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## Effectively communicate with your employees: Inspire and influence



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Exit surveys suggest that employees leave a boss, not their job. Much of that dissatisfaction comes from poor communication. And that costly situation could be corrected with a few key principles leaders have at the tip of their lips.

### Do



- put aside complaints
- consider the impact of perception
- reap the power of positive words
- remember that manners matter

### Don't



- forget to communicate your reasoning behind initiatives and

- decisions
- fail to communicate consistently and frequently
- create a double standard on deliverables
- make or send mixed messages

## **Do**

### **Do put aside complaints**

Any leader can be successful with the right staff, sufficient resources, proper support, and plenty of time. But knock away one of the legs from the stool, and you'll have a challenge worthy of your best talents as a leader. Then measure your results by how well--and cheerfully--you meet the challenge before you.

### **Do consider the impact of perception**

Perception becomes the reality for many people. A leader announces cost-cutting initiatives--and then takes the executive team on a strategic planning retreat to an exotic locale for five days.

Message communicated: "Cost-cutting measures are not to be taken seriously."

Perception: The executive team considers themselves an elite group, operating under a different set of rules than the rest of the employee group. The cost-cutting measures have no basis in fact.

Impact: Future ideas submitted by employees for cost-savings measures dribble to nothing.

### **Do reap the power of positive words**

With positive words, we can accept, admire, admit, advise, affirm, apologize, bridge, build, calm, challenge, cheer, clarify, comfort, compliment, counsel, defend, discover, dispel fear,

encourage, enlighten, evaluate, explain, extend, forgive, free, heal, include, inspire, introduce, lead, model, mold, nourish, persuade, plan, praise, pray, predict, prepare, reveal, support, thank, trust, uplift, warn, and welcome.

And the best thing about words: They're not expensive, scarce, or fattening! You don't have to have a PhD to spit them out.

### **Do remember that manners matter**

Otherwise competent business leaders are disliked and dissed by their staff and peers because they fail to understand that manners matter. Communicating respect and kindness could revolutionize employee engagement. So how do leaders show disrespect?

- arriving late to meetings and wasting others' time by keeping them waiting
- not speaking when entering a room
- failing to return a greeting
- speaking in a harsh tone when upset
- using sarcasm or put-down humor meant to embarrass or humiliate others

The opposite of these discourtesies are the small kindnesses that communicate respect for the individual, engage hearts, and ultimately increase your impact when you have an important value, belief, or concern to share. Manners matter a great deal to leaders who intend to last for the long term.

### **Don't**

#### **Do not forget to communicate your reasoning behind initiatives and decisions**

If you arrived home after work and discovered that the city authorities had blocked entrance to your street and told you no traffic was allowed into the neighborhood for the next 48 hours, you would probably be upset.

On the other hand, if they explained that a serial killer was running loose up and down the streets, firing at will, you probably would not argue with their judgment. You'd likely be very willing to listen to all the information they could give you on the situation and abide by their decision.

Similar situations occur daily in the workplace: Leaders discuss crisis situations and everyday dilemmas behind closed doors, emerge and make announcements to employees, and bury their conclusions in vague language that leaves people beleaguered, baffled, and often bruised. And after those vague announcements, they often expect buy-in!

Don't make this communication mistake.

### **Do not fail to communicate consistently and frequently**

Struggling leaders communicate a message once and think their message has been heard, understood, and applied throughout the organization. No need for repetition from time to time. No need for interpretation at the department level. No need for reminders at team meetings.

Definitely, don't put these "leaders" in charge of sales or lead generation! With this thinking, of course, you could run one ad one time and definitely reduce your marketing budget. But be prepared for the drop in leads coming through the door.

Also understand the value of consistent communication—both good and bad news. Failing leaders often fall into the trap of communicating with employees only when they bad news is looming on the horizon: restructuring, layoffs, hiring freezes, product problems, executive mismanagement that's made the national headlines. Strong leaders make it a habit to communicate frequently and consistently—whether the news is good or bad. No surprises.

### **Do not create a double standard on deliverables**

Build your own integrity by delivering on your promises. Do what you say you will. Of course, as a leader, you have to deal with others who don't meet deadlines or pull their own weight. They must live with the consequences of their lost opportunities, diminished credibility, and damaged relationships. But you as a leader create a standard and a model with deliverables—don't make it a double-standard.

### **Do not make or send mixed messages**

Positive words said with an unnatural smile leave your staffer wondering if she just got an "atta-girl" for the project or the habitual comment that you give the attendant at the Starbucks counter every morning.

"Sounds like a good idea. Let's talk about it sometime" as you leave the room can mean several things: 1) It's not worth my time--now or ever. 2) It's a good idea. 3) I'm in a hurry, and not paying attention.

Make your body language and tone of voice consistent with your words.

## Summary



Employee engagement hinges primarily on two things: exciting work and interacting with people they like and respect. As a leader, you have tremendous control over both these methods of engagement through how you communicate.

You as a leader can inspire and influence your employees to put forth their best efforts by what you say, what you do, what you don't say, and what you don't do. The results? Employees either engage or look for greener pastures. Consider the above communication steps to flip the situation in your favor.

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