

Communicating like leaders

Constant, professional communication is a competency that every good leader requires



"TRUST IS THE GLUE OF LIFE. IT'S THE MOST ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT IN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION. IT'S THE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE THAT HOLDS ALL RELATIONSHIPS."

STEPHEN R. COVEY, AMERICAN AUTHOR

When one looks at where leaders go wrong on the simple things, often it goes back to communication. A team needs to know the vision and what they are heading for, and constant, professional communication is a competency that every good leader requires.

Every leader needs to be able to write professionally, and to develop their own unique style. If you are likely to delegate a lot of your writing, e.g. thank-you notes and acknowledgments, then ensure that whoever is writing them is aware of your quirks and personalisations. There is nothing worse than receiving information in a personal letter that is so obviously impersonal. In a leadership role it is also vital that you give credit to whoever dreamt it or said it. If someone has a great idea or concept, or even a one-liner, tell others who thought it or said it. Plagiarism comes in many forms.

Praise in public, criticise in private

Many people are reliant on regular validation, so no leader should assume that their team is going to be able to move forward without being affirmed. People want to feel appreciated, that their efforts in the team make a difference.

JENNY HANDLEY



Some people wish to have words of affirmation, others feel that an increase or bonus is all the validation they need, and for some respect and flexibility give them the thanks they require. Work out what each person wants, and then try to give it to them, regularly and consistently. Speak to the heart if you want a hand.

Team members will mirror the actions and standards set by a leader

Team members will mirror the actions and standards set by a leader. Your team will adopt your style of writing, so ensure that it is professional and always as clear and to the point as possible. Use perfect grammar and spelling, and preferably get someone to check your writing before it leaves your office. This is not only for printed documentation, but for communication that is despatched electronically too.

Talk to your team

Team talks could include a briefing, a consultation, a persuasion or the delivery of bad news. Whatever form they may take, there is always an

opportunity to inspire and motivate. Everyone in a team wants to communicate with the captain. For a leader to interact with vast numbers of people in a personal way is challenging, but not impossible. Consider video interaction, or an intranet, or personal handwritten notes—not just email and telephone messages. Include these in your annual communication plan. Get the message out—everything from budgets, awards, birthdays, special occasions, festivals and religious holidays. Ring the changes so that people get an email on their birthday this year and a message on the welcome board at reception the following year. Make it an integral part of your internal communication strategy.

Tom Peters, management guru and author, introduced a concept called MBWA—management by walking around, in his book *In Search of Excellence* many years ago. It is invaluable for the leader to go to his team at their work stations to show interest and to have meaningful, personal interaction. It is also termed 'leading from the floor', which is sometimes more appropriate for a production environment than an office. Getting to know your team where they work is vital. Engaging with them in a meaningful way is too. It is often a good idea to host relaxed, informal talk time over coffee. Again, off-site meetings may also provide a more casual, comfortable environment in which to get to know your team.

People don't only work for an organisation, they feel that they work for the leader. Let them get to know you, and you will get the results from your team that you ultimately want. ▲

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