



## **Line Staff Advisory Committees: A Means to Improve Communications**

by Bruce Baird

Communications has been a constant issue for many businesses, especially tribal gaming. Communications in tribal gaming can be compared to a “Plink O” board - any message intended to reach a certain audience when sent, like a Plink O chip when dropped, will take various turns and twists and could miss the intended audience by a wide margin. If the message is oral, then it runs the risk of being trapped in a communications void called “The Moccasin Telegraph.” The Moccasin Telegraph is capable of taking an event or message and blowing it out of proportion in less time than it takes to state it.

An alternative to the communications issue is a system called “Line Staff Advisory Committees.” The creation of these advisory committees is to provide a direct line of communication between administration and the line staff so that issues can be addressed from a line staff perspective.

The concept is rather simple to implement, but harder to maintain. The committees need to know that what they do is making a difference in their respective properties. Setting the system up will require a series of meetings with the line staff, and many of them might not be sold on the idea at first. Some of them will worry that the administration will appoint members to the committees who would not be true advisors, or that it would be just another project the administration would start and never follow up on.

Letters can be sent to all departments requesting that those line staff interested in serving on one of the committees sign up with the casino manager. Let the line staff know that in thirty days there will be elections and that only the line staff will be voting. Once a committee(s) has been established, the first meeting should establish the guidelines under which the committee will operate. Monthly visits are usually the best method for working with the committees.

Some suggestions for committee conduct include being professional at all times, including disallowing any personal issues that members might be involved in. Committee members should be prompt and stay through the whole meeting. Keep in mind that the guidelines apply to the administrator as well as the committee members. Once the basic guidelines are established, they can be modified to fit the system as necessary.

If used correctly, advisory committees can be a very good tool for administration and in turn build trust between administration and the line staff. Will there be distracters? Yes, mostly from managers who will be worried that the advisory committees will take the opportunity to complain about their managers. Opposition might also come from other line staff for the same reasons. Line staff might continue to complain until the committees actually accomplish something. It is very

important that the committees accomplish something within the first month; trust is the driving force here and without trust the concept will fail.

Once put into practice, the advisory committees will be one of the best communications tools available. In fact, they have been instrumental in providing direction in several areas:

- Requesting outside break areas (fenced areas), which improved morale.
- Development of an across-the-board 2.5% raise.
- Policy and procedure changes to reflect better ways of conducting business.
- Generating more suggestions from line staff.
- Developing a greater area of trust between line staff and administration - line staff are being heard and feel that they are really part of the business and the decision-making process.
- Developing a greater understanding of how administration makes decisions and the issues they face on a daily basis.

The biggest issue will be credibility. Unless the advisory board provides a solution to an issue soon, there is a risk of having a few things begin to happen. The staff might begin to think that the advisory boards lack the ability to solve issues or that the advisory board members will begin to lose interest in what they are doing.

Morale also seems to be a key issue with the advisory boards and the rest of the line staff. Find something that will improve the morale no matter how small. One example is the aforementioned outdoor break area. Staff, once signed into work, may not leave the building, which is especially true for cash handlers. In an operations meeting within the week the regulatory board and gaming operations agreed that a fenced in area would qualify as part of the building.

This was the first issue brought up by the boards and was resolved within the first week. This established their credibility not only in their eyes, but in the eyes of their line staff. Moreover, it changed the minds of many administrators that not only could there be a direct line of communication between administration and the line staff, but that working together they could resolve many issues. ♣

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