

“Hitting SEND with a Smile: Communicating with Authority, Humanity, and a Dash of Panache”

By: Suzie Popielec, CMCA, AMS, PCAM
Goodman Management Group

Let's face it: most residents don't eagerly await our eblasts. They may open them in a moment of curiosity, panic, or only after discovering that trash pickup didn't happen on Tuesday...again. Worse yet, they toss it in the virtual trash folder without reading. So how do you keep your carefully crafted creations from being digital debris? Read on for some suggestions and advice.

In the community management world, the eblast is one of the most powerful tools we have to inform, direct, soothe, and (occasionally) amuse. But it's only effective if people read it, and better yet, *believe* it. Better still...dare I say **enjoy** it? That's where strategic communication comes in. When done right, an eblast doesn't just convey instructions, information, or basic details. It builds authority, demonstrates competence, and fosters trust. All while reminding your residents that someone capable and kind is running the show. Setting a tone of harmony like a conductor guides the orchestra...that is the goal.

The Trifecta of Connection: Authority, Humanity, Likeability

If you want your emails to land well and not linger unread, you need to strike a balance. The magic happens when your message conveys three key qualities:

- **Authority:** You're the one with the plan. You understand the business at hand, you negotiate with vendors, and yes, you even know who parked in the fire lane (but aren't telling). This is where you demonstrate competence, expertise, and experience. It looks like this, "According to the Design Guidelines..." or "Per the survey results..." or "County code states..."
- **Humanity:** You're also a person. You have a name, a sense of humor, and you put your pants on one leg at a time. This is where you remind people you are not a robot or an ATM machine. It looks like this, "I took a ride through the community after lunch today..." or "I wanted to send a note before I head home..." or "I've been thinking about the parking problems and here's my idea..."
- **Likeability:** People don't have to love you, but it helps if they don't dread hearing from you. This is where you project warmth, insights, and maybe a little vulnerability. It sounds like this, "I understand this topic is tough..." or "We're here in the office if you have questions about..." or "Happily, the fitness room has reopened...have a great workout!"

When all three...Authority, Humanity and Likeability...are working in concert, your messages carry more weight. Residents listen and respond with better results. And sometimes...they stop in or call to express their thanks and appreciation, which really feels great.

The Anatomy of a Winning Eblast

Every part of your message serves a purpose. Done well, it reads like a conversation with a competent friend. Let's break it down:

When it comes to Subject Lines, clear beats clever, but clever *and* clear is ideal.

- "Pool Heater Update: It's Not Dead Yet!"
- "It Stinks, but the Trash Truck is Running Late"
- "A Saga of Sod & Swales: a.k.a. Why Your Yard is So Mushy"

Avoid fear tactics unless it's truly urgent. Residents shouldn't feel like opening your email is a trap or a timebomb. Consider structuring your Subject line the same way each time so your residents become accustomed to it and know it's actually YOU sending it, like so:

[NAME OF THE ASSOCIATION] • Meeting Updates | Trash Pickup | Holiday Hours

A great Opening Line sets the tone and it's important to think carefully about this. Be direct, be truthful, be human. Often attributed to Rumi, *The Three Gates of Speech* dictate three requirements:

Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind?

If one is missing, some reassessment might be needed. Empathy in your opener signals that you understand and you care about their perspective. Serious topics require a more formal tone, versus a staff vacation notice which can be upbeat and light.

- "We know it's not your favorite topic, but it's time to talk trash—literally."
- "Let's solve this pet waste issue together...here's how."
- "Dollar\$ & Sense: The Budget Basics You Need to Know."
- "Surf's Up! The Pool is Open for the Season!"

Write your Body Copy like you are speaking to them. Be clear with critical information. Use bullets and bold text for clarity and emphasis. Assume they're **skimming** and help them find what they need. **Critical text can be written in red.** Anticipate common questions and answer them before you receive a barrage of Reply All commentary and questions. I like to use the standard Who/What/When/Where/Why/How approach from my journalism days. Otherwise known as 5Ws (and an H), this formula for setting up your writing offers facts that help people feel informed. It's the "Why" and the "How" that allow the most latitude to let your personality shine in your communications.

- **What** is happening and **Who** is involved? (*The pool is closed tomorrow for all residents and guests due to pump replacement. The vendor will be onsite for the work.*)

- **When** and **Where** is it happening? (*All day at the main clubhouse pool*)
- **Why** does it matter? (*We're getting ready for the season swim meet and 80's night at the pool; we want to make sure everything is working well*)
- **How** does it affect the readers/residents? (*The bad news: the pool is closed. The good news: it will rain tomorrow. Come to the clubhouse and play chess with your neighbors!*)

Tone is the secret sauce that does the emotional heavy lifting. Here's how to adjust it without losing professionalism. For particularly difficult topics, use strategic empathy. For instance, I try to commiserate with my residents by acknowledging the pain points before they do.

- "We know...it feels like the landscaping project has been underway since pioneer times."
- "No one likes assessment increases, including us. But here's what they're funding."
- "We all care about our friends and neighbors in the community...let's not park in front of driveways."

Humor makes messages more readable and makes you more human. However, it's important to avoid joking about safety, finances, or anything involving fines or legal notices. Keeping it friendly, not flippant, retains your professionalism, their dignity, and mutual respect.

- "If this playground policy was a TV show, we'd be on reruns by now. Here's what's changing in the **final** episode."
- "We survived the Great Pool Filter Meltdown of July. Here's what happens now."

Dealing with the Usual Suspects

Every manager knows them: the Disappointed Diva, the Question Queen, the Follow-Up Frequent Flyer. Maintaining professionalism while managing challenging communicators is essential to success. Anticipate the pushback and pre-answer it in your eblast. Use backfills, gentle repetition of key info in multiple formats, to catch anyone who skimmed past the first line. Good messaging won't eliminate the "I didn't see that" replies, but it will reduce their volume. And it'll give you a solid "See below" when they land in your In-Box anyway. Try to avoid "Per my last eblast..." at all costs, no matter how tempting it may be. There is no way that snarky start comes off in a polite or personable way.

Using images, graphics, and actual photos from the property can help reinforce your message or derail it completely, so **choose wisely** but **DO** choose to use them. Include visuals when relevant and possible, like a diagram of a construction zone or a calendar graphic, but always double check every photo for appropriate content and the right tone. And don't let emojis sneak in unless they're used sparingly and on purpose. One well-placed smiley can charm. Three in a row could be interpreted as overdone and unprofessional. See?

Finally, always close your eblast with a human touch. Polished, polite, and professional signoffs remind residents that real people are behind the message and leave them feeling like a human.

- “More information to come...stay tuned!”
- “Stay cozy on this snowy night.”
- “If you have questions, send them our way.”
- “We’re happy to help here in the office.”

Why This Matters More Than Ever

Every eblast is more than a notice. It’s part of your brand as a professional manager and communicator. A well-written message says: We are capable. We are transparent. We are on your side. We are human. In a time when trust in institutions is shaky at best, every bit of professional, warm, clear communication counts. Especially in the one place people expect to have some control...their own homes and neighborhood. So, the next time you’re drafting an eblast, remember it’s not just about informing. It’s about connecting. When you hit *send* with clarity, kindness, and just a bit of personality, your message travels further, and you come across as the kind of leader people sincerely want to hear from.

BIO:

*Based in the metropolitan Richmond, Virginia area as part of the Goodman Management Group team, **Suzie Popielec** is the onsite community manager for The Groves at New Kent. A PCAM with decades of professional communications and management experience, she is a recognized authority on managing age-restricted, amenity-rich, large-scale, and developing communities. Suzie holds a degree in Marketing Communications and brings a writer’s sensibility to her work, drawing on past roles as a freelance copywriter and former writer for Long & Foster Real Estate’s luxury homes magazine. Suzie is the creator of numerous community publications and websites, an educator/mentor for the CVC-CAI chapter, and a published author for Consensus magazine. The former PR Chairperson for the Central Virginia Chapter of CAI, Suzie is a dedicated advocate for shifting HOA culture by helping managers and stakeholders move beyond the “Adversity Mindset.”*