



Communication in the Workplace - June 2007

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Our firm conducts a significant number of surveys as part of our diagnostics for assisting companies to improve their management practices. It should come as no surprise that communication is almost always one of the top three management issues. Most survey respondents feel this is an area that usually needs improvement.

The funny thing about communication is that almost all of us feel we are pretty good at it. Yet, most business misunderstandings, or disconnects, are rooted in less than stellar communication practices. For our monthly *Leadership Update*, we thought it would be helpful to pass on some insights for healthy communication for your consideration.

Good communication is enhanced by good relationships. It's hard to have one without the other. So, we suggest developing a combined strategy of building relationship skills along with communication skills.

We start the process by suggesting you consider each of your co-workers as one of your customers. Your job is to help make them successful. This has a powerful impact on overall business performance if you can be effective in doing it. That starts opening a "channel" or "conduit" of communication that will grow as the relationship grows.

There are at least four groups of people who are important to your success. They are co-workers, centers of influence, suppliers & colleagues, and your clients/customers. Here are some communication perspectives for you to ponder in evaluating what initiatives you can take to strengthen communication in your business.

1. Co-workers – Your co-workers are a critical part of your overall performance team. If you don't have time to show that you care about them, the quality of your relationships - and communication - will suffer. The best way to build the relationship is to communicate, and questions are the big contributors in that process. Peter Drucker taught the value in asking the right questions, which open the door of understanding. Be inquisitive about what is important to your fellow-workers.

2. Centers of Influence – This refers to those people who respect you and whose position has an influence on your success. Cultivating relationships and good communication creates a thriving channel of information exchange with good results. And at the same time, this is the group that has a stake in your success. They want you to be a 'winner.'

3. Suppliers & Colleagues – Suppliers and professional colleagues are also critical to the development of successful relationships and communication. Asking questions and listening well opens doors to new opportunities. Cultivating new insights and perspectives create opportunities for all parties.

4. Clients/Customers – The importance of developing relationships with one's clients and customers is obvious. But hold on. How are relationships cultivated through communication? Are we really connecting? Do we really know them? Could you fill a page on each one with what you know about them? No? Then you have a real opportunity.

These are but a few thoughts collected from our files on building communication effectiveness in the workplace. We all tend to get in ruts and go on autopilot in so many aspects of our work. Step back and take a look at your key business relationships. Think about how proactive you have been in developing those relationships. What role has communication played? Our observation is that communication often is the neglected step-child because of how busy we are.

Take an inventory of your top 10 relationships. Grade each one on a scale of 1-10. Then think of what you would need to do to bring each one up a point or two. Communication involves trust, understanding, empathy and resolution. It is an art that requires continuous practice. Conclusion? Practice, practice, practice.

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