

## **LGLA Scenario Councillor (Joan) Skilled Communicator**

Jack grew up in the community and has lived in his current house with his wife for over 25 years. The house is in a more rural part of the community and is where they raised their family. They are now empty-nesters and the neighbourhood has built up though it continues to maintain a rural atmosphere.

A property beside Jack's was vacant for over a year before it was purchased about six months ago by an owner who is new to the community. At first, Jack and his wife were pleased that they would have new neighbours anticipating the adjoining property would be tidied up and some of the obvious repairs to the house would be made.

The new neighbour operates a small trucking firm and now has a cargo van, a pick-up truck and two cube trucks parked on the property. The van and cube trucks are obviously "second hand" and the colour scheme of their previous owner is still recognizable. In the past few weeks the neighbour has acquired an excavator/backhoe with trailer suggesting that he is expanding the business.

Traffic has increased greatly to the property often late at night and in the early morning. It appears that the neighbour is letting other truckers park their vehicles on the property for short periods of time.

The fence and garden are still in disrepair while the house continues to look in need of repair and paint, new eaves cleaned and likely a new roof. To Jack, the house and property doesn't reflect "pride of ownership" nor "respect for the neighbourhood."

Prior to Jack raising this issue with Councillor Joan, no issues with the property had been raised – it wasn't on anyone's radar and no official complaint had been made.

Jack wants the property cleaned up and the "commercial trucks" and other equipment removed immediately.

### **Skilled Communicator's preparation (Councillor Joan):**

While you are unaware of this issue prior to Jack approaching you in the grocery store parking lot, you aren't surprised when residents raise issues with you in public places. You are in your second term as a councillor and pride yourself in being open and accessible – you campaigned on the theme "making City Hall work for you!"

You also know that there are often "several sides" to any issue and you have been burned in the past by leaping to conclusions. You also know that to attract new residents and small businesses, Council had decided to try and attract entrepreneurs by requesting staff to apply existing bylaws with a "slightly more expansive" interpretation. You recall that staff cautioned Council that this direction could generate conflict among property owners but agreed to move forward with the direction.

From your experience fielding issues, you are aware that in some situations, one particular bylaw is more appropriate than another – and often more than one bylaw may play a part (e.g., it may be the "unsightly" bylaw and/or the business licence bylaw that needs to be considered).

You have also known Jack for over 20 years and your children are about the same age. You often attend school functions along with Jack and his wife and Jack was the pee-wee hockey coach for all three of your sons – he has been a great influence in their lives.

### **Skilled Communicator's preparation (Councillor Joan):**

As you are being approached in a parking lot you really don't have time prepare a strategy for this conversation but you can still use the basic steps for having a good interaction by seeking to understand Jack's issue before you try to respond. This is a time when asking "curious questions" can be very useful.

Jack may greet you in a relatively friendly manner asking about your sons or he may simply launch into the issue that is causing him distress – you need to be ready for either initial approach.

**Actual conversation:**

1. Start with a response that reflects Jack’s level of emotion:
  - a. If he starts with a friendly question about your sons, respond accordingly – but then ask him how he (and his wife) are doing – give him a chance to raise any issue that may be holding; and,
  - b. If he immediately begins with intensity, you will want to begin your response from a listening stance to let Jack feel that he is being heard – you won’t have to say very much but you will want to be nodding your head and encouraging Jack to tell you all he has to say.
  
2. **Clarifying the issue(s):** once Jack seems to be “slowing down”, you have the opportunity to ensure you clearly understand the issue(s) that are bothering him – remember his initial complaint may not be the most significant nor the entire issue. Ask him questions that enable him to surface any other issues and reframe what he is saying to ensure you have heard him correctly:
  - a. What else is happening related to the property or business that you feel isn’t right?
  - b. Is there anything else that is causing you concern?
  - c. OK, let me make sure I am hearing you – (paraphrase or reframe what Jack has said – possibly in simpler or more direct statements) – have I got that right or am I still missing something? – keep doing this reframing until Jack acknowledges “you have got it”. You want to be sure you have a clear understanding before you move on.
  
3. **Identifying what Jack has done to date:** once Jack appears confident you understand his issues, you will want to find out what specific actions he has taken to find redress to his issues. Before you try to troubleshoot, you want to be confident that you have a complete picture of the issue(s). You could start with a couple of questions prefaced with a comment like, “OK, just a couple of questions so I better understand where we stand right now.”
  - a. Have you approached your new neighbour about your concerns? (If so, how has he responded?)
  - b. Have you talked with any of the other neighbours (If so, what are their concerns)?
  - c. Have you talked with anyone at City Hall (If so, who and what did they say)?
  
4. **Moving to action:** you will want to assure Jack that you appreciate his concerns and are taking them seriously. At the same time, you want to avoid making promises you can’t keep or offer solutions that may not work – particularly because you still can’t be sure you have all the information. .

**ISSUE:** “What’s going on here?”  
“What are the issues from your point of view?”  
“What’s the main issue as you see it?”

**SOLUTION:**  
“What would be a possible solution that would work for everyone – you, the neighbour and the other residents?”  
“What else could we do to improve the situation?”

**ACTION PLAN:**  
“What kind of a plan would we need to make this happen?”  
“What else would we need to do?”