

5 Communication 'Best Practices' That Aren't

(<https://www.tlnt.com/5-communication-best-practices-that-arent/>)

No matter the topic, there's always the flipside. Politics? The liberal view versus the conservative view. Religion? Scores of interpretations. How to build the better app? Fee versus free, with imbedded links.

So when it comes to communication, the same is true. What you've always heard as conventional wisdom may not be "best practice" after all. Take a closer look at the flip-side.

"Best Practice" #1: Lead with clear directives.

While no one would argue with the word *clear*, leading by directive leaves a lot to be desired in developing a team. It's often far more effective to lead a group — or individuals — with strategic questions to help them analyze a problem, think creatively, and broaden their perspective. For example: "What's your ultimate goal in making these changes?" "What challenges do you anticipate in years 2 and 3 after competitors leap into the marketplace with similar products?" "What's Plan B if this approach fails?"

"Best Practice" #2: When negotiating, listen for the other party's vulnerabilities and weaknesses.

While this approach may work to gain consensus on one key point in the short-term, this overall strategy is for losers. More successful negotiators listen for opportunities. What does the other party need? What's *not* so important to them? Listen for where your goals and the other party's goals align. What could you give away to meet their needs? What could you ask for to meet your own needs and goals? Those overlaps are the opportunities for mutual success.

"Best Practice" #3: Be consistent in your praise and recognition.

Parents reward their kids for good behavior or often for exceptional grades. Owners of professional sports teams reward pro athletes for setting or breaking records. Retail shops even reward shoppers with discounts and bonus gifts if they spend \$xxx on certain days. Our entire population is geared to winning recognition and rewards. Definitely, recognition needs to be *applied* consistently. Whoever meets the criteria should receive the reward.

But here's what should NOT happen: Praise or recognition routinely for the same things in the same ways. When employees routinely get rewarded for the same performance, they come to expect the reward; they notice only when it stops. With employees getting "likes" and comments all day on their social media, you have to up the "ante" to get their attention. Either change the way you recognize their work, or increase the criteria for the recognition.

Consistent, routine recognition loses its power to motivate.

"Best Practice" #4: Rather than clutter inboxes, reply to email requests only when you have complete information.

Granted, no one welcomes a plethora of unnecessary emails back and forth: "Got it." "Good." "When can I expect a decision?" "Next week at the latest." "Great. I'll look forward to your answer." "Sure thing. Be back to you soon." Enough already!

Even though a sender is white-listed, their emails do occasionally go astray in cyberspace. So rather than keeping a sender in suspense, not knowing if you are deliberating on your answer, disturbed and plotting their demise, or simply traveling in Dubai for a month, acknowledge receipt promptly.

If you don't have information or a decision, say so, and let them know when they might expect to hear from you more fully. A less-than-speedy response in the age of Twitter communicates any number of messages — none of them positive.

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Practice #5: Focus on the meeting agenda and let an assistant handle meeting details.

Productivity experts will tell you that it makes good sense to delegate the details to an assistant. I agree wholeheartedly — when it comes to *executing* the details. But not *deciding* the details. Those small meeting matters can make a big difference in meeting outcomes.

For example, consider the venue. Where you meet can set up a guest-host situation, making some attendees uncomfortable in disagreeing on ideas under discussion. Serving snacks can make the meeting feel like a social occasion, again affecting group dynamics. Other “details” like allowing or not allowing substitutes or setting up definite confirm-cancel systems can totally alter a meeting’s outcome.

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