



SIRA

(Situation/Implications/Recommendations/Action)
A Communication Framework for Inspiring Leaders

By Katherine Ebner

Have you ever struggled with how to get everyone on the same page in a meeting and move from discussion to meaningful action? Often, teams and committees get stuck in “update mode,” going around the room with each person listing recent accomplishments. While this kind of information is useful, it doesn’t drive action and doesn’t necessarily lead to results.

Whether you are the official leader or a motivated participant in a meeting, you can dramatically improve the focus and outcomes of every meeting or email by using the SIRA framework to tee up important topics. Here is how it works:

S What is the Situation?

Begin by providing a brief overview of the situation at hand. Take time to think this through before the meeting. You want to give a summary of the situation that includes all points of view in an objective, comprehensive, and succinct manner. Remember that you are not building a case; instead, you are simply stating the facts of the situation, making sure that all listeners hear their own concerns outlined.

situation! You may experience this as confusion about what is being discussed or a sense that the conversation is disconnected or has gone off on a tangent. By outlining the implications of the situation, you bring focus, clarity and common agreement about the importance of addressing the situation.

After you have outlined the implications, you can ask the group: Are there any other implications that I missed? Most likely, there are a few. When you have a complete understanding of the implications of the situation at hand, you can move to recommendations.

I What are the Implications?

What are the implications of the situation that you just described? If the situation is left undressed or unresolved, what will happen? If a deadline is missed or a decision is not made, what are the consequences?

Often, groups move too quickly from situation to problem solving. The problem is that each person in the group prioritizes a different element of the

R Recommendations

Now that everyone is on the same page, you can share your recommendations about how to address the situation. While you may want to invite the group to generate recommendations, you will save time if you have given this advance thought and have some preliminary recommendations to

offer. You can share them by simply saying, “I’d like to begin to move us towards action by offering some recommendations. I’ve given this some thought and prepared a few ideas. I’m sure others will have input and suggestions to help us get to the actions we want to take. Here are my recommendations:” (then outline them simply and succinctly).

A Actions

By now, you have found agreement about the situation and its implications. You have discussed recommendations. Usually, the immediate actions become apparent. However, this is not always the case. Again, you will want to come to the meeting with some action steps in mind. You may choose to adapt them a bit in light of the discussion of the group.

Begin by summarizing the discussion thus far in order to bring people along with you and make sure that everyone knows you’ve heard their views. Be neutral and objective as you do this summary. Once you have offered your summary, ask, “Did I miss anything?” Acknowledge any new points, but don’t let the conversation get drawn back into the discussion. Instead, aim for agreement about actions or next steps. This dialogue might sound like:

YOU: We’ve been talking about the XYZ situation. We agree that if we don’t address it this week, the situation may worsen and we may even lose the opportunity. We need to act quickly. As a group, we recommend that this situation be treated as a priority. Based on our discussion of recommendations, I propose the following next steps....”

You can outline possible next steps and then ask: “How does that sound?”

Make sure that you have clear agreement and enrollment from those who are accepting responsibilities. This means asking them if they would be able/willing to do the request rather than just assuming that they will. To make a clear request, you will want to articulate:

- Specifics of the request
- Who is doing what
- By when
- To Whom
- Conditions of Satisfaction

Do pause to make sure that each person has agreed to take the action. If someone is not able or willing to take the next step, ask “what would work better for you?” or “how else could we accomplish this by next Tuesday?” Invite the group to solve that specific problem.

In summary, the key to moving a group to action and results is NOT to be the boss; it is to have the ability to frame the situation and implications, make compelling and logical recommendations and gain agreement about specific actions or next steps. Each step of this process provides an opportunity for leadership, influence and safeguarding momentum and outcomes.



Katherine Ebner is the CEO and Founder of The Nebo Company, a leadership consultancy based in Washington, D.C., and Founding Director of Georgetown University’s Institute for Transformational Leadership, where she also serves on the faculty of the Leadership Coaching Program. Formerly a change leader in higher education and international business, Kate specializes in helping leaders transform their own leadership, organizations and outcomes through passion, commitment, communication and vision.



The Nebo Company
nebocompany.com • 202.537.3201

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