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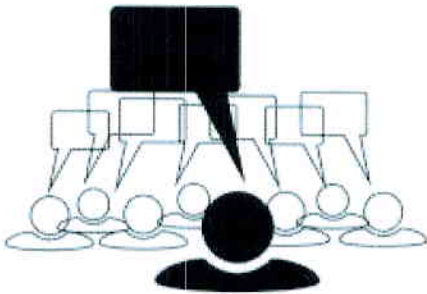
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Is Communication an Asset or a Liability on Your Balance Sheet?

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Dianna Booher, Author, What More Can I Say?: Why Communication Fails And What To Do About It.

In survey after survey, “communication” makes the top 3 list: why marriages end, why mergers don’t work, why management has difficulty leading employees through change, why employees leave an organization, why customers stop doing business with a firm.

Or, on the positive side, great communication is why marriages work, mergers go smoothly, employees embrace change, employees love their job and their boss, and why customers rave about the customer service where they do business.

My guess is that it’s not much different in your own organization: even though you may not have a line item for it, communication shows up on your balance sheet. Having served as a communication consultant for the past 3 decades to almost half of the Fortune 500, I’ve observed these commonalities about communication that influences, motivates, and inspires, and have written about them in ***What MORE Can I Say? Why Communication Fails and What to Do About It*** (Penguin Random House).

Collaborate to Give Ownership: People don’t always do what serves them best. They do what they *perceive* serves them best. Believing that you have the better—or only—grasp of reality or truth may stand in the way of influencing others to be fully committed to

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the mission or the organization. According to research, the most common area of weakness for ineffective senior leaders is their inability to develop others on their team, followed by their inability to collaborate.

Arrogant statements like these build a wall: "The truth of the matter is...." "The best way to deal with something like that is to" "What you should do the next time this comes up is"

Cull the Simple From the Complex: Simplicity leads to focus, which produces clarity of purpose. Consider the power of one word and one-sentence messages. But short does not necessarily equate to simple any more than long equates to complex. Clarity comes from word choice, structure, and relevance.

Sell the Dream: Study after study suggests that people prefer to risk their money and their future on someone's potential performance rather than their actual past performance. Whether talking about pro baseball players, artists, chefs, college test-takers, or product launches, those surveyed showed more excitement about "untried" potential than in someone who had actually achieved a high standard. Lesson learned? As a CEO, motivate your team by selling the dream of "what could be." The idea of risk and reward excites people more than the "sure thing."

Speak to the Heart: People cannot hear logical reasons for change in an organization until they work through the emotional issues surrounding that change. Whether you're talking about layoffs, cost-cutting, restructuring, name-changes, or relocations, people want explanations, of course. But never expect logic alone to build your case and win commitment.

Metaphors, analogies, straightforward phrasing, tone of voice, body language, timing, setting—all of these are part of speaking to the heart. Master the art of storytelling. This ability will determine the degree to which you will be able to lower the bar of fear during difficult times and lead through to calm seas of success.

Build a Culture of Trust, and People Will Respond: How many times have you heard this line after a senior official is dismissed: "He's leaving to pursue other interests" or "She's leaving to spend more time with her family?" Then within hours, days, or weeks, the rest of the story unfolds: the scandal, the fraud, the earnings report becomes public. Headlines around the globe remind us daily about mismanagement, moral lapses, and malaise at the top of corporations and government agencies.

So how do you as CEO avoid these liabilities that create distrust among employees?

- Insist that your leaders tell the truth (no lies, cover-ups, deceptions, half-truths)
- Instill personal accountability for decisions and misjudgment; allow room for error
- Admit your own vulnerabilities and misjudgments, which will give others freedom to do so

- Demonstrate trust to gain trust
- Explain your reasoning behind decisions. Good decisions can turn into disasters when communicated poorly. Often leaders go through all the pros and cons of an issue in their head until they are absolutely convinced their decision is in the best interest of all concerned. But they fail to communicate their reasoning to the very people who have to execute the strategy or work the plan.

One last suggestion: If there's any doubt regarding operations and productivity, customer satisfaction, employee retention, production launches, advertising campaigns, email productivity, or sales presentations and closing ratios, you may want to check your financials again to see where communication appears on your balance sheet.

About the Author

Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 46 books, published in 26 languages, with nearly 4 million copies sold. She writes, speaks, and consults on leadership communication, executive presence, and productivity. Her latest book is WHAT MORE CAN I SAY?: Why Communication Fails And What To Do About It. National media outlets such as Good Morning America, USA Today, the Wall Street Journal, Investor's Business Daily, Bloomberg, Forbes.com, CNN International, NPR, Success, and Entrepreneur have interviewed her for opinions on critical workplace communication issues. For more information visit www.BooherResearch.com or www.WhatMoreCanISayTheBook.com.

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