



Communicating for Results in Turbulent Times

Have you ever had a "difficult" supervisor? Did they discuss things with you or just give orders? Did they compliment you for a job well done, or did you only hear from them when you made a mistake? How did this impact your ability to come to work and be productive? What feelings did you have regarding this supervisor? At a recent, "Dealing with Difficult People" Seminar, individuals were asked to close their eyes and envision their difficult person in their last altercation. They were asked to see a door open at the end of a hall and their difficult person walking toward them. All of their senses were to be used. What did they hear, see, smell, etc.? After this brief exercise, the discussion turned to the feelings held by those who had envisioned a "lousy boss." Even though individuals had not worked for these people in some time, several got red in the face, anxiety increased, and they became stressed, and angry. They discussed hating to go to work and how difficult it was to be productive under those conditions.

Your success as a manager depends on your people. Although leadership is necessary to coordinate activities and direct others to a goal, you need your employees to get the product out the door. Effective leaders understand this and have learned to act more as a coach than a dictator. They know communication is the thread that holds an organization together and some believe the "real" organizational structure actually emerges from communication. In writings on leadership, effective communication surfaces as the most important skill to cultivate. Supervisors who tend to be more "communication-minded" have learned to include their employees in the operation of the business through open and honest contact. Communication in an organization has to be consistent and focused on the goals of the organization.



Organizational Vision and Mission:

Does your organization have a vision and a mission? The vision, or what the organization hopes to become gives a clear picture of the future. The mission on the other hand describes what the organization does, for whom and the benefits. Is your mission statement an important driving philosophy or just words on the wall? A true mission statement helps all employees to understand what the organization is about. These words articulate the guiding principles that an organization will adhere to as it reaches for its goal or vision. In order to maximize the effectiveness of the mission, it needs to be integrated into all aspects of the business. You cannot remind people often enough about the purpose of the “why we are here and how we are trying to accomplish our goals.” All organizational objectives should be in line with the driving principles of the organization.

Your mission is useless however, unless open and honest communication takes place on all levels and in all situations. What happens when problems occur? Is your organization one that can handle the brutal facts? Do managers and employees feel comfortable dissecting problems or do they look for someone to blame to save face? When an organization has developed a culture where the truth is heard, it has moved a long way toward solving the problems facing the team. The most difficult situations become much more complicated when there are pieces of the puzzle missing and the team cannot see the whole picture. People will not share information if they believe it will be used as a battering ram against them.

Accountability:

If you are successful in communicating the organizational goals and mission, it is then important to hold your people accountable for reaching the goals. The employees must have not only the responsibility to meet goals, but the authority to accomplish them. In addition, holding people accountable does not mean that you



abuse them in any manner. Your organization will gain far more if you use the experience of a problem to analyze what systems failed or were not present and need to be constructed. By developing an organization in which people do not filter their communication, you are building a culture that will bring out the best in individuals.

It is also imperative that you, as a manager, hold your self accountable to the same standards. A leader knows that they are the link between their team and the bigger picture. It is your job to lead your group toward a set of objectives that are in line with the mission and vision of the organization. If you micromanage, you are not leading. By putting the right people in positions that match their skill set, then you can facilitate the process. While monitoring your team's progress, if you see areas that need attention, it is your job to develop your team members by providing the tools and skills they need to complete the task. At all times communicate to employees the accomplishments they have done well.

Trust

Once you communicate the company's mission clearly and consistently and have held yourself as well as your employee's accountable, trust will develop. Steven Covey makes a strong business case for trust, and calls trust "the one thing that changes everything. Trust affects two outcomes – speed and cost. When trust goes down, speed will go down and costs will go up ... When trust goes up, speed will also go up and costs will go down.

Think about it in your own experience. Have you ever worked with someone you did not trust? How did it effect your communication with that individual? How much time did you waste watching your back? Did you walk on egg shells? Where there is a lack of trust people create politics, or slow things done. When people trust one another, work gets accomplished more easily. Covey (2006) said when you trust



people, you have confidence in them – in their integrity and in their abilities. In order to develop trust, a leader must communicate in an honest manner at all times.

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Today, more than ever, organizations are facing challenges and changes, and human beings need trust and honest communication. One of the most difficult things to communicate to employees is delivering bad news. Some managers avoid talking about difficult situations, but people sense changes and the grapevine will fill in the gaps if people are not given information they trust from people they respect. Dana Bristol-Smith (2008) uses the “Band-Aid analogy” to discuss taking the pain out of bad news. She states, “Remember when your mother asked you if you wanted her to take a band-aid off quickly, or slowly. We found that when the band-aid was removed slowly, it hurt for a long time. We later learned that if she ripped it off quickly, it’s still painful, but probably not for so long. Here is her four-step model for getting the job done with less pain and stress, and for showing respect and empathy for employees.

1. What? What is the change? Describe the change and how it will impact the staff.
2. Why? Why is this happening? Give the whole truth and nothing but the truth.
3. Show empathy. Acknowledge and address the staff’s concerns and potential problems with the change. Use feeling language to show empathy.

I know that some of you may be feeling overwhelmed with how your workload will be changing. I understand that and share your concerns. I want you to know that you have my support in what ever way you need it through this challenge.



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4. Now what? What actions do you need staff to take to make this happen?
When do they need to make them? Any other next steps?

Once your organization is built on trust and respect, the delivery of any information is made easier. When people are satisfied with their place of business and you, the manager, have dealt with all employees in an open and honest manner, you have laid the ground work for a win-win situation and have increased the chance that your organization will recover and thrive throughout any circumstance.

Dana Bristol-Smith - Used with permission. Taken from "Taking the Pain Out of Delivering Bad News - http://www.speakforsuccess.net/team_dbs.htm