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WHITE PAPER

# Communication Excellence

Three Components of Effective Communication



## > Three Components of **Effective Communication**

Every human communication interaction, be it face-to-face, written, telephone, or other means, has three critical components: SENDING COMMUNICATION, RECEIVING COMMUNICATION, and FEEDBACK.

### **COMPONENT #1: SENDING**

The first component of communication is sending communications. Communication scholars refer to this as 'encoding' a message, that is, constructing and transmitting an understandable message to the receiver. There are seven keys to sending effective communications:

#### **Key #1: Think Results**

As you create the message you need to transmit, ask yourself how this communication could potentially drive overall company goals. For example, you might need to address a particular employee on how to improve their customer service. Rather than focus your communication on their failures, effective front-line leaders focus the conversation on results. You would remind the employee how their actions drive company goals, and how their actions impact overall results.



## **Key #2: Clear Purpose**

Every message you send should have a clear purpose. For example, your outcome could be reaching a specific goal, solving a customer issue, giving information, seeking information, relationship building, etc.

## **Key #3: Think Before You Speak**

You may find this a bit elementary, but you would be amazed at how many well-meaning leaders engage their mouths before their brains. But if you prefer to shoot from the hip and just say what's on your mind without thinking, you will open yourself and your company to potentially damaging lawsuits and employee turnover.

## **Key #4: Structure the Message for the Receiver**

Since mutual understanding is our goal, then front-line leaders must create messages that resonate with their receivers (employees, colleagues, customers, suppliers) – not create messages that sound good to themselves. This may sound somewhat confusing, but consider this. We too often spend more time thinking about what you want to say rather than thinking about what they need to hear. That is the difference.

## **Key #5: Avoid Irrelevant Details**

Have you ever known someone who, when telling a story or relating some information, included so much irrelevant detail that you wanted to scream? To send effective messages, remember to focus only on the relevant information, data, or contexts.

## **Key #6: Read Reactions and Adjust**

Baseball Hall of Famer, Yogi Berra, is credited for saying, “You can see a lot by watching.” The same is true in communication. As you create and transmit your communication, watch for the reactions of your employees. Be prepared to read the reactions of your employees and adjust your communication to reach intended results.

## **Key #7: Focus on Results**

Yes, I know I repeated it, but this is the most important component of sending messages. Remember to always keep the results, the ultimate outcome of the communication, in your mind as you communicate with your employees, colleagues, and senior managers.

## **COMPONENT #2: RECEIVING**

Most leaders think they are great listeners. Yet in my 30+ years of experience, be it in the boardrooms of the Fortune 500 or the front-line Mom and Pop shops, the leaders I have encountered, worked with, or coached either are quite average or in reality quite poor listeners. Without strong listening skills, you are doomed to being a very mediocre supervisor with, at best, a team with both low morale and productivity.

## **COMPONENT #3: FEEDBACK**

After sending the message and receiving a response, it is now time to offer feedback to complete the communication process. Interestingly, feedback has two sub-parts — giving and receiving. Sometimes front-line leaders give feedback

to employees, colleagues, vendors, customers, and even bosses. Sometimes front-line leaders receive feedback from the same groups. Let's examine each sub-part separately.

### **Feedback Sub-part #1: Giving Feedback**

**(1) Positive.** Studies indicate that we hear “No” 4-7 times more than we hear “Yes.” Even with our children, it is so much easier to catch them doing it wrong than to catch them doing it right. The same is true with our employees. I suggest you attempt a 3:1 ratio of positive-to-negative feedback.

**(2) Constructive.** Destructive, mean-spirited, intimidating, or demeaning feedback destroys morale, team spirit, and productivity. Moreover, it destroys your ability to effectively lead your team to achieve great results. In all cases, phrase your feedback so as to help the person — never to tear them down.

**(3) Focused on behavior — not personality.** Even though you may think an employee is an unmitigated jerk, feedback should focus on their behaviors. Why? Because people can change behaviors — they can't change their personality.

**(4) Non-Judgmental.** Suspend your internal judgments and focus only on the issue at hand. For example, you may not approve of a particular employee's hairdo, choice of jewelry, style of music, or even lifestyle choice. These issues, and dozens more like them, seldom have any direct consequence on performance, and they should not have any direct impact on your feedback to them at work.

**(5) Clear.** Front-line leaders need a crystal clear picture of what they are trying to accomplish with the feedback. Make sure you are clear on what you desire as the outcome of the feedback and be prepared to provide examples and backup.

**(6) Concise.** Get to the point. Avoid needless rambling, injecting irrelevant information, or “dancing around” the issue. Be professional, courteous, and concise in stating the feedback.

**(7) Specific.** Avoid generalities like, “Sam, you need to do a better job.” Ask yourself what specifically Sam needs to improve. The more specific the feedback, supported with quality and quantity measures, the more effective the communication.

**(8) Follow with a Thank You!** Why? First, it expresses your sincere appreciation (without sounding condescending) for the employee to really listen to your feedback. Second, it personalizes the relationship between you and your employee. Third, it demonstrates your honest, non-manipulative interest in improving their performance.

### **Feedback Sub-part #2: Receiving Feedback**

**(1) Be open-minded.** Even when you disagree or the feedback seems inaccurate, keep your mind open and your mouth shut. More often than not, the feedback you receive will indeed help you grow.

**(2) Consider all feedback as constructive.** Effective front-line leaders assume all feedback, be it from employees, bosses, customers, or even spouses, to be something upon



which they can improve. Approach all feedback with the mindset that what you are about to receive is constructive, not destructive.

**(3) Listen non-defensively.** Top front-line leaders remind themselves that it is far more productive to achieving great results to listen non-defensively. They save their attacks for crushing the competition — not each other!

**(4) Restrain your tongue.** How easy it is for us to immediately lash back at those who offer us well-meaning feedback. Bite your tongue — literally! Let the others speak without interrupting or defending.

**(5) Don't take anything said personally.** When you receive feedback from your team, maintain a thick skin, and do not assume what you hear is an attack on you as a person, but frame the feedback into how you can become a better leader.

**(6) Say Thank You.** It takes a lot of guts, especially for your employees, to offer you feedback. Be thankful for it even if it hurts or does not add a lot of value to achieving great results. For by graciously accepting the feedback, you communicate to your team your willingness to listen, grow, and build a solid team together.

## Summary

Communication is a process of active two-way communication that results in mutual understanding. To achieve great results, front-line leaders must master three essential components of communication: sending communications, receiving communications, and giving effective feedback.



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