

7

Shape Effective Experiences and Expectations for Citizenship in Your Group



In this chapter, we finish our unit on communication by explaining how we use it to create and shape experiences. This chapter is about the role your communication can play co-constructing effective group experiences and group direction. Then, in Chapters 8 through 10, we explain how your stories and framings can help a group to thrive. Direction-giving efforts as a doer, follower, guide, manager, or leader are attempts to affect a group's experiences. When you give direction to a team, organization, or community, you change the unfolding story of that group.

❖ **HELP SHAPE STORIES OF EFFECTIVE GROUP EXPERIENCES FOR YOUR GROUP**

Groups maintain themselves and are effective in part through stories members share. These stories describe and shape experiences the group has had, is currently having, or hopes soon or someday to have. You can give direction by helping shape three types of experience stories: ones that create a sense of who we are as a group, ones that give direction to our group, and ones that create an expectation for citizenship action in our group (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 Three Types of Experience Stories You Need to Share as You Group

- You need experience stories that constitute and shape the group’s sense of itself as a group.
- You need experience stories that enhance your group’s sense of direction and effectiveness.
- You need experience stories that create an expectation of citizenship in your group.

Communication functions to help us create and structure our own personal experiences as well as experiences we share with others (Burtis & Pond-Burtis, 2001).

❖ **A HUMAN EXPERIENCE IS A CONSTRUCTED UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IS MEANINGFUL**

Imagine that you and a few friends are asleep in a tent on a camping trip one night. You are awakened by a loud bang outside. “What was that?” you exclaim, disoriented. “I think it’s a bear,” moans your first buddy, awakening reluctantly but fast. A second buddy charges out of the tent brandishing a rifle, then falls to the ground shooting into the night. More bangs follow; the night is briefly bright. “You shot my car!” screams your first buddy as she stumbles out of the tent. “Where is the bear?” you ask, peaking from the tent to see the last of the fireworks display fading from the sky over the nearby town.¹

¹Burtis and Pond-Burtis (2001) use this illustration to discuss how communication relates to experience.

Your actual experience was sleeping while camping, being awakened in the dark by a bang, and then hearing your buddies and a gunshot and seeing light. Communicating, or making meaning about the nature of the experience, is what allows you to make some sense of it. Your meaning-making process begins even as the experience is unfolding. You struggle to interpret and to frame the experience. You use communication to decide what is meaningful.

There is little doubt that you will talk about this experience. That talk will likely continue and evolve over time. After you return from the camping trip and over the years that follow, you may still find opportunities to recount the story. You may use it as a teaching tale to warn your child about the dangers of loaded guns. You may use it as an inspirational story about the patriotic fervor of a small town that shoots fireworks off in the face of marauding bands of bears. Your recollection and retelling of the story may turn what started off as a scare into a humorous anecdote. When a friend remarks, 10 years later, "I would have been scared if I was with you," you may or may not recall your own fear. Both your talk about the experience and the experience itself evolve. Your "actual experience" is transformed into your account and into the uses to which you put that account.

Where does the actual experience begin and end? Is experience just what your body goes through? Is the evolution of thought and talk, the making of meaning that accompanies and continues after the experience, part of the experience as well? We think experience encompasses all these things. Were we to limit our conception to just what the body goes through, then people who have blacked out from excess drink or a blow to the head would be judged as having a more meaningful experience the night they were unconscious than did the person who was with them, trying to keep them alive. Too much focus on what is and is not an "actual experience" can skew or diminish the uses we can make out of an experience.

Something to Think About and Discuss With Others

Experience matters to us only if it is meaningful. The "actual experience" of the body of the dead drunk, Alzheimer's patient, or trauma accident victim can be less meaningful than the symbolic constructions of others who observe and interact with that person. If awareness ever returns to the recently unconscious or briefly lucid, does having had their actual experience give them a better sense of what is meaningful

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than does the account given to them by the observer of what has been happening? A TV show tells about a rape victim who experiences no ill effects because she does not recall her attack. She seems totally unaffected by the trauma, until some lawyers convince her she really is a rape victim (who can testify for them in court) by telling her the story of what happened to her and then showing her footage of something that looks like her attack. Finally, she feels traumatized by an actual experience from years earlier.

Experience is something in which we engage: a focus of our attention and/or energy. Experiences include events where we participate and those where we observe. Experiences include what we get told about, read about, or see on the silver screen. As long as we can sense it and are engaged by it, we are having an experience: firsthand, secondhand, virtual, vicarious. Experiences help us figure out what we think is meaningful. We engage our attention in something and it becomes an experience as we find it meaningful.

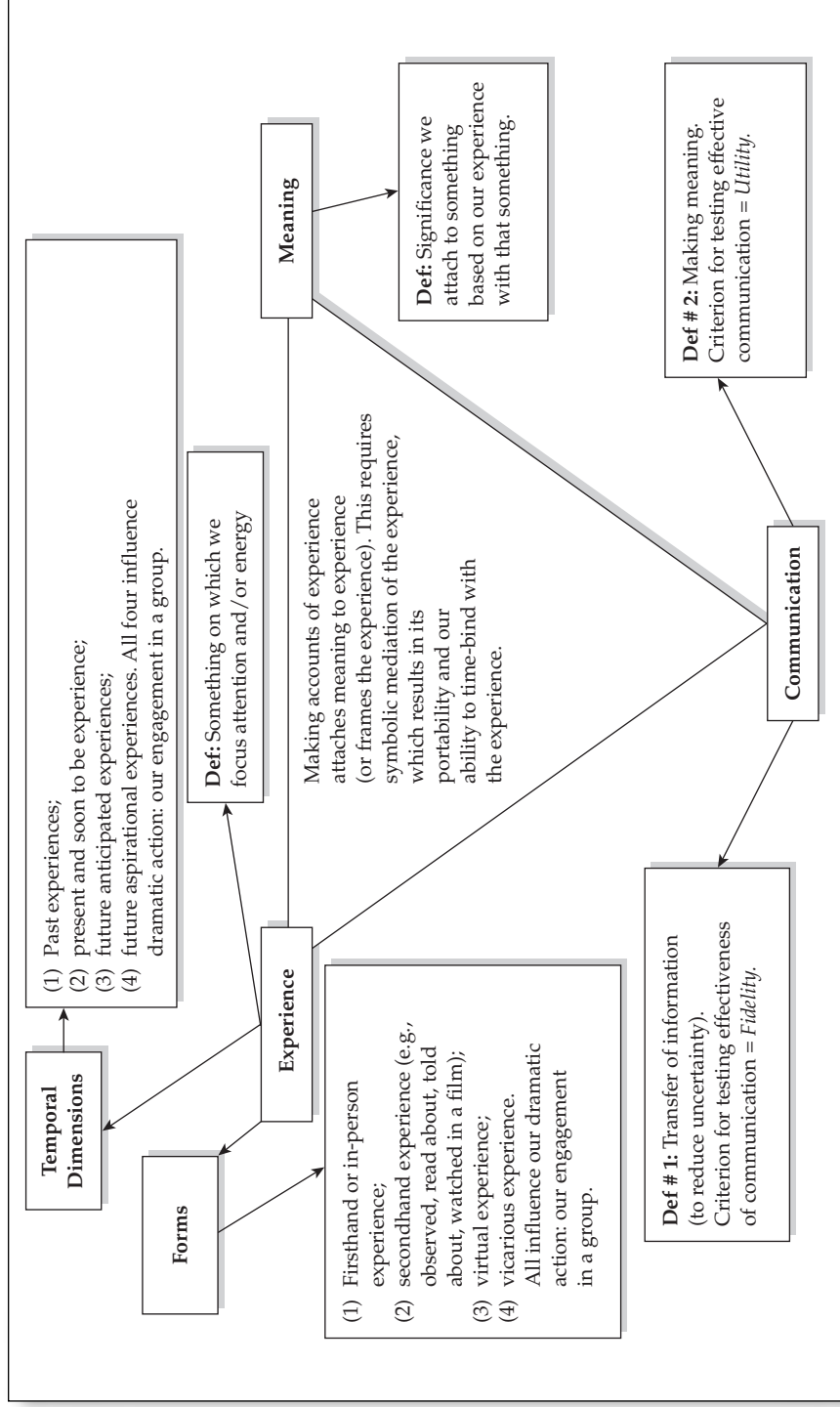
The experiences that become meaningful to a group help shape the group's story. The experiences that concern us in this book range from the most mundane of grouping matters to the life changing: anything that affects the ongoing story of the group's efforts to thrive. We start by discussing your individual experience and then sort out how you make something meaningful out of experiences you share with others.

Communication is how you construct accounts of your own meaningful experience. When you have an experience you think is meaningful, you develop a story or account that frames the experience for you. Your accounts probably focus on what has happened, is happening, or will happen. You are engaging in a normal human process: You translate experience into a symbolic representation you can make use of and share. You construct and make use of accounts.

Meaningful experience requires an account. We symbolically reconstruct experience into an account. An account helps to make sense of our experience. Attaching words to experience is what we do when we need to interpret and frame something meaningful. As we attach words and other framings, we create an account or story that makes experience useable (see Table 7.2). We attach words to an experience so that we can think about it and interact with others about it.

Table 7.2

How Shaping Accounts Integrates Experience, Meaning, and Communication



Any experience is mediated once it gets (re)constructed into symbolic form. Such mediation is an intervention into the experience in order to make sense of it or to make use of it in some way. Such intervention changes the experience. Yes, as we construct an account, the experience affects what we think is important. But at the same time, our ideas about what is important affect the experience.

As we construct understanding from experience, meanings we make become part of the experience. We interpret things even as we experience them: making and sometimes sharing meanings about the experience (e.g., about why it matters) even as it unfolds. For example, a journalist provides commentary on a tragic plane crash as passengers are being rescued. She is shaping meaning for viewers as they are watching events transpire.

As we develop an account, we are often unaware that we are creating something new. What we are doing seems to us to be just the making of an objective account of “what is really happening to those involved in the crash.” However, each intervention is a creation of something new: something somewhat removed from the experience. The journalist might interject her own experience in a plane that nearly crashed, which has little to do with the current event, but can help her frame what is meaningful about it. Her frame gets integrated into our experience of the crash as she narrates the action in her report.

Something to Consider

We *analyze* our experiences by breaking them down to the parts that seem most interesting or relevant to us and then by thinking further about each part (e.g., about how each relates to the big picture). We *critique* experience by creating descriptions, interpretations, and evaluations of it. Both analysis and criticism require *applying words* and *definitions* that *frame* our account of an experience. Analysis, criticism, and application of symbolic forms (words, definitions, and framings) are all selective processes during which we *filter* what we think, say, and do: through our personal values, attitudes, knowledge, perspective, and other experiences. We top off these processes by *constructing our version or account* of an experience. In each of these ways, we intervene: We construct something new out of our experience as we communicate or make meaning about that experience (Chapter 6). Our symbolic constructions begin to represent the experience for us.

To experience is to be enveloped in a process involving perception, interpretation, and adaptation. The thinking about, critiquing, and acting on what is perceived all become part of the experience. *What is meaningful about human experience is less the event than it is a constructed understanding of the event.*

By creating an account of an experience, we strive for what Gregg (1984) calls *fixity*: a somewhat stable and useful representation of experience. Gregg explains that words were invented in the first place to help simplify experiences: “holding them still” enough for us to make sense out of them, to make use of them.

It is difficult to find a moment when there is any separation between an experience and the symbol(s) used to represent it. Communication about an experience and the experience itself are sometimes nearly synchronous. Once the first word or phrase (any symbolizing) is applied, the processes of fixity begin.

Because of fixity, experience is intrinsically tied to communication. A meaning is the significance we give to an experience. It is the interpretation we decide to make of an experience. Interpretation is selecting words we think explain and frame experience. What we interpret and extract as meaningful from experience is whatever engages our attention as the most interesting or useful aspect. *Our account becomes the residue of our experience.* The meanings that we have for anything that we hold dear are a residue of our experiences with that thing. When someone matters to you, it is because of experiences you had or hope to have with this person. When group choices matter to you, it is because of experiences you had or hope to have with the group.

In addition to constructing your own accounts, you also negotiate or co-construct shared accounts for group experiences. When you experience something with someone else, you have to “negotiate” what “really happened” with those who share the experience. That is the case as you discuss the experience, especially if you want to use the shared experience to shape aspirations for the group. Coming to a symbolic convergence in which you agree about interpretations of key group experiences is a basic aspect of direction-giving (see Chapter 6).

The words and framings you personally apply to an experience are your own account. A group uses similar processes to develop its symbolic convergence: shared terms and framings, which comprise the story of the group. These become the group’s “official account”: negotiated meanings, memories, and aspirations that shape the group’s experience story.

For example, groups share accounts of their past² in celebrations, dedications, memorials, and commemorations. They do so to honor the past, to shape the group's story about the past, and to use accounts of the past to serve the group in its present and future. Stories that become official accounts are rhetorical resources for grouping and direction-giving activities.

When two people engage the same something, each likely has a slightly different experience. They attach slightly (or substantially) different meanings. They have to interact to find or create any meaning they share. A group is a co-construction of meanings that people figure out how to share. Nuances and competing interpretations are sorted out. Meanings become shared over time as groups tell and revise (negotiate) stories of past, current, and aspirational experiences. Individual interpretation becomes part of group experience.

By sharing accounts, experiences that interest us get integrated into group experience and begin to provide direction. Experience stories are told to help us form and maintain groups. Experience stories are told to help us provide knowledge and insight that helps our group thrive. For example, existing military strategy evolves from a process of using experience stories to shape future operations. D-Day involved the successful landing on beaches in Normandy due largely to what was learned by the failure of British and Canadian forces to land at the port of Dunkirk years earlier. Failed experience became useful as Allied forces framed a story for future experiences involving attempts to attack unfortified landing zones. Beyond the information they transfer, stories integrate otherwise isolated experiences into the story of our group. *When we create a shared account, we make experience portable*, which allows us to carry the residue of our experience with us into the future.

When you "negotiate" an experience with others who end up disagreeing about what is true or meaningful about the experience, you keep your own interpretation from the interaction. However, if you want to group and to give direction well, you need to understand what your group shapes as its account or experience story. Remember from Chapter 6 that what we say when we attempt to communicate or to give direction is not all that the other person hears. The other person hears you through his or her own accounts and sense of the group's experiences. You need to *consider the likelihood that your message is but a few drops in the flow of the other person's experience*. Crafting your messages well is important for any direction-giver. However, it is at least as

²See Phillips (2004), Bodnar (1992), Hess (2007), Hasian and Carlson (2000), and Hauser (1999).

important for you to have a sense of the unfolding story of your group's experience as others understand it.

Communication allows you to have vicarious experiences and to bind time. You can put experience stories to excellent use in shaping your direction-giving attempts. You can go so far as to use experiences you have not actually had, at least not personally or directly. *Vicarious experiences* are the actual experiences of others that we manage to make our own. We can learn from such experiences, even dread or enjoy them as though we ourselves are participating.

Each of us benefits from vicarious experience, probably beginning from the time a parent or teacher reads us a story or tells us an account of his or her own life experience. For example, firefighters "swap stories after every fire, and by doing so they multiply their experience; after years of hearing stories, they have a richer, more complete mental catalog of critical situations they might confront during a fire and the appropriate responses to those situations" (C. Heath & Heath, 2007, p. 18). The capacity to make use of vicarious or extended experiences is a marvel.

In short, you can have an experience, even if you are not physically present when it happens. Over time, that is how humans preserve and perpetuate civilization. We accomplish something called *time-binding* whenever we transfer an experience from one place to a different place and, by definition, different time (Korzybski, 1933). As we experience something in the moment, we employ time-binding. We use the past to help make sense of the present. To test our current group direction (to decide if we are on the right track), we extrapolate an account from what is happening now to where we will end up in the future. Society is a manifestation of time-binding. What is learned by one generation is passed to the next. Sharing accounts of experiences is how we make experience useable, how we save a residue of the experience and make it portable, and how we bind time.

Groups that maintain themselves over time are stronger according to their ability to time-bind stories of grouping experiences. Think of your family as a continuous grouping experience. Consider its traditions and the time-binding heard during holiday gatherings. What ends a family or group is the loss of any sense of its past. Then, if any remnant of it survives, it is a new group having a fundamentally different experience story because of the loss of its time-bound anchors.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of our abilities to have vicarious experiences and to bind time. They allow us to stretch our understanding beyond limits established by our normal perceptual capacities. Superman might be able to see through a wall, but your sight can be extended by listening to someone from the other side of

the wall describing what is happening there or by reading a story told by someone about what happened there 40 years ago. If the one who tells the story is gifted or we are suitably engaged, we can find our own present and future experience affected by their story. Think of the most effective direction-giver you know. Take away his or her abilities to time-bind (e.g., to learn from his or her own experiences; to share accounts with you) and you disable them.

❖ **STORIES OF PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE EXPERIENCES ARE HOW YOU GIVE DIRECTION TO YOUR GROUP**

Current, past, and future constructions of what is meaningful are integrally related aspects of the experience story we shape for our group. Effective direction-giving involves framing and reasoning “from experience—from prior cases—and we make new decisions by abstracting the essentials from an appropriate prior case. . . . The case from which we reason leads to the framing of our experience” (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996, pp. 71–73). We would not do or say what we are now doing or saying if the past and future were completely separate from the now.

There are past, present, and future aspects to every experience. For example, when we interpret and analyze our present and recent experiences, we do so in part by using words, meanings, and stories that are already familiar because they are meaningful parts of our past. We frame our future according to what is already meaningful. As new experiences change our perspective, we revise interpretations and accounts of our past as well as our framings of the future. The three temporal aspects of experience are integrated throughout the story of any group (see Table 7.2).

Something to Think About and Discuss With Others

The Tennessee Volunteers have one of the most successful basketball programs in the past 35 years under Pat Summit, the “winningest” coach in NCAA history (men or women). As her team competes each year, their present experience is affected by past success (e.g., their ability to recruit top players; expectations for excellence shared by team members, fans, and donors; responses to the team by pundits, opponents, and officials). Both past and present influence the future story for the team (e.g., chances of and aspirations for a ninth national championship or Summit’s

1,000th win; ability to recruit a coaching successor). A loss in the first round of the NCAA tournament means something different to the Vols than to a first-time qualifying team.

How do past successes affect your own group's present experiences and aspirations? How do past struggles? In what ways do your group's aspirations for the future affect its present?

People use experience stories to justify and adjust grouping activities. The direction-giver at any given moment is probably the person who is describing, interpreting, or evaluating some salient aspect of past, current, or future group experience. The potential set of past, recent, concurrent, soon-to-be, and long-term future experiences is mined for information and guidance. We decide which exigencies for grouping are salient based on a combination of past experiences, current experiences, and anticipated or aspirational future experiences.

Many effective direction-givers are people with talent for making use of time-binding and vicarious experience to help shape the story of their group's unfolding experience. Effective direction-giving tends to be a future-oriented activity: a stream of answers to questions about what to do next or how, describing anticipated experiences, and getting the group to consider aspirational experiences.

To tap the rhetorical resource based in future experiences, we need to distinguish between what is anticipated and what is aspirational. Both anticipatory and aspirational experiences can motivate current action, shape or guide current experience, and help us to put past experiences into context. They are also useful in assessing group outcomes. Did we actually accomplish what we said we hoped to accomplish? But they are also different.

Anticipated experiences are future experiences that appear to be within our grasp. They have been projected or planned for and seem to be in sight. There is more certainty attached to these the more closely we come to achieving them. As they become more and more inevitable, until they are finally current and then past experiences, they lose some of their rhetorical force.

Aspirational experiences are future experiences that excite our interest and motivate our actions. They portray improvements we want to try to attain but have not yet got a handle on. A company struggling to land its first major account may motivate employees by emphasizing that a desired client is "within their grasp" or "close enough to taste."

Aspirations, to be compelling, must be different from current, anticipated experience: different enough to be attractive enough that folks feel inclined to stretch themselves in efforts to attain them. The aspirational experience can provide substantial rhetorical force for direction-givers who wield its potential attractions in ways that engage the group. Over time, however, the aspirational, as it is attained, can become anticipated. It can lose some of its rhetorical force, potentially skewing the bar by which future aspirations are set—championships you win can lead your group to start to expect to win.

To tap the rhetorical potential in either sort of future experience requires a compelling and realistic story of that future experience. Then, our future experiences can start to help shape what we do now: what we experience now. When we aspire and then set *goals* that include the substantive, measurable steps needed to attain our aspirations, we can be strongly influenced by our future experience. We can also strongly influence our future experience through our actions intended to breathe life into them. With sufficient time and attention paid to making it a reality, an aspirational experience can become a guiding light for grouping choices.

We evaluate the quality of our grouping efforts and of the direction we have been given by comparing what we are experiencing to our anticipated and aspirational experiences. When we compare our present to our potential for something else, we consider and explore the options that face us. We rehearse the possibilities as we tell stories of future group experiences (Scheibel, Gibson, & Anderson, 2002).

Aspirational stories are rehearsals. Aspirational stories give us a chance to vicariously experience what is not yet: binding time from present to future to back again. Doing so helps us to decide whether we want to partake of a particular future: in particular, whether we want to expend the energy necessary to co-construct that future group experience. Aspirations require change. When they require us to exert more energy than is our norm, they may lose their appeal and our attention unless something spurs us on.

When someone tells a group what they should be doing, that person describes the present experience relative to an alternative. The equation may be as simple as “We are not working; we should be.” Or “This is not how we ever did our inventory before. What is up with you people?” Or “The deadline is upon us and it looks like we will exceed our goal and win the week of free vacation time on the island.” Our response to the experience we are having is filtered through our expectations for that experience. When stories of what we want are not matched by the stories of what we are now experiencing, we become

troubled and begin to wonder how to get back on track or to start to move in a new direction.

If the experience we are supposed to be having, according to our expectations, is not aligned with the experience we think that we are having, that violation of expectations will elicit arousal. Arousal might be energy creating—for example, a group that exceeds its goals for yearly fundraising when it finds out how close it is to doubling the money it expected to raise. Arousal can be dampening or frustrating. Either way, current experience unfolds in an ongoing comparison to anticipated and aspirational experience. We are almost always able to assess current experience as “better than expected” or “not what we imagined” or “worse than our darkest nightmares.”

Try to think of any direction-giving attempt you provide in terms of the experience your messages suggest grouping members ought to be having right now or in the future. Of course, there are particulars you need to convey, but those particulars need to be understood as part of the ongoing, unfolding story your group is already experiencing.

We all know that one set of circumstances can be interpreted and framed in two or more entirely different ways (e.g., as evidence of effective grouping; as evidence of a challenge the group faces; as evidence of impending disaster for the group). So, we have a choice about which account of past, current, and future experience we choose to engage. Whichever way we engage a group creates different dramatic action in the group as the experience story unfolds through the efforts and interactions of group members. Your account of the group’s experience as a direction-giver helps shape the experience that follows. As you attempt to provide direction, the group will be hearing your potential contributions through the filter of how they think what you suggest will affect their experience.

If you do not continually assess, interpret, and frame grouping experiences, you leave that opportunity and rhetorical resource for someone else to use. The group’s experience story will be told. The only question is how you are involved in its co-construction. If you are charged with the responsibility to manage the group or if you are convinced of the need to help provide direction to your group, it is a mistake to absent yourself from the work of shaping the stories of your group’s experience. They can become a group’s official representation of its experience.

If in your opinion all is going well, you should find ways to reinforce existing activity. Your account of what is happening now is part of how you accomplish that task. You cannot simply set an experience into play and expect that it will continue to unfold as you hope. Such a

laissez-faire style is too limited. People talk (as Elton Mayo found with his Hawthorne studies—see Chapter 5). They modify their experience based on the stories they share as they talk.

❖ **CONSTITUTIVE RHETORIC IS HOW YOU
CO-CONSTRUCT A SENSE OF YOUR
GROUP AND OF “THE OTHERS”**

Sometimes we intentionally use a story to try to provide direction. Often, however, sharing accounts unintentionally provides direction. Stories influence cohesion and group climate. They affect the attraction we have to aspects of our task and to desired outcomes.

One of the foundational functions served by telling the stories of grouping experiences is shaping who we are and what we do as a group. *Constitutive rhetoric*³ represents whatever we do in the attempt to create or shape who we are as a grouping entity, what it means to be part of our group, and how we connect who we are to our efforts to act like a group. In short, constitutive rhetoric is how we co-construct our sense of ourselves as a group: for ourselves and for the consumption of interested others.

Constitutive rhetoric places special focus on who we are as a group of people. As we interact together, co-constructing and sharing stories of our grouping experiences, we constitute a sense of ourselves: who we are, what we are, why we are, and how we are. Constitutive rhetoric is employed when a grouping member or direction-giver “projects onto the audience an image of the idealized ‘people’ to whom [he or she] is speaking. This . . . provides the audience with a set of characteristics to value and a set to downplay in identifying with this constitution of a ‘people.’ . . . They are invited to see themselves as a collective with common qualities, experiences, and values, and significantly, a common enemy” (Morus, 2007b, p. 6). We constitute our group by inviting each other to behave “as our people” ought to behave.

³For information on constitutive rhetoric, see, for example, Charland (1987) and McGee (1975). For examples of constitutive rhetoric, see, for example, Charland (1987) and Hahner (2008), who provides a cultural criticism of the “Americanization” practices used to acculturate young immigrant girls into the cultural values of the United States during the period surrounding World War I: a process accomplished through CampFire Girls and Girl Scouts. See Morus (2007a, 2007b) for a discussion of the attempts to create national identity for the Serbian people, and see Roy and Rowland’s (2003) explanation of Hindu nationalism.

Constitutive rhetoric can help shape what we experience by putting a particular framing on what we are and do. It is one thing to face the world as you and another to face it as a freedom fighter, Marxist, feminist, environmentalist, Moslem, Christian, or Jew. Such “idealized people,” constituted by stories of their experiences, provide framings accompanied by pride and preference.

Rivalries between competing schools or sport franchises are formed in such a manner. During the Olympic Games, countries rally around their teams and feel national pride (e.g., in 1980, the United States rallied around its hockey team as it upset a dominant Soviet team). Countries marshal their resources against attack in such a manner—for example, how the United States responded to 9/11 (2001), the Gulf of Tonkin (1964), Pearl Harbor (1941), the sinking of the *Maine* (1898), the Alamo (1836), or when “the British are coming” (1775). Rhetoric used in such situations appeals to your role as a member of the idealized group. It raises then praises the identity of your group. It sings of love and duty: for your team/country and to your team/country. It can have a tremendous effect on the engagement people have in their grouping experience, which affects the dramatic action that later unfolds in the life of the group.

Constitutive rhetoric is also how we co-construct “the others” (e.g., a hated rival, terrorists, communists, the Western democracies, etc.). A key to figuring out who we are is to figure out who we are not. To do that, we need someone, anyone, we can identify as “other than us” or as “an outsider” to our group. The “other” may be fabricated: an idealized other, created as a strategically useful attempt to help us constitute ourselves. Regardless of its source or substance, we need a counterpoint against which to shape our sense of ourselves. (How do you constitute your group’s other: as enemy, competitor, or loyal opposition?)

“Who we are” is constituted in part by what constraints and challenges we face and in part by who opposes us. Every culture, religion, or “founding philosophy” has constitutive aspects, describing who its adherents are as a people. Every such perspective includes a story of struggle and probably of heroes in the cause, as well as enemies. There is always something to battle, always something that pushes against us and makes our progress difficult. Attempts to constitute an “us” are often easier to articulate as we construct the “other than us.” We define ourselves and we define who we are not. Such constitutive rhetoric helps us figure out how to behave.

❖ **HELP SHAPE STORIES OF EXPERIENCE THAT CREATE AN EXPECTATION OF CITIZENSHIP IN YOUR GROUP**

Effective groups must co-construct experience stories that engage people sufficiently for the group to succeed. One type of experience story needed in every long-lived group is a story that helps create a sense of our duty to our group as citizens.

The obligation of citizenship is for members to help co-create the direction a group takes. This means helping others in the group figure out what we need to do so that our group can thrive. One person's efforts to help a group thrive tend to stimulate interactions among other grouping members. The success of groups, what makes some of them thrive as others wither, is always, fundamentally, the result of *human engagement*. People engage a group by trying to create a successful experience through their attention, action, and interaction. As others engage the group, their efforts manifest as shared dramatic action created through engaged interaction. A group is effective because engaged citizen-members co-construct the experiences that make it so.

❖ **CITIZENSHIP EXPERIENCE STORIES STIMULATE PARTICIPATION, CRITICISM, AND REASONED CONFORMITY**

Citizenship is a term traditionally used to represent enumerated obligations and privileges that come from being a "member of a country" (e.g., for male U.S. citizens, residency, registering with selective service at age 18, voting, habeas corpus, and free assembly). Formal citizenship is of less interest to us than is the social contract we explain in Chapter 1.

A social contract is an informal calculation. If you are able to move along in life in part because of the power and flow of a group, then you owe that group. In this sense, *citizenship* is your duty to "give back," to help your group thrive. To do so, you must engage your group.

Your engagement should always include some form of (1) participation, (2) constructive criticism, and (3) reasoned conformity (Gastil, 1992, 1993). These are acts of citizenship regardless of the type of direction-giving you provide the group, including if you act as a follower (see Chapters 1 and 2). Who is better situated than group members to criticize and to create improvement in grouping processes and objectives?

What becomes of a group if its members do not participate? How can a group succeed if members refuse to blend their efforts: to conform in reasoned ways so they can work with each other? Participation, constructive criticism, and reasoned conformity are necessary aspects of your engagement in a group (i.e., conforming by blending your own ethically appropriate, authentic, and functionally necessary energies and actions with the efforts of others). These acts help give direction to your group (Burtis & Turman, 2006). They are the heart of your ability to behave as an engaged and effective citizen.

A social contract obligates people to each other. It obligates the members to the group and the group to its members. A group member should not act entirely as an independent or sovereign agent because grouping people are *interdependent*. Each member's acts affect the others. We all give up some of our autonomy to blend our efforts into the group. That sacrifice obligates others in the group to contribute as well. None of us should be deprived of or spared from the efforts and fruits we should be able to reasonably expect from our group experience.

Understanding recurring types of poor citizenship refines our understanding of what citizenship requires. The obligation for each individual to try to help the group is why we judge poorly any social loafers, passive members, and saboteurs. The social loafer's *nonfeasance*, or failure to perform expected acts, takes energy from the group. The passive member's *acquiescence*, or meek and mindless submission to others, takes quality from the group. The saboteur's active attempts to unravel the work of the group are counterproductive to the shared processes and purposes of grouping. *Malfeasance* is doing acts that cannot be justified because they are contrary to grouping processes or goals. *Misfeasance* is the abuse of supposedly good grouping acts or supposedly good grouping processes to accomplish one's own ends. All of these reduce the ability of the group to thrive by depriving the group of an appropriate contribution.⁴

Think of your life experiences as a worker, boss, family member, or student: in whatever role you play on a team or in an organization or community. Your experience will show you that you are better at what you are supposed to do when you are surrounded by others trying to do what they are supposed to do. You and your efforts can be diminished or even hurt when others are not interested or are distracted.

Regardless of the reasons, each of us is enhanced in our own efforts by others in the group, or we are diminished. So, if someone is not willing

⁴In Chapter 2, we explain that a follower, an active and important type of direction-giver, is neither a passive member nor a social loafer.

to fulfill the social contract, it can be better to divorce our efforts from theirs rather than to let their actions become our model or our group norm. We may struggle along without everyone always providing what they ought. But no group can handle too many social loafers, passive members, or malcontents.

Intentional efforts to help a group to thrive do not happen spontaneously. Taking citizenship seriously requires a group to indicate how its members ought to engage. The issue will probably be raised indirectly in the stories grouping members exchange about their experiences. Such stories share a sense of expectations for the citizen-member.

More direct approaches are also in order. This entails experience stories constructed specifically to create an explicit expectation of citizenship. You will hear such stories shared among members of any team that expects to win. You will hear them shared in any family that tries to be supportive. You hear a version in any organization that seeks to create a product and make a profit. No group attains its best fruits through efforts of only a few. Stimulating the engagement of many requires stories of responsibility that the group experience needs to entail.

If this sounds complicated, remember how communication helps us create and shape experiences. All that is needed to begin is to show a positive orientation toward this obligation. We create expectations of citizenship by sharing accounts and experiences that show our social contract is in play. When we share experiences and stories that demonstrate that we share a social contract, it helps create a sense of accountability for co-constructing the group experience. By shaping and sharing experiences that help the group thrive in the moment, we help the group to be effective and to continue to thrive over the long haul.

❖ **HOW GROUPS PERPETUATE THEMSELVES SHAPES THE EXPERIENCE OF CITIZEN-MEMBERS**

Groups perpetuate themselves through processes members engage for doing so. Bormann (1983) explains that you need to help your group attain three key types of convergence. *Consciousness-creating* experiences help constitute the group's sense of itself (e.g., who we are as a group; why we matter as a group). If the group survives long enough for its members to create a symbolic convergence around their shared sense of the nature and importance of the group, it becomes harder for the group to be undone and easier for grouping members to continue their efforts.

Consciousness-raising is accomplished through experiences that inculcate new people into what is meaningful in the group. This includes

recruiting and/or socializing new members and, if necessary, shaping experiences that help nonmember stakeholders understand why the group is important to support. *Consciousness-sustaining* experiences help established members celebrate successes and recall why it is important to them to continue to group. Taking part in the co-construction of these three key types of symbolic convergence experiences is an aspect of your citizenship participation. It is also a way to strengthen your engagement in the group and to help provide direction to your group.

We find examples of these experiences writ large and small in most groups. Whole countries use formal systems of education to inculcate values into the young that can perpetuate the culture of the country when the young mature and take over. Smaller communities use parades and other celebrations to instill and perpetuate their sense of what is important to them about themselves. Organizations house offices of communications or hire public relations firms to shape their narratives for various internal and external publics. Families share stories across generations. Teams retire numbers, field mascots, and otherwise attempt to shape stories that their various publics will find sufficiently compelling to engage. All seek to perpetuate, to time-bind, the values and processes their group has converged upon as “us.”

❖ **PLAY YOUR PART AS A CITIZEN OF YOUR GROUP**

Effective grouping requires “articulate advocacy” and coordinated action so citizenship does too. *Advocacy* involves expressing your concerns or ideas. It is accomplished by developing your position: developing your reasoning and finding evidence that supports your idea. Making and stating your case gets your advocacy articulated to others for their consideration. Advocacy can also manifest as a follower’s support for or promotion of the concerns or ideas expressed by others (see Chapter 2).


Advocacy is not limited to making speeches or formal written messages, though those certainly can be useful. Much of our advocacy is found in the day-to-day interactions we share, including in the interpretations, framings, and stories we select and try to use to shape our grouping experiences. Advocacy is affected by the impression we create of ourselves, which lends weight to or detracts from what we have to say. Advocacy is found in the words we choose to use and the definitions and meanings we seek to get others to share.

A citizen is an advocate who is putting a part of himself or herself into whatever case he or she makes while engaging a group. The

phrase *articulate advocacy* represents the well-reasoned and supported parts of your case that you present to others. But your advocacy includes all of how you try to get your sense of things integrated into grouping activities, group direction, and the story of your group’s experience.

How well you succeed in your advocacy is based in part on how well you understand your group’s story. That, to an extent, is a function of how fully engaged you allow yourself to become in the group (see Table 7.3). Ignorance makes it hard to appropriately engage the values the group struggles to sort out. Ignorance is not stupidity. Ignorance about aspects of the group’s story may simply mean that you need to hear more stories and share more grouping experiences. You have to deeply engage a group to play such an important role.

Table 7.3 Engagement in the Group and the Ignorant Citizen^a

<p>The “ignorant” citizen has a deficiency in some aspect of his or her engagement in the group. Citizenship is the obligation to help your group to thrive. This includes engagement in the co-constructions and reconstructions of your group’s story/experience: past, present, and future.</p>	
<p>Citizen engagement ranges from lower (most ignorant) to higher levels</p>	
<p>Lower levels of group engagement</p>  <p>Higher levels of group engagement</p>	<p>Level 1: Affiliate with group or with a member of the group</p> <hr/> <p>Level 2: Behave according to a primary group ideology (e.g., voting): Following the ideology is a citizenship shortcut—it does not require you to really engage the group or understand, gather, and test information on group issues</p> <hr/> <p>Level 3: Engage at a beyond-the-surface ideological level (i.e., engage ongoing decisions about what should be done and what would be meaningful to the group)</p> <hr/> <p>Level 4: Help co-construct the group’s ideological soup (i.e., engage the ongoing struggle, sorting out what should be the most basic of group values)</p>

a. This terminology is informed by research in which scholars attempt to develop journalistic practices that will inform and engage a citizenry (Porto, 2007).

If you do not, an ignorant but effective advocate can do as much damage to a group as a saboteur.

Everyone in a group works for or against the group. Among grouping people, neglect is never benign. A *citizen-member* is someone who intentionally attempts to help co-construct a thriving group. We use terms such as *duty* and *social contract* to frame the orientation of this person, distinguished by the sense that she or he is a co-creator of the story of the group's experience.

❖ IN CONCLUSION

All group members should think of themselves as having both the duty and opportunity to contribute to their group. To do so is an act of humanity because we share the imperative to develop relationships with one another and because we sometimes share exigencies for action that we can only address together. Any experience story that gives a group the direction it needs is an important story. This includes stories that help constitute who we think we are as a people, stories that help us succeed and thrive, and stories that create an expectation of citizenship for our group. Who will do that work if you do not?