trust us, and we can work together in a good way.

The role of the board very specifically is to oversee management of the organization for the credit union. They are there to oversee the whole management team and to make sure that things that are important to be considered are being considered.

They're also there to make informed decisions around key areas of the credit union, including the leadership. Who's going to be the CEO? Maybe [they have] some authority over some of the other officers?

What's our strategy? How are we making sure that we are sound financially? What kind of risks are we up against that we need to deal with? How are we going to govern ourselves and take care of those issues that we need to take care of so that we can be effective in our job?

We have some very specific duties. The first one that you see on the screen is, "Acting in the best interest of the organization." In this case, of course, the credit union is referred to as, "the fiduciary duty." That's a duty put upon a person who is entrusted to make decisions on behalf of other people. The directors of a credit union are there to make decisions on behalf of the members.

In addition to that fiduciary duty, they have that second duty that you see, which is taking the care that a reasonably prudent person would in similar circumstances. That's the duty of care.

I'll give you a funny example about that. If a financial officer were to walk into the boardroom with a cocktail napkin in their hand and say, "Hey, board, on the back of this cocktail napkin, I have our financial statements for the year."

It absolutely wouldn't be reasonably prudent for the board to approve it. If, however, the financial officer came in and said, "Board, here are our financial statements that were prepared by the Comptroller. They've been reviewed by our external auditor. Our audit committee has looked at them and has agreed that they are reasonable and appropriate, and they are recommending that they be approved."

That's a completely different circumstance. As directors, they can rely on the advice of external advisors and people who have more expertise than they do, so it's prudent for them to go ahead and make that approval.

There's something else that we need to recognize. There is a huge information gap between members of management and the board. Most members of management are spending 2000, maybe even 3000 hours a year in the organization. Board members tend to spend about 10% of that time, or about 200 hours.

They spend a lot less time, so they have a lot less understanding of the day to day business of the organization. Yet they're still required to make reasonably prudent decisions on behalf of the credit union.

The ideal that we're striving for is to make sure that we are accessing the value that the directors bring to the credit union. They are out in the community. They have different business interests, and different understandings, and different perspectives. They're bringing us their insight, their experience, and their expertise.

It's really important for management teams to recognize that the board may ask some uncomfortable and even difficult questions. But at the end of the day, we're all on the same side. We're all looking to ensure that the credit union is sustainable in the long term and successful.

That means as a management team, we have to really be thinking about the balance of information that we're providing to the board. We need to provide high level information—less detail, and more information around the conclusions that management has come to, the recommendations they're making, and why they're making them—as opposed to a whole bunch of data being provided to the board.

Ideally, we're going to look at plain language, which is really helpful and something that we aren't generally taught in high schools and universities. We're often taught to write in an essay format that is very formal. We're trying to use the biggest words that we possibly can to get our point across.

Plain language is very much almost the opposite of that. We're trying to use simplified language in order to make sure that things are easy to read. When they're easy to read, they're *going* to be read.

At the end of the day, every board member, every director, is responsible for reading all of the information that management provides. Therefore, if you're providing 10 or 20 pages of data that you looked at as a management team to come to some particular recommendation, thought, or decision, it's important to know that the directors are actually feeling like they should be reading all of that. Are we actually using their time wisely?

Another thing that can tend to happen with management teams is, we forget to tell people things we already know. A lot of times those are the big important things. We forget to tell the board, “Hey, board, we really thought about this project, and we considered two or three different alternatives. We chose this one because...”

That's the type of information that is really important to the board.

Things like strategic alignment. How does this fit within our overall strategy? Does it apply to one of the particular pillars? What key risks are we taking on if we were to approve this project, and what board *action* do we want the board to make? It's really important for us to take that into account as we're preparing information.

Very often, because we are in strategy all day, every day, we forget to tell the board this is the particular strategic pillar that this particular project is supporting. We need to make sure we're making those connections.

00:10:41:09 PLAIN LANGUAGE

I'm going to spend a little bit of time here talking about some plain language principles that are very helpful when we're doing board communications.

Plain language is defined as a clear wording, structure, and design. It's not just about the words. It's so an audience—in our case, our board—can find what they need, they can understand what they find, and then they can use that information.

They can find the details of the project, and those details will make sense to them in a way that they can look at it from their perspective and go, “Yeah, this is a good idea.” Or, “No, we don't think this is a good idea.” Or, “We need more information.”

Again, we want them to be able to find it, understand it, and then use that information to make a decision, to provide an approval, to give feedback—whatever it is that we're asking them to do.

Some keys to plain language include things like using short, clear sentences. We have a tendency with board communications to use long, unclear sentences. We want to try to shorten our sentences.

We want to use everyday words. For example, you've heard me say it many times already, “use” as opposed to something like, “utilize.” We often use the more formal word in board communications.

We can use fewer words where we can, and we also want to be very *direct* in our communications. Usually when we're direct, it is with fewer words. It's less formal, and it's easier to understand. It's good to keep it short and sweet. When it comes to sentences, I like to keep a sentence to one idea. [For example,] “Board, this is a memo about the new project.”

Or, [it could be] three data points. Maybe I'm looking at something like the financials, and every year, when we do the financials, we talk about what our revenues were, what our assets are under management from our membership, and maybe one other item.

We might have two or three key data points. Ideally, we're going to use 20 words or less. A lot of times the ideal would be around ten words. Sometimes when we're communicating detailed information to the board, it's pretty hard to get to that level, so shorter is better at any rate.

I also like to make sure paragraphs are short. Ideally, I don't want them to be more than two or three short sentences long, and five or fewer lines long.

If I'm getting into the range of an eight line paragraph, sometimes I will actually break a rule of grammar in that particular case. I will see if I can split that into two paragraphs, just to make sure that it is visually easier and more appealing, and would help directors be more likely to read it.

We also want to have action-oriented sentences. Again, this tends to be something we've been taught in school, even up through university. We tend to use what's called a passive voice as opposed to an active voice. Active voice is action-oriented. We talk about who the doer of something is, before talking about what they're doing.

We often do that backwards in our communications to the board. We will put a lot of information before we even say who is asking for what or the specific details.

I'll give you an example. A passive sentence that I see very often in board packages is something along the lines of, "The project is being presented to the board by the operations department for approval."

You can see there's a lot of information in there. There are a lot of words in there. It's not very direct, and it's definitely not active.

If we were trying to make this active as to who is doing what, we might end up with a sentence more like this. "We," instead of the operations department, because at the end of the day, everything that comes from management is from the whole of management. "We" are asking the board to approve the project.

This is much simpler, much shorter, and much more direct. That is an active sentence, because we talk about who is doing what. We are asking. "Asking" is what we're doing the board to approve the project. That's another thing that you can keep in mind as you're going through documents that you're preparing for the board.

We want to always be as clear and concise as we possibly can be. I like to make sure we avoid the, "eses." The "eses" are not just restricted to legalese. There can be accounting "ese." There can be compensation "ese." There can be human resources "ese." There can be I.T. "ese." There are all of these specific areas where we have our own language and our own words that aren't really commonly used elsewhere.

We want to keep it to common language, explaining things clearly to someone who might not be skilled, or have an understanding of exactly how a credit union operates—how its finances work, how its insurance and other things need to work. We have to avoid using that kind of technical language.

We also need to define our TLAs. I know everyone understands what TLAs are. Or, maybe you don't. TLA's are three letter acronyms.

We do this all the time. We do it in our own day to day operations, because it makes it easier for us to communicate. But remember, the directors are only there a few times a year—maybe four, maybe six—and they're not in the business all the time.

They don't see those all the time. They don't necessarily understand what they mean. If you are going to use acronyms or abbreviations, make sure that the directors clearly understand them. Make sure that they're well defined.

As much as possible, we're going to try to say things only once. If we ask them at the beginning of the memo to approve the project, we're not going to ask them again at the end to approve the project.

We're only going to say it once.

Design. Design is one of those things we don't always think about when it comes to information that we're writing. Things like adding headings, using bullets, maybe providing some tables, and definitely making sure there's lots of lovely white space where a director can rest for a moment as they're reading.

[These] are really helpful ways to make sure that the documents we're preparing are inviting to read. [This way,] they're more likely to be read and understood.

I think headings are my favorite, followed quickly by whitespace. Make sure that you're using headings within the document that tell the directors what they're looking at. [For example,] "Board action required." Then add a quick sentence, project description, and the risks of [the] project.

Make sure you put those headings in place. [That way] directors can very quickly skim through that information. They're going to know where exactly in the memo to look for something in particular.

White space is also really helpful. In MS Word, we can often go to the paragraph spacing. There's generally a menu option that drops down for 1.15, that spreads the lines out a little bit, makes the text less crowded, and makes it feel like it's easier to read. Therefore, it's more likely to be read.

Lots of things around design can help us communicate better.

00:20:43:00 RESOURCES

I'm going to talk a little bit about some resources for this.

We can develop resources within our organization. There are resources in the toolkit as well. But when we're thinking about those resources, we're thinking about things like what are our margins going to be? What is our font size going to be? What is our line spacing, as I just mentioned. How many headings and heading levels are we going to have?

It's really helpful for a board to know that all the documents coming to them from a management team are going to look and feel the same. When we do things consistently, the board knows where to look for things and how to find things. It makes the communication that much smoother.

Internal resources that you may develop include a style guide, similar to a branding guide, that defines when we use our logo and all of that. You might have more of a style guide for briefing notes to the board.

Once again, I'm referring to them as "briefing notes." You might call them "memos" or "executive summaries." Whatever you call them, a style guide could cover the main types of briefing notes.

It might also cover the main types of presentation decks. We'll talk about presentations in a little bit, but we can take a look at some of the main memo types that you might be including.

You can also help your writers with some success strategies. Suggest that they follow the formats, and some content guidance that you're going to give them, when they're preparing their documents.

I know for myself this [one]works, and I do it all the time. I always plan to rewrite whatever document I start with. I always plan to edit it, but I like to make sure I step away for a little while. It might only be five minutes. Ideally it would be overnight. I then come back and try to see if I can make it only half as long.

Now that's a big ask, and it might not be somewhere that you can get to. Try saying to yourself, “How could I communicate this better?” “Could I be more clear? Have I got details in here that don't need to be in here?”

A really good exercise that you can try, is to see if you can do that with your emails for a week or so. Whenever you do an email, step away, even if it's just for two minutes. Then come back to it and see if you can get it to be about two-thirds to one-half as long—ideally, about half as long.

I can tell you, the more you write, the easier it gets. The more you plan to edit—and edit for length, clarity, and conciseness—the easier that gets.

It's helpful to make sure that all members of management understand the purpose of a briefing note to the board. The idea is to provide them with some critical information that they need to review in order to have a reasonable discussion and make a specific decision. We want to give them the critical information.

We *don't* want to give them all the information and say, “Board, you make a decision about this as a management team. We've already looked at it. We have a view of it.”

What are the critical things that we took into account? What are other things that we might be able to do? Are there questions that we have for the board?”

Those are critical pieces of information. If absolutely necessary, you can provide some more detail, maybe in some appendices. But again, it's up to the board to read everything. Unless that appendix is adding value, it might be something that you put in a board portal and maybe make a reference to it for the board. “There's some additional information for those of you who are curious about this.” Or, “There are some articles that we found that might be of interest on this particular topic.”

Whatever the case may be, be very judicious in whether or not you add appendices. If you do, [consider] what they include.

A number of the key formats that are common, probably across all credit unions, are things like project approvals. Maybe it's a pre-approval. We're not ready to ask the board to approve the project, but we want to give them some of our initial information and our investigations that we're doing.

Maybe we're considering a merger, so we want to be talking to the board about what we're thinking and how we might proceed.

This could also be project status. [For example,] we've decided we're building a new credit union in a particular space, and it's been approved. The board then wants to be updated on status. For project approvals, it could be two or three different nuances on that.

Regular reports are the things that we report on a quarterly or other regular basis, [such as] how we are doing against our key performance indicators. Are we making progress on our strategic initiatives? Are we on budget with our financial situation for the current year? Those are the kinds of things that might be in regular reports.

There might be things [like] periodic approvals. Maybe we do them from time to time, and they're pretty similar all the time. Maybe we appoint the officers on an annual basis. Maybe we review some of our governance documents every year or every few years. Those are going to be some periodic approvals that the board might look at doing.

There can also be things like information reports that are just for the board to understand. Maybe there are some trends in government, and we're giving them an information report on what those particular trends are.

Some of the document guidelines that you might consider using in your particular credit union [concern] the length of memos—ideally, three to five pages. I know some organizations that say we want them [to be] one to two pages.

You can figure out what is most appropriate. It might be that certain documents are a little bit longer than others. You want to decide on a range that everyone on the management team can be striving to meet.

Then of course, [there are] appendices. If you're going to use them, you want to keep the number of pages down and the number of appendices down.

There's been some very recent research in the UK that talks about what directors are able to absorb. By absorb, I mean they can read it, they can understand it, they can think about it, they can think about the kind of questions they might want to ask, and they can make some internal decision about it.

[According to the research,] they can absorb 30 pages in one hour. If we're giving them a board package to review, and they're going to spend two to three hours reviewing it, we don't want that package to be more than 60, maybe 90 pages long.

That might be larger than some of you are giving, but maybe you're not giving board memos on every item. Ideally, every item should have some memo, even if it's very short.

Or, it could be that you're giving them a lot more information or a lot of data, but not necessarily enough analysis and discussion of that—enough of management's thought processes. You're just

giving them the data without any real direction. We need to be really careful about the length and the quantity that we're providing.

In terms of writing guidelines, paragraphs [should be] two to three sentences—overall, three to five lines long. How many lines on the page does it take up?

Sentences can be up to 20 words, [although] ideally [they should be] 10 to 15. The shorter the better. It's much easier to understand short sentences.

If we're using things like bullets, they might be two lines each. You might use up to two of them, with each of them only one line, or two lines at the absolute max.

Again, you want to be careful about all of the different ways you're communicating.

Within the toolkit, there are a number of formats that will be very helpful for any credit union. One is a project approval briefing note format. That's going to give you the details that you might want to include in a project.

Another is a regular report—most likely quarterly, but maybe not—and a briefing note format for things like operations, finance, Human Resources and those kinds of things.

There's also a periodic approval briefing note format that might be for things like financial statements or consent agendas, minutes, and things like that.

You've got a few different tools in the toolkit to assist you along the way. It's not that these are the only way to do it, or that these are the best way to do it. These are a starting point for you to look at and decide, “Is this going to work in our organization? How might we adapt it a little to fit our credit union better?”

00:31:53:20 PRESENTING TO THE BOARD

That covers the whole issue around information that we're providing to the board. I'm also going to spend a little bit of time talking about how we present to the board.

This is for those members of management who are sometimes preparing PowerPoint presentations and who are actually presenting them to the board. [This is] a really important part of communication, and a part where we sometimes lose a lot of the value that we could be accessing.

The feedback that I have seen and received—and colleagues of mine have attested to—is that a lot of times, a presentation will cover all of the materials. In fact, sometimes the slides will literally be just the information in the memo, which gets read by the presenter. That makes it far too long and not helpful.

It means that there's no time for the board to ask questions and have their own discussion, which is part of their job. It's part of their duty to be having that time to question management, to have some discussion of their own before making a decision.

The other thing that gets missed is there's no engagement. This leaves no opportunity, or no time spent in the management team, actually asking for information, ideas, thoughts, whatever it may be from the board. These are really important areas that we can be missing out on.

The value with the presentations, and their purpose, is to ensure that there's more discussion time available for the board.

We also want to make sure there's improved engagement between the board and the management team. At the end of the day, we're going to be working to enhance the board management relationship.

Ideally, the board should question management, but also trust management. We want to make sure that we're always building a really constructive relationship between those two parts of the organization. That's going to get us the most value.

00:34:37:00 GENERAL GUIDANCE

For general guidance, we'll look at some other resources, internal and external, and go from there.

The role of the presenter is to remind the board of key facts, risks, and issues identified by the management team, or maybe analysis done by the management team. We're not going to review all of the information again. We're just going to remind them of some of the key items that they've already read about.

We're going to remind them of the story. How did we come to this decision? Why do we even want to do this?

Another role of the presenter is to respond to director questions. Directors are asking questions, and unfortunately, they're not always perfect at asking them in a very constructive way.

At the end of the day, that's their job to ask questions. [They need] to make sure that a management team hasn't missed some particular information, some particular aspect, that is really critical to take into account before taking a particular course of action.

Ideally, the presenter is always frank, which means that they're telling the board bad news as well as good news. [They're] not trying to make everything seem rosy all the time, if that's not the case. Through all of those activities, [they should be] building trust with the board.

In a presentation, again, we want to have some guidelines around how much information we're giving the board. Maybe we're going to have five to six slides per agenda item. Some organizations do only three or four. [Either way,] we want to make sure that those slides facilitate the conversation and that they support approval items.

If there's something that requires a board resolution, have we given them enough information? Are we reminding them of the key aspects of that information?

Ideally, we might have three to five main bullets and a few second level bullets. You'll notice that in my presentations, I very much adhere to those things as best I can. There aren't too many slides for what I'm presenting.

Education sessions are a little different, but there are a number of slides. They highlight my key points. They don't have a lot of words on them.

What happens is, when we use too many words on a slide, or when we repeat information from the materials that we're provided, our audience stops listening to us. [This is] because, as humans, we're better at either listening or reading.

It's very hard for us to listen and read at the same time, so we stop listening so we can read the slide. If someone else is reading the slide out loud, that's really not great. We want to make sure that the slides, if we're using them, are helpful to what we're discussing.

I am actually a fan of using PowerPoint slides when communicating to the board, because oftentimes they can have enough of a visual impact to give the board a better understanding. A quick visual reference is okay, such as, “Now we're going to talk about strategy on this thing. There are two or three things I'm listening for. I see what they are. They're shown on the slide, so I'm going to listen for those things.”

The [slides] can provide a way for the board to better understand what the presenter is saying. We'll talk a little bit about [the] content of slides—in particular, slides that are for decisions. In this case, we'll assume that it might be a project approval.

What is the overview of the project? What are we doing? How much is it going to cost? What is its timeline? Do we have contractors available?

Whatever the case may be, why are we doing it? What's the strategic fit? How does this benefit our credit union? What is the purpose of it?

Now that we're thinking about this project, what risks does it bring along, and how are we going to mitigate those risks? What do we already have planned to make sure that those risks are not going to cause us a problem later?

Have we considered alternatives? If so, very briefly, what were they and why didn't we choose them? We might even include some engagement questions for the board.

When we move along to our regular reporting slides, we've probably got some key highlights that we provide in every quarter. There might be some key operational highlights that we look at all the time. There might be key financial highlights that we look at all of the time. We may be looking at KPIs, or key performance indicators—I'll define my TLA there—key performance indicators, and our progress against those.

If we're looking at a budget, do we have variances from our budget and how are we going to mitigate those? Do we, as a management team, have any requests for feedback, or engagement questions for the board directly?

Some tips for our slide decks or our PowerPoints include, keep text at a high level. Use fewer words. Even though you're probably going to say a whole sentence around each of your bullet points, it should just be a reminder and a highlight of it—not what you plan to say.

You can use PowerPoint notes if you need some additional notes. Or, you might have some paper notes that you refer to if you want to provide yourself with more details, or if that makes you more comfortable in presenting. Just don't include all of that on the visual slides that you're providing to the board.

A quick example here. Do this: Key risks, environment costs, and delays.

Not this: The key risks we reviewed were environmental impact, cost overruns, and construction delays.

You can see that, even though I'm probably going to say all of that information to the board—things like, “We looked at a number of key risks, board. We looked at environment risks, including environmental impact of building on this site.” We’re going to give them more information as we're speaking.

We’re going to keep them focused on us and what we're saying, rather than reading the slides, by making sure the slides don't have too many words on them.

The amount of time is another critical issue I want to address. Even if you’re doing time allotments in your agendas, the amount of time allotted for a particular item is *not* the amount of time the presenter can take. The board still has to be able to ask questions and have its discussion and engagement with management.

As a rule of thumb, we can use the 80/20 rule. We're going to take about 20% of the time to present to the board, and we're going to reserve about 80% for some board questions and discussions.

[For example,] if we have a ten minute item, we're going to just take a couple of minutes to remind the board of the information that's been provided in advance and some of the key issues. We're going to say, “Yeah, we know you've read the package, so I'm just going to remind you of these things.” Then, we're going to have more time available for the board to have their questions, discussions, and engagement with the management team.

Sometimes, we also have to be prepared to take cues from the chair. It might have been intended that we were going to have 20 minutes for a particular agenda item, so we had 4 or 5 minutes to make our presentation. We walk in and the chair says, “Oh, we're running a little behind.” That means we need to be super quick in our presentation.

Maybe we have in mind a one-minute elevator pitch that we can use when we walk into the room, in case the committee or the board is running behind. If we only have a minute, we might only be there to answer questions.

They might say, “Yeah, we've read the materials. We're just going to ask some questions and have our discussion.” That is not a slight against the management team or any member of management. That is simply the board or the committee managing their own time.

We need to be a little bit thick-skinned about that and be ready and prepared in case that happens.

In the case of doing an education session—which sometimes the management team members are doing with the board, or maybe someone in your risk management group is going to give the board an education session about insurance within credit unions and how that works—the rules are still the same in a lot of respects about the slides, the content, and how much detail. However, the presentation time is a little flipped.

More often, when doing an education session, at least 80% of the time allotted is for the actual presentation, and then it's closer to 20% for questions and discussion. Or, it might be split 75/25. It's usually a little bit on the opposite side of the [usual] timing.

All of the rules around the communication still stand. Even if you're giving an education session, you do not have carte blanche to put up a whole bunch of slides full of a whole lot of text. You want your audience—the board, the directors—focused on what you're saying, not focused on reading the slides.

00:46:35:21 YOUR AUDIENCE

We're going to spend a few minutes here talking a little bit about our audience and our style. When I talk about style, I'm talking about our own communication style.

We all have a particular style. Other people have different styles. We tend to default to our own style when we're presenting.

I want to make sure that you can understand what your personal style is, and maybe understand the styles of other members of the audience—the board, for example—so that you can present more effectively to everyone.

We're going to talk about these four quadrants, in a sort of quick and dirty version. I'll pause for a few seconds, here and there, to get you where you need to be.

We're going to figure out for you what your style is. There are a couple of questions that can help us with that. Would your friends say that you are a more expressive person? You show excitement. Maybe you're demonstrative. Your hands move when you're speaking.

Or, are you less expressive? You're a little bit more stoic. You don't say a lot, but you say important stuff.

I don't really like the words that are on this particular graphic, “open” and “guarded.” To me, it's “more expressive” and “less expressive.”

If you're more expressive, you're on the top half. If you're less expressive, you're on the bottom half. Neither is good nor bad, better or worse. They're just different.

If you're more expressive, you're somewhere at the top. If you're less expressive, you're somewhere at the bottom.

That's question number one. I'll pause just for a second here to give you a chance to figure out whether you're more expressive or less expressive.

The second thing I would ask you about, is would your friends or coworkers say you are more people oriented, or you're more task oriented?

Again, the words on the slide are a little bit different. Direct is task oriented. If you are more task oriented, you're on the righthand side. If you're more people oriented, you're on the lefthand side.

By now, we should have had a chance to figure out, are you on the top, or the bottom? Are you on the left, or the right?

Everybody, just take a moment to figure out whether you are on the righthand side or the lefthand side, and which of the four quadrants you land in.

Now that everybody has their styles, I'm going to help you understand both your style and the styles of others. This is a really quick tool. I think there are some additional resources later on that you can use that are a little more in-depth, but this one's a really quick way to understand your style.

We tend to have one style as our main style, and then we usually go to one of the two that are touching directly—either left or below, or above or right, but not kitty corner. We tend to do one of the others near us as a secondary style. Therefore, we can understand that one, and we're pretty comfortable with it. It's just not the one we normally go to.

For example, if you are a promoter, you might be a promoter/controller, or you might be a promoter/supporter. If you're an analyzer, you might be an analyzer/supporter, or an analyzer/controller, just to give you some examples.

Let's talk about each of these styles. The promoter is known for being expressive and people oriented. In order to communicate well with a promoter if you're not a promoter, we really need to start with social niceties.

We also need to be enthusiastic. As far as our tone of voice, as far as our energy, promoters really like to hear us talk in terms of people. Who's going to be involved? If it's a project, who's going to be involved with this project?

They like to hear stories and examples, such as: “We know two or three other credit unions in a different region that took on a similar project, and they had some really good results.” Whatever the case may be, they really like to have an idea of stories and examples.

The controller, again, is on the top-half, labeled expressive, but these people are more task oriented. With them, ideally they want us to be clear, brief, and precise. Frankly, I probably could have left all of the additional information on this slide off. As long as we are getting to that, get to the point.

They like us to talk in terms of results, what is going to be done? “This project is going to be this.” “What are our goals along the way?”

They also like to hear about solving problems. If you're saying there are risks, how are those being mitigated?

It's really important to understand how to communicate to a controller, which in some formats, has a similar quadrant base, or is actually called a director, oddly. A controller or a director is often very much results-oriented.

A supporter is less expressive, but very people oriented. They really want to ensure that there's a relationship built first.

As members of management, we want to make sure that we're connecting with directors on an individual basis. They want us to earn their trust. They like to hear about process. How is something going to be done?

They want you to be nice and to be sincere. They want you to provide reassurance. “So yeah, there are these risks, but we know we've really got them covered quite well, because we're doing this and this.”

They want to make sure there's follow-through. If we say we're going to do something, they really want to make sure that they see that done. If you promise them something for [the] next meeting, make sure that happens.

Supporters, as well, prefer that we speak a little bit more slowly. That's something that I have to work on, making sure that, at least from time to time, I'm going more slowly when I'm presenting.

Analyzers. Now we're looking at those people who are less expressive and task-oriented. For these people, we have to be prepared and go slowly—even more so than for supporters.

They want to make sure we have our facts and figures down. Now, that doesn't mean we're necessarily going to have all of that information in our briefing note, or in our slide deck, but we better know those facts and figures for the discussion in the Q&A with these particular people.

Analyzers are often the ones who continue to have some questions after everyone else is done with their questions. They want to hear us talk in terms of purpose—why we are going to do something. They want us to answer our questions, and they would like time to think about the information.

Again, it's really important that we're providing briefing notes well in advance of meetings, so that these directors, and all directors, can get that information, review it, and think about it. They need to figure out what their point of view is on it, and bring that into the meeting.

Best practices are always going to see us getting them good information in advance, and then presenting it to them in a way that appeals to all of the different styles.

Just a real quick way to think about this, everybody has kind of an ideal that's most important to them.

With those who are promoters, they want to look at appreciation—for themselves and for the people involved.

Controllers are much more focused on achievement. Did we do what we said we were going to do? Did we do it the way we thought we would?

Supporters are about connection, so make sure that there are good personal relationships.

For analyzers, the most important thing for them is accuracy—that everything that is being presented is, in fact, accurate.

I'm going to share with you one more thing at this point, too. We tend to have the most difficulty relating to those people who are diagonally opposite to us on the quadrants.

If we are a promoter, we can have a hard time with an analyzer. If we are a supporter, we can have a hard time with a controller.

We also need to take into account people's secondary [style]. Sometimes, we're generally aligned with them. Maybe one's a promoter, one's a controller, but one's a controller/supporter, and the other is a promoter/analyzer. [That means] we can have a bit of head-butting based just on the styles that we have when we communicate.

[That's why it's] really important to understand, "Hey, what's my style, and what kind of style might there be in the room that I'm presenting to?"

The last piece I'm going to talk about on this idea of presenting to people is, we all also have sensory preferences. They are the ways we learn, based usually on a specific sensory preference.

We use particular words when we communicate, based on our own sensory preferences. But we can also be aware of those, so that we can use words and phrases to connect with people who have different sensory preferences than we do.

We're going to look at a number of these different ones, and we'll talk a little bit about how you can apply this as well.

People who are visual respond to words like, "You can see." "I know you will have seen in your board package..."

Those who have a preference for auditory, they're *listening*. They respond to words that reflect listening. "I heard you say this." "We were listening to the financial officer present the financial statements." Those are "hearing" words.

Those of us who are verbal tend to think a lot about words. For example, "You *read* about," or "have *read* through" your materials. You can use those type of words that reflect people who are reading words.

"Kinesthetic" tends to be an action-oriented type modality. We've got to to work," "working," "moving"—those kinds of words.

Those who are cerebral [use] "We *thought* about..." Or, "We *think* this is a good idea." "We're suggesting this..." They use those kinds of words that reflect thinking.

For those who are emotive, "We *felt*" that this was the best way to go.

Again, think about whether or not you can incorporate words that are not your sensory preference into your presentation. I tend to be very visual, so I use all kinds of [examples like], "You can see this." But when I'm communicating to others, I look to see if I can figure out their preference, and then try to reflect that back to them.

If you're not really sure where you are on this, you might take a look at a couple of emails you've written recently, or take a look at them as you write them. What kind of words are you using? Are you

using cerebral words? Are you using emotive words? What is the person you're communicating with most likely to be using?

You can actually adjust a little bit to help them better understand, by using the words that they are most comfortable with.

01:01:51:20 PRESENTING

Now, we'll talk about the actual act of presenting, [using] some tips that we can take away based on all of those different communication styles.

When we first come in, let's give everyone a warm smile. Even if we're just on video, in an all-video or hybrid call, give everybody a warm smile into the camera.

We want to make sure that we present briefly, that we speak clearly and slowly, so that everybody can understand what we're saying.

We can take into account or consider some of those sensory preferences. There's probably some of everyone in your board group, so make sure you try to sprinkle in some [of their preferences, such as:] “Yeah, we *thought* about that, and we really want to do this.” “Because we *feel* that's the best path forward.”

It's pretty easy to incorporate a lot of those different sensory preferences when we're speaking.

Make sure that we take questions. As much as we need it for ourselves, we [should] have backup information to be able to answer those questions.

If there's a question we can't answer, we need to say, “I don't have that information right now. I'm going to find out about it, and I'm going to come back to you.”

We need to build trust. We need to not make up stuff just because we feel like we're on the spot. [Instead, admit,] “I don't recall right now. Let me check, and I'll come back to you later this afternoon when we reconvene,” or whatever the case may be.

Make sure you know your stuff. Have your backup information.

If you are the type of person who gets nervous—and that can happen, whether it's online or in person—there are a number of things that you can do.

One of those is—if you're waiting outside of the board or committee room, and you've got to go in and present—you can literally just shake your arms and legs and stamp your feet a little bit. Just shake off some of that nervous energy. That works for some people.

Another tip that's really helpful is just deep breathing, right through your diaphragm—breathing three to six breaths. A lot of times, what happens is, fear is excitement without breath. We're kind of

excited, but we're not breathing, so that becomes this kind of icky feeling in our stomach. A few deep breaths can really help.

I'm a big fan of the superhero pose. If you're at all familiar with Young Sheldon, he's standing there in the field, and there's a cow near him. He's kind of backing away from it and very nervous about it. Then he just decides, “Nope, I'm going to step toward the cow. I'm going to put my shoulders back, my chin up, and I'm just going to be strong.”

That's the superhero pose. There's actually evidence that this helps people feel much more confident. Surgeons will often use it when they're going into a long, complex surgery—just to give themselves this extra bit of confidence and stamina.

Another thing you can do is, you can make eye contact with someone in the room that you're more familiar with, or that you know is already a fan of yours. When you first start speaking, make eye contact with that one person for just a couple of seconds. A lot of times after the first few words, it will drain away all of that nervous energy.

Another one you can consider is, you can stand while you're presenting. Sometimes, just standing up takes a little bit more of that energy away.

I talked about [the] superhero pose, and of course, you can see the superheroes on the slide there. There's another phrase that I really like to think of, and that's, do everything like a four year old wearing a Batman costume.

As you know, if a four year old gets into a Batman costume, they can do anything. They're super confident. That can be something that you can keep in mind as well.

01:06:56:29 SAMPLES AND RESOURCES

Okay, samples and resources. Let's talk just a little bit about the tool kit contents.

There is a guidebook that gives you a lot of the information that we've talked about today, written out for you, so you've got some more reference.

There's a very quick reference guide, like a two pager, that you can refer to. One side of the page is about the briefing notes. I think the other side is about presentations. So [you have] some really quick pointers that maybe you take a look at when you're doing one or the other of those specific tasks.

There's also a 4 in 1 PowerPoint format that includes the kind of slides or information that you might use for project approvals, project updates, regular reports, and information reports as well.

There's lots of great stuff in the rest of the toolkit. [There are a] couple of other resources for you. There's a resource at plainlanguage.gov, which I think is still there. It's a U.S. government website, so I don't know how it's been impacted, but they do have some really great resources on plain language, including active/passive voice, how to use shorter words, how to find easier words for harder words.

There are lots of exercises and [some other] wonderful stuff there that—if you want to dive deeper—can be really helpful.

If you have grammar questions, I'm a big fan of Grammar Girl. There's a link to the website for questions like, “Do I use the word ‘then,’ or do I use the word ‘than’?” All of those kinds of questions get answered. She is also quite entertaining, so that’s a resource I really like as well.

If you're looking to improve your ability to communicate, your ability to present, which is a huge fear for a lot of people—often worse than the fear of death is the fear of having to speak in public—see if there's a Toastmasters anywhere near you. That can be a really great place to learn how to speak in public.

There are also some links from Brian Tracy. He is a wonderful speaker who's been doing it for many years, and teaching it for many years. There are a couple of articles there that you might find very helpful.

If you want to go a little bit deeper into those four quadrants of personal styles that you looked at, there are a couple of different links for different ways of looking at those. Again, sometimes the names are a little bit different, but usually the styles are pretty similar. So, there are a couple more resources for you there as well.

01:10:13:04 CLOSING & CONTACT DETAILS

Thank you all. That's all I have for today. This session has been brought to you by CUES, in collaboration with Stabilization Central Credit Union and my company, Governance Studio. If you do have questions further on, there are some contact details for myself. There’s also a link on this slide that you can follow if you would like to receive my fiercely practical governance newsletter, which is full of a lot of great stuff.

With that, I'm going to thank you all very much. I appreciate you participating in today's session. I hope you found some great jewels of wisdom. You will find lots more in the rest of the toolkit on board communications, on writing for the board, and on presenting to the board. Thank you all. Bye for now.