




collaboration  
culture  
**communication**  
courage

**The 4C's** behind the  
business of child nutrition





## Communication workbook 03

NextUp has partnered with LINQ to explore the 4 C's behind child nutrition. The 4 C's include:

- collaboration
- culture
- communication
- courage

The ability to communicate well is critical in any field, and that's certainly true of school food service professionals.

In the third installment of "The 4 C's Behind the Business of Child Nutrition," a four-part video series hosted by [NextUp](#) and moderated by Shannon Solomon, a renowned, passionate leader in the restaurant business and K-12 education industries, school nutrition professionals discuss the importance of communicating effectively with a wide range of stakeholder groups to support their core mission of feeding students. They also provide examples of how they communicate within their own school systems and share advice with their peers.



### Meet the Panel

From Left: Shannon Soloman, Jessica Shelly, Roy R. Pistone II, Katie Cossette

## Communication summary

### PANEL MODERATOR

**Shannon Soloman**  
School Nutrition Professional

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*"Every Friday morning, I host a Zoom meeting where staff can come in and touch base with me. Managers can jump on when they're prepping their kitchens for the day to chat and ask any questions that pop up."*

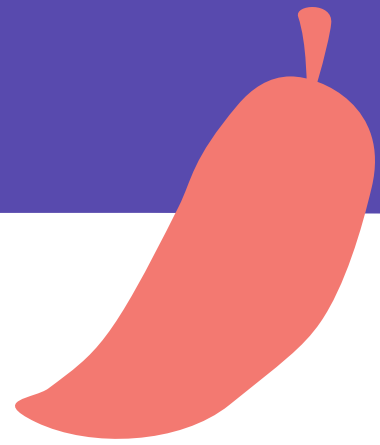
Savvy leaders understand the importance of communicating well with their team members, among various departments districtwide, and also with external partners.

Strong communication ensures that school food service teams are on the same page and that employees are all pulling in the same direction to fulfill their mission. It enables team members to work together effectively and solve problems collaboratively as challenges arise.

But it's not just communication with food service employees that is important. Child nutrition leaders also must build relationships and communicate well with others throughout the district, as well as externally. As panelist Roy R. Pistone II notes, *"Your school board can become your biggest cheerleaders if they know what's going on in your department and the challenges you face."* This awareness is only possible when leaders are communicating effectively and serving as advocates for their food service programs districtwide.

During a panel discussion, Pistone and his colleagues Jessica Shelley and Katie Cossette consider what effective communication looks like within child nutrition programs.

Keep reading to hear more from the conversation!



## Reaching different audiences

### FEATURED SPEAKER

#### Jessica Shelley

MBA, SNS, REHS, Director of Student Dining Services for Cincinnati Public Schools in Ohio



A key challenge in communicating with various stakeholder groups is knowing which methods they respond to the best—and which channels are the most effective for reaching them.

*"I find that the students in my district are paying attention to sources like TikTok, but parents would prefer that snail mail letter,"* says Shelley.

In a [survey conducted](#) by the Center for American Progress, parents, teachers and school leaders reported high value in the communication systems their district used. Survey results also indicate that individualization—regardless of how technologically advanced—mattered the most in value perceptions. Parents reported using fewer methods than teachers and school leaders, suggesting that parents may not find all available systems at their school effective.

This is in line with the panelists' experiences. They suggest using multiple channels to get your message across, making an effort to learn which methods resonate the strongest with each audience and tailoring your communications accordingly.

To encourage open communication and maintain flexibility among staff members, directors and managers can set regular "office hours" where staff can bring questions, thoughts or concerns without pressure.

*"It's important to note that it's not easy, Building relationships takes time, and it takes work. Give yourself a little bit of grace and allow that as long as you're moving forward and making progress, you're going to get there."*

## Paying attention to nonverbal communication

### FEATURED SPEAKER

#### Roy R. Pistone II

Food Service Director at Citrus County



*Body language is important,"* Pistone observes. *"I teach that to our managers: You set the tone for the day, and you don't have to say a word. If you have a smile on your face, that sets the right tone."*

The importance of nonverbal communication is why Pistone asks employees to turn their cameras on during online staff meetings. *"I want to see peoples' reactions,"* he explains. *"If they are stressed, what can we do to try and help them? I'm not going to see that with the camera turned off."*

*"Body language is important. I teach that to our managers: You set the tone for the day, and you don't have to say a word. If you have a smile on your face, that sets the right tone."*

Follow LINQ on LinkedIn to hear more from those making a difference in nutrition within their districts!



## Building relationships

### FEATURED SPEAKER

#### Katie Cossette

MDA, RDN, SNS, Director of Nutrition Services for Englewood Schools in Colorado



*"Get to know something about each one of your employees that's not necessarily work-related."*

Effective communication is about building relationships and making personal connections with colleagues. Building relationships is how you establish trust, which is what allows people to be open to hearing what you have to say.

*"Get to know something about each one of your employees that's not necessarily work-related," Cossette advises. "I have a manager who just became a grandmother. So when I see her, I always ask her, 'How's that grandbaby? Do you have any new pictures?' When we connect on a personal level, she knows that she doesn't have to be afraid of me, and we can collaborate together."*

Pistone keeps track of his employees' birthdays, and rather than sending an email wishing them a happy birthday, he calls them and sings the birthday song

over the phone. *"That is the difference maker,"* he remarks. *"They think: 'Hey, he took time out of his day to pick up the phone and wish me a happy birthday.'"*

In Shelley's district, the school nutrition department meets online every Wednesday. *"We start by taking the temperature of the room,"* she shares. *"How's everybody doing? What accomplishments or personal achievements can we recognize? How can we problem-solve together? It's a really important way of connecting—and having that camera on is so important for that."*

## Communication Key Takeaways

### Appreciate different styles



Everyone has a different style of communicating, and it's important to recognize and understand how each employee communicates best. While some may be direct and to the point, others may need encouragement to communicate.

### Actively listen



Listening to what others have to say is a critical component of effective communication. "Don't just listen to other people, but let them know they've been heard," Shelley said. "Really validate that you understand what they said and respect their time."

### Be authentic



A strong relationship cannot be built if you are not honest. *"Don't try to be something you're not,"* Shelley said. *If you do that, "people aren't going to take the information that you're sharing with them seriously, and that relationship is not being built. If I'm expecting people to be honest with me, then I need to give that same respect back to them."*

### Communication Resources

Use these resources to support communication in your district's nutrition program.

#### What's in your toolbox?

Download our manager toolbox, provided by Aurora Public Schools, which includes ideas to promote a supportive and successful team environment! [Click here](#)

#### Related Resource:

[7 Ways to Retain Your Very Best Food Service Employees](#)

[How to Cut Down on Meetings While Managing Your School District](#)

*In the next episode guide we'll be diving into the importance of and tips to cultivating a good culture.*

**Missed Episode 2: Culture?**  
Take a look at everything 4C's here!

