



Mastering HOA Communication

Expert strategies from HOA executives to build trust, resolve conflicts, and strengthen communities



Before We Begin... 🙄

Sound familiar? This is exactly why we're here today.

Watch this short video of an HOA board member who means well — but whose communication style leaves just a little to be desired. (Okay, a lot.)



Watch the video →

Don't worry — by the end of today, no one will be walking away confused.



Meet the Panel

Three leaders sharing practical strategies for HOA communication, alignment, and community trust.

COMPASS ROSE

Donald "Donny" Disbro

Donald "Donny" Disbro brings nearly 27 years of experience in HOA and property management leadership. Prior to joining Communitas, the parent company of Compass Rose Management, in 2018, he spent 17 years with Professional Community Management, where he served as CEO of PCM of California and oversaw major portfolio growth and large-scale community operations. Donny has extensive experience working with master-planned community developers including Pulte/Del Webb, The Irvine Company, and Brookfield. He holds a BS in Business Administration and an MBA from Chapman University. Outside of work, Donny enjoys pickleball and biking with his wife and spending time with his family.

MANAGEMENT TRUST

Chera Wolfe

I'm an executive community manager at The Management Trust with nearly two decades of experience supporting HOAs through financial management, homeowner assessments, and day-to-day operations. Prior to joining the Trust, I spent eight years running my own community management company. When I'm not working with communities, you'll usually find me buried in a book — I read at least one every week.

COMUNEO SERVICES

Heather Miller, CMCA

Heather Miller, CMCA is the CEO of Comuneo Services, a community association management company with more than 42 years in business. She leads a team of 30 staff members and has nearly two decades of experience in HOA and community management. Heather specializes in relationship-driven leadership, communication systems, conflict resolution, and customer service-focused management strategies, helping boards and communities work together through clear communication, transparency, and strong operational support.

Why This Conversation Matters

Communication is where trust is built, stress is reduced, and stronger communities begin.



Breakdowns start here

Most HOA conflicts begin with communication breakdowns.



Less stress, less risk

Good communication reduces liability and stress.



People remember how

Homeowners remember how they were communicated with.



Stronger together

Strong communication creates stronger communities.



Leadership in action

Communication is leadership — not just messaging.

SECTION 01

Foundations of HOA Communication

Setting the stage for everything that follows

DONALD DISBRO · COMPASS ROSE

Why Communication Matters in HOAs



Relationship-Driven

HOAs work best when trust and cooperation lead the way



Miscommunication Causes Conflict

Most issues start with unclear expectations, not bad intent



Protects Everyone

Clear communication supports the association, the board, and management

The Role of Management in Effective Communication

1

Board Decides

01

Management as the Hub

Not the bottleneck. The connector between board decisions and community clarity.

2

Management Translates

02

Translating Decisions

Converting board resolutions into clear, actionable communication for homeowners.

3

Community Understands

03

Buffer & Facilitator

Absorbing friction, maintaining professionalism, and keeping all parties informed.



SECTION 02

What Great Communication Looks Like

Standards, outcomes, and everyday excellence

Core Communication Standards



Regular Updates

Consistent, scheduled communication keeps everyone informed



Board Packet Reports

Thorough, organized packets before every meeting



Same-Day Phone Acknowledgment

Every call acknowledged the same day it's received



48-Hour Email Response

All emails responded to within 48 business hours



Complete Responses

No partial answers — address every question fully

What Strong Communication Creates



Trust

Homeowners and boards feel confident in their management team



Faster Resolutions

Issues get resolved before they escalate into conflicts



Less Burnout

Clear systems reduce stress for managers and volunteers alike



Happier Communities

When people feel heard, neighborhoods thrive

The communities that communicate well are the ones people are proud to call home.

Email Best Practices That Actually Work

HOA Name + Topic in Subject Line

Make every email instantly identifiable and searchable

New Topic = New Thread

Never bury a new issue in an existing email chain

One Issue Per Email

Keep communication focused and easy to act on

Clear, Complete Responses

Answer every question — don't leave anything hanging

Avoid Long Reply-All Chains

Reply-all creates noise. Keep distribution intentional.

AUDIENCE EXERCISE

The Angry Email

⚠️ "This is the THIRD time I've emailed about the pool gate. It's been broken for two weeks. Nobody responds. This is completely unacceptable and I'm considering contacting the city."

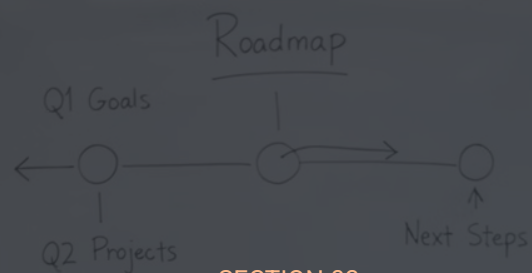
✗ Worst Response

"We've been very busy and will get to it when we can."

✓ Best Response

"Thank you for following up. I apologize for the delay — this should have been addressed sooner. The gate repair is scheduled for [date]. I'll confirm once it's complete."

What makes the best response work? What would you add or change?



SECTION 03

Moving from Reactive to Proactive

Getting ahead of the conversation

Proactive vs. Reactive Communication

Reactive

- Waiting for problems to surface
- Responding only when asked
- Communicating after delays happen
- Boards left in the dark

Proactive

- Setting expectations early
- Sending updates even when there's no change
- Communicating delays before they become surprises
- Keeping boards consistently informed

✓ Proactive communication isn't extra work — it's the work that prevents bigger work later.

Goal Setting & Project Communication



Define Expectations Upfront

Establish communication milestones and reporting schedules before the project begins



Scheduled Reporting

Regular check-ins and status updates at defined intervals — no surprises



Defined Responsibilities

Everyone knows who communicates what, to whom, and when



Reduce Confusion

Clear upfront communication eliminates the most common sources of project friction

✓ The best time to set communication expectations is before anyone needs them.

A background image of a modern office lounge. Several people in business attire are socializing. Some are standing and talking, while others are seated on a light-colored sofa and armchairs. The room has large glass windows and a clean, minimalist aesthetic.

AUDIENCE EXERCISE

Three-Word Meeting

Describe your last board meeting in exactly three words.

Turn to your neighbor. Go.

A modern office interior featuring a large, light-colored conference table with several ergonomic office chairs. In the background, there is a glass-walled meeting room and a white shelving unit with various office supplies. The scene is dimly lit, with light coming from the windows on the right.

SECTION 04

Building Communication Systems

Structure that scales and sustains

HEATHER MILLER · COMUNEO SERVICES

Building a Communication System That Actually Works

Without a System

- Constant interruptions
- Missed information
- Emotional reactions
- Confusion and frustration

With a System

- Clear expectations
- Faster responses
- Better documentation
- More trust

"Good communication isn't about being available 24/7. It's about creating predictable systems people can rely on."

— Heather Miller

Communication Expectations & Boundaries

Not Every Issue Is an Emergency

Urgency should be defined, not assumed. Help boards and homeowners calibrate expectations.

Define Response Expectations Upfront

Set clear timelines before anyone needs to use them.

Consistency Over Speed

Consistent, reliable responses build more trust than instant but erratic ones.

Healthy Boundaries Protect Everyone

Clear limits protect managers from burnout and volunteers from overreach.

Clear Expectations Reduce Frustration

Most frustration comes from unmet expectations — not unmet needs.



SECTION 05

Communication in Action

Meetings, conflict, and real-world application

Meetings, Reports & Follow-Up

Great communication doesn't end when the meeting does. Reports and follow-up are what turn discussions into action.

01

Clear, Concise Reports

Summaries of key issues — not data overload. Board members are volunteers with limited time.

02

Post-Meeting Recaps

Send a summary of decisions made, action items assigned, and deadlines established.

03

Documentation for the Future

Thorough records reduce future disputes and create an institutional memory for your community.

Communication During Conflict or High Emotion

When emotions run high, your communication approach matters more than ever.

Stay Factual & Calm

Lead with facts, not feelings. Stick to what happened, what's being done, and what comes next.

Avoid Defensiveness

Acknowledge concerns without taking things personally. Validation doesn't mean agreement.

Know When to Pick Up the Phone

If an email thread escalates past two rounds, switch to a call. Tone is lost in text.

Acknowledge First, Inform Second

People need to feel heard before they can hear you. Lead with empathy.

✅ Good communication de-escalates. Most heated situations cool down when people feel genuinely heard and respected.

AUDIENCE EXERCISE

Role Reversal

⚠️ "A homeowner receives a violation letter about a fence stain. They're upset — they didn't know it was a problem."

Homeowner's Perspective

- Nobody told me this was a violation
- The letter felt cold and impersonal
- I've lived here 12 years — I deserve a conversation
- I feel like I'm being treated like a number

1 Board's Perspective

- We're enforcing the rules consistently for everyone
- The letter was sent per our standard process
- We can't make exceptions — it's not fair to others
- We didn't realize how it would land emotionally

What communication approach could have prevented this situation entirely?

The Board's Role in Successful Communication



Respect Communication Protocols

Follow the systems that have been established. Consistency starts at the top.



Speak with One Voice

Avoid mixed messages. The board communicates as a unified body, not as individuals.



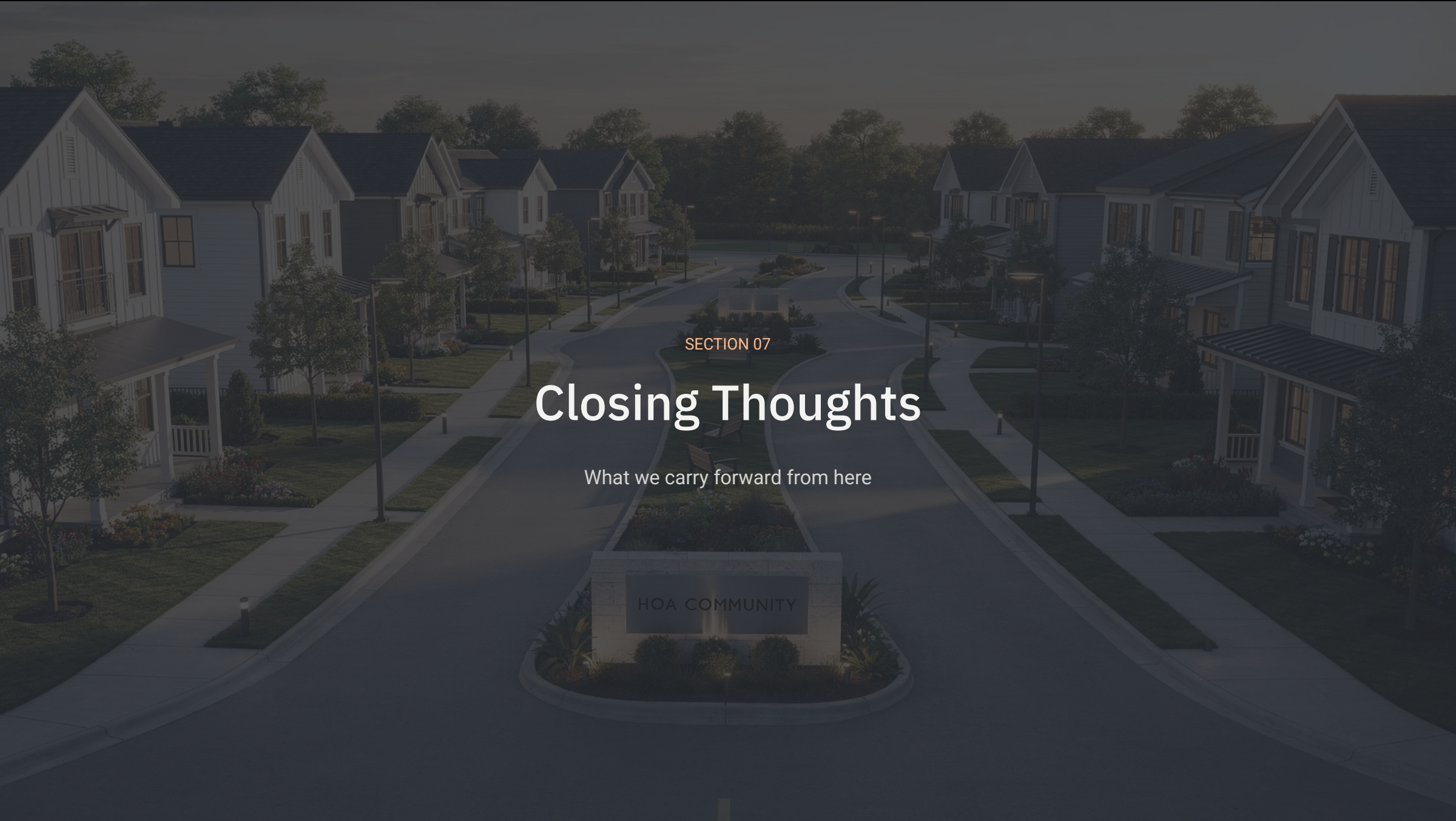
Support Management's Processes

Trust the systems. Reinforce communication standards rather than bypassing them.



Model Good Behavior

Boards set the tone. How you communicate shapes how everyone else communicates.

An aerial view of a modern residential community at dusk. The scene shows a winding road with sidewalks, flanked by rows of light-colored, two-story houses with dark roofs. The houses have large windows and some have small porches. The road is illuminated by streetlights, and there are trees and landscaping along the sidewalks. In the foreground, a stone pillar with the text 'HOA COMMUNITY' is visible. The overall atmosphere is calm and well-maintained.

SECTION 07

Closing Thoughts

What we carry forward from here

HEATHER MILLER · COMUNEO SERVICES

Closing Thoughts



Communication Is a System

Not a personality trait. It can be built, refined, and improved by anyone.



Clear Expectations + Consistency = Success

The formula is simple. The discipline is the work.



Build Trust Before Problems Happen

Good communication is proactive infrastructure, not reactive damage control.



When Boards & Management Communicate Well, Communities Thrive

This is the outcome we're all working toward.

Thank you for the work you do. The communities you serve are better because of it.

FINAL QUESTION

If you could send one
message to every homeowner
in your community tomorrow
— and knew they'd actually
read it — what would it say?

Thank you for being here. Now go build something great.