

MANAGEMENT

Improving Communication Makes for Immediate Positive Results

Nearly every business leader recognizes effective communication as essential to business success, yet few understand the enormity of its impact.

In fact, it is virtually impossible to identify any aspect of business that isn't based on communication. Vision, goals, expectations and the barriers to personal best are all rooted in communication.

Making decisions, solving problems and planning for succession are all based on the way people convey information. The way they acquire goods and services, raise money and build a reputation depend on how they get their message out.

According to the National Communication Association, it is estimated that 75 percent of a person's day is spent communicating in some way.

So, what exactly is meant by communication? Most everyone sees it as a discourse or exchange of information between people.

In the context of an organization, communication involves the flow of information within a company as well as in and out of the company.

It also includes the exchange of thoughts, feelings and messages between people or groups in verbal, non-verbal and written form.

Communication is so pervasive and all-encompassing that people sometimes aren't even aware of it, or the lack of it, at a conscious level.

The negative impact of poor communication can be felt all over an organization. A poorly expressed mission statement will likely result in employees who don't understand their roles and who lack direction.

Poorly run meetings result in wasted time, frustration and lack of commitment. Presentations often leave audiences bored, uninspired and even confused.

Managers are frustrated when others fail to



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meet their expectations or require so much of their valuable time, and they fail to deal with performance problems in direct and effective ways.

And consider the impact of technology. Who doesn't spend hours every day sifting through a full inbox of e-mails? Even cubicle neighbors e-mail each other instead of communicating face to face.

The list of potential communication challenges and breakdowns goes on. There are tremendous costs to an organization that fails to "do" communication well.

These costs include the erosion of trust among employees, increased conflict between employees and management, information running amok through the grapevine, lack of information leading to poor decision making, increased turnover, loss of customers, decrease in productivity and creativity.

The organization's image suffers. Profits may be affected and ultimately the stock value goes down.

What is necessary is to identify where and when communication can be improved, because in the words of George Bernard Shaw, "The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion that it has taken place."

The answer is that most leaders don't know

how to tackle it and they don't make it a priority. They are focused on immediate, pressing, short-term demands.

Fortunately, there are concrete steps leaders can take to solve their communication challenges:

- Position communication as a management priority;
- Develop a communication strategy that is aligned with the organization's vision, mission and values;
- Examine current communication policies and practices – internal and external, implicit and explicit;
- Identify gaps and capabilities, and determine changes and expected standards of behavior necessary to improve business results through effective communication at all levels throughout the organization;
- Commit to developing communication skills, practices and policies that will close the gaps; and
- Establish accountability measures and rewards for the successful execution of the communication strategy.

The leader who makes communication a priority will begin to see immediate results.

Improving communication must take on the same weight as adhering to budgets, meeting deadlines, responding to requests from above, and all of the other demands that keep managers so busy, not because it's a nice thing to do but because it makes a difference in measurable business results.

Recognizing that communication is at the core of corporate performance, and ultimately their own success, will provide individuals with the necessary incentive to embrace new practices.

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