

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT – WHAT’S IT REALLY ALL ABOUT?



As hard as we’ve tried, we can’t think of a single business type or sector which shouldn’t be working to engage its stakeholders – it’s audiences – yet too often we hear “stakeholder engagement – what’s that?”. Every decision we make has the potential to affect someone else, and it’s through stakeholder engagement that we are able to manage that impact, and mitigate their intervention in our plans.

Over the years of managing and delivering stakeholder engagement, we’ve had the joy of working on some amazing projects. High-profile competition bids, delivering community consultations for development projects with the most aspirational eco credentials, and working closely with residents involved in investment regeneration which has the potential to not only improve their homes but their health and wellbeing – and we’ve loved every minute. Even the early starts, the late finishes and the inevitable frustration when someone chooses not to be involved yet still wants to criticise and object to what they know relatively little about.

We’ve also been shouted at, sworn at, slandered, cursed and generally labelled the lowest of the low with no morals or ethics. We’ve had to pull project managers from the middle of a 15-person deep mob, had to rescue young architects from a retired designer intent on making sure his views were the only ones audible during a public consultation, and we’ve had to get the local police force involved when tensions between two rival developers threatened to erupt during the presentation of a proposal in a village hall.

Some would question the value of making the

effort to engage with people who react like this to a proposal of bringing forward land for development, or retrofitting thermal improvements to homes which really weren’t expected to still be standing so many years after they were built as a post-war solution.

But we do what we do because it’s good. It’s good business practice, it adds value and it allows for better decision-making.

But what exactly is engagement?

We’ve asked ourselves this many times and have concluded that there’s no simple answer.

It’s identifying. It’s including. It’s involving. It’s meeting. It’s talking. It’s listening. It’s knowing that your next encounter is likely to be with someone who disagrees with the reason for engaging with them in the first place. Engagement is really whatever the person you are engaging wants it to be, and it depends on context.

According to the Oxford Dictionary, it is: n. 1 the act or state of engaging or being engaged. 2 an appointment with another person. 3 a betrothal. 4 an encounter between hostile forces. 5 a moral commitment.

For Results Communications, engagement is

a combination of all the above – and more. Traditionally ‘engagement’ has been a box-ticking exercise for many; the ability to say ‘we told them what we want to do’. But for us, it’s not about telling your stakeholders what you want to do; it’s about showing them what you hope to do and finding out their views. Listening to their fears about how it may impact on how they live, where they go and what they do. Finding out what they know about the area where you are planning to intervene – be it through a change in the way you work that may affect your employees or customers, or a development proposal you are bringing forward. Working through your plans and their concerns to see if there’s another way to achieve what you want while still mitigating their concerns.

Successful engagement is not a single-direction conversation. Nor is it two-way. True, effective, engagement has to be multi-directional.

Results Communications delivers bespoke and strategic marketing, stakeholder engagement and bid writing solutions to public and private sector clients regionally and nationally. By doing this, we can help remove the conflict between contrasting views and smooth the path of projects.