



REPRINTED FROM

agency sales[®] magazine

december 2008 • vol.38, no.12

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COMMUNICATION! COMMUNICATION!

the golden thread that ties key leadership functions together

EDITORIAL | LEE FROSCHHEISER



COMMUNICATION!



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You hear it all the time... aspiring managers or other executives want to know the most important key to an esteemed business leader's success. Thinking the answer must be something like inspiring leadership, technological innovation, savvy marketing or far-sighted financial planning — all of which are important — **their jaws drop when they learn the truth.**

Generally, a savvy leader's success is directly tied to his or her ability to focus on the business fundamentals — the daily blocking and tackling that every company must master to be a winner in its field. Strong, effective leaders stress fundamentals like discipline, accountability, strategic alignment, managing to his or her values, and empowering employees. Additionally, these leaders have mastered the basic functions of management: leading, planning, organizing, staffing, controlling and communicating. But what's the one golden thread tying all those functions together — and the most important key to great leadership? Clear communication.

Think about it... how do the best leaders motivate and inspire their people? Through clear communication. How do the best organizations promote discipline, accountability and strategic alignment? With clear communication. And how do market leaders sell their products and services? With compelling ads and marketing campaigns — in sum, by clear communication. The point itself is crystal clear: In real estate the old cliché is "location, location, location." In business leadership, you preach "communication, communication, communication."

Good Leaders, Good Communicators

There's no mystery here. Regardless of whether you're talking about business, politics, sports or the military, the best leaders are first-rate communicators. Their values are clear and solid, and what they say promotes those values. Their teams admire them and follow their lead. Likewise, if you want your company to reach new benchmarks of achievement, you must master the art of clear communication. So how do you do it?

First, you must realize and accept that clear communication is always a two-way process. It's not enough to speak clearly; you have to make sure you're being heard and understood. To facilitate this, use the following two-way communication primer:

1. Prepare how you'll communicate

- Clarify the goal of the communication.

- Plan carefully before sending it or meeting in person.
- Anticipate the receiver's viewpoint and feelings.

2. Deliver the message

- Express your meaning with conviction.
- Relate the message to your larger goals.
- Identify the action to be taken.
- Confirm the other person understands.

3. Receive the message

- Keep an open mind.
- Identify key points in the message.
- Value constructive feedback and use it to grow.
- Confirm your understanding.

4. Evaluate the effectiveness of the communication afterwards

5. Take corrective action as necessary

Primers, of course, aren't enough. You must go deeper and determine why internal communications are poor or ineffective, considering any potential barriers. Once the barriers have been identified, you'll see where to improve. Additionally, you'll inevitably realize the stakes are high when it comes to communicating — if you fail to do this properly, you can poison the atmosphere between you and a colleague, as well as your company's morale. So the next time you're drafting a letter, email or policy statement, before you send it, stop and consider these common barriers to clear communication:

- ✓ Lack of respect by either party for the other.
- ✓ Poorly defined purpose for the communication.
- ✓ Failure to establish the best medium for the communication (email and cell phones are NOT the best ways to communicate serious material).
- ✓ Assumption that the listener receives the message.
- ✓ Ignored emotions or sensitivities.
- ✓ Failure to get on the listener's level of understanding.
- ✓ Intimidation by either party.

Once you've determined what's preventing clear communication at your company, dig even deeper, asking key questions that relate to your business' health such as:

- ☉ How do you produce strategic alignment inside your company?
- ☉ How do you get your team to actively buy into your business goals?
- ☉ How do you ensure that everyone understands and upholds your company's mission and values?

Again, for each of these issues, the answer lies in clear communication.

Write It Down!

In this high-tech, fast-paced world, it's easy to overlook the value of writing down thoughts, intentions and even visions. Doing so, however, is a basic business strategy that enables clarity and purpose. What's more, the process of writing a business plan can be more important than the actual document.

One great way to see just how effective writing it down can be is to always have three updated, clearly drafted documents: a mission statement, a values statement and a business plan. In fact, the document-drafting process naturally produces common understanding, consensus, alignment and buy-in. It also promotes clear communication within your management team while empowering your people and grooming them for future leadership.

Why is this so crucial to a business' success? Mission statements de-

fine who you are and where you're going. Value statements are your compass, the needle keeping you firmly on course. And your business plan is the rudder steering your ship.

For example, think about Thomas Jefferson and the other framers of The Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution. They drafted documents that not only defined America and its mission, but also laid the foundation of ideals, principles, values and laws on which the nation operates to this day. And guess what? They didn't just sit down one day and dictate it to a secretary. They worked the language and polished every word, over and over, and they used the process itself to promote alignment, consensus and collective buy-in. With words, language and clear communication, they launched a revolution. What's more, on the shared values of liberty, individual empowerment and collective prosperity, these visionaries built a nation of unparalleled wealth and economic gain.

Communication Is the Key

Bottom line, clear communication is the most important key to a business leader's success. So to grow as a leader and manager, you must learn how to be an effective, compelling communicator. And if you want your company to succeed, you and your team have to master the art of clear communication together, as well. By using these and other strategies, you and your employees can reach new levels of leadership excellence. ^{as}_{iii}