

Building an Executive Leadership Communication Plan



Often business leaders carry the weight of decisions on their own shoulders. Sometimes their communication with employees in their own organization can lend itself to edicts or sound bites; “Revenues are up”, “We have a new client”, “Improve production times”, “Our 3rd quarter results were . . .”. These ‘highlights’ often account for the primary one-way communication process many leaders adopt.

There can certainly be extroverted leaders who excel at small talk and chitchat with employees. The leader who walks the floor and knows members of the organization can be both inspiring and effective. Though small talk and chitchat does not make a good leader, a good communicator or a successful business leader it is one tool for relationship building that can facilitate communication.

There are leaders who communicate everything, the good, the bad and the ugly believing that transparency means to tell all. But telling all can sometimes result in confusion and an inability by employees to differentiate what is relevant and important from what is noise.

Generally speaking the difference between a good leader and a great leader can be the quality of what and how he/she communicates on many different levels. Stop for a moment and ask yourself what is the key information a leader must convey to employees. Don’t focus on the details but consider what employees need to remain productive and engaged.

6 Things Leaders Should Convey to Their Employees

- 1) **Needs:** what the leader and organization needs a team or employee to deliver and how to represent the organization.
- 2) **Priorities:** Priorities of the organizations, the leaders, the teams and sometimes the individual employees will not align without clear and open communications.
- 3) **How to:** Sometimes the leader can offer big picture direction and sometimes even small picture direction so employees understand how they are expected to prepare and/or execute the plan
- 4) **Feedback:** How the organization, team or individual is performing in their job

5) **Inspiration, Vision and Motivation:** An inspired and motivated leader with a vision generally gains the most attention and energy from his/her employees

6) **Appreciation:** This is one often over looked but at the end of the day an organizational leader who does not appreciate and demonstrate appreciation for employees may not have much to appreciate in the longer term.

Within these 6 items there is a lot of leeway to discuss all aspects of a business and dissect what you are and have been doing wrong or right. These 6 items represent a lot of ground and can include all aspects of business communications.

Effective Leadership Communication Strategies

1) **Begin with Self-Awareness:** What human based strategy does not begin with self-awareness? Yet often we fail to take the time to really assess our strengths and weaknesses and obtain feedback from others. An effective communicator is aware of his/her strengths and weaknesses and understands that different audiences need different information and respond to communication styles. Being true to ones strengths as a communicator is important but the ability to vary the message and the medium can raise the effectiveness of any communicator.

2) **Identify appropriate channels for communication:** Different audiences receive information differently and different types of content are more effectively delivered through some means than by others. Reading the dry stats of an annual report, versus a PowerPoint slide show versus charts and graphs and so on will communicate differently and more or less effectively to different audiences. The popularity of the 'Infographic' is one example, some people get them and some people do not but they can be an impactful tool when done well.

Before any communication happens take the step to consider how best to communicate the information. This may require multiple methods and means to communicate similar information to different people for different purposes.

3) **Clarify and provide required content:** Not all content needs to be communicated. Depending on the purpose and the audience more or less detail, more or less context and more or less communication is necessary. Take the time to examine the content and the audience and determine which details offer clarity and which do not; how much context is needed to make the connection and how much information needs to be shared.

4) **A reliable pattern of communication:** Reliable patterns of communication are useful on two levels. On one level they enable predictability and people know what to expect and when and can plan around this information. On the other level, communication outside the normal pattern can be used to signal something else, a sense of urgency, surprise, celebration and more. Regular communication patterns can become tedious and lull employees into complacency but they remain important for planning purposes. For example, a Monday morning weekly update or month end report can be an excellent way to share information that is regularly required. An extra communication outside this pattern has the impact of gaining attention.

5) **Two way dialogue:** Perhaps in the past a two-way dialogue was not as imperative but in todays connected world it cannot be avoided. Identifying a process and the tools to enable two way dialogue is vital. This can be as simply as walking around and talking to individual employees or having company wide conversations on LinkedIn

Simply by considering these components communication between a leader and everyone else can be improved.