

Effective Communication as a Manager

1st December 2021

Communication is at the heart of everything you do as a manager—whether it's sharing information, trying to change a behavior, working to solve a problem, or building a stronger relationship with a new employee. You spend much of each day in meetings, on the phone, and in electronic communication. The clearer you are when sharing ideas and communicating with others, the more accurately your message will be heard. The better you are at listening, the more you will understand people's perceptions and feelings.

Develop an open and responsive communication style

Research shows that employees who think their managers communicate in open and genuine ways trust their managers more, are more productive, and feel more positive about their work.

Create an atmosphere of open communication. Keep people informed. Give updates in regularly scheduled meetings about work, projects, and organizational changes. Encourage others to share relevant information with the group as well. People often like to be informed about big-picture issues and want to understand how their work fits with the organization's goals.

Respond to messages and requests from employees promptly whenever possible. If you don't have time to respond today, send a quick reply saying when you will have time to respond. And then be sure to respond by that time, if not sooner.

Let your team know that you are not too busy to be interrupted for concerns or unexpected issues that come up. Encourage people to message you or drop by your office. If you're busy when they try, don't let them slip away. Make an appointment or call as soon as you're able. Thank people for reaching out. At busy times, you may need to politely set limits. You might say, "I just have a few minutes today. I'm on deadline, but I'd love to hear what's on your mind."

Tell the truth. Otherwise, you undermine your credibility and reputation. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Then offer to find the answer, if appropriate. If a question arises and you are not at liberty to say, you might respond that "when there's something announced, I'll be sure to tell you." Employees understand that you can't share information that isn't yet official, but they do want to be kept "in the loop" when information is

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available.

Explain your decisions as much as possible. Giving reasons for your decisions demonstrates respect for your employees and minimizes misunderstandings, misperceptions, hurt feelings, and the spread of rumors. For example, if you decide to cancel a project that group members have been working on, people will want to hear why. What were the main considerations that went into the decision and who was involved in making it? Explain as much as you can. Speak simply and clearly and avoid jargon so you won't be misinterpreted.

Don't make promises you can't keep. Businesses often have to shift quickly in response to economic conditions. Avoid making promises to your employees that you then have to retract. Use language that does not over-promise, for example, "Based on what I know now, I think we can budget for three new laptops this year. But we will have to get our final budget approval to know for sure."

Encourage people to be open and candid. Show employees, you're serious about creating and sustaining an open atmosphere by being open in your interactions with them. For example, if it's not confidential, tell employees what news you've heard from your boss or at management meetings. Check with your manager anytime you're uncertain if you can share company information.

Make appropriate personal connections with employees even when you're busy. Sometimes all it takes is a simple question like "How was your weekend?" Pick up the phone, send an email, and, when you can, connect in person. However, avoid connecting with your employees on social media—don't send or accept friend requests. Letting your professional and personal worlds combine on social media can cause discomfort, inappropriate privacy breaches, and even legal problems.

Give—and ask for—frequent feedback. We all need immediate and specific feedback to ensure that we're productive and that our work stays on track. Make sure you mention positive performance when you see it. Talk with your employees individually when you need to address a shortcoming, focusing on their actions, not their personalities. Giving feedback in person is best. Likewise, ask for feedback from employees and your own manager. A way

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to gather feedback may be to ask what you should keep doing, start doing, and stop doing.

Be honest, direct, and prompt when delivering bad news. Don't put off delivering difficult news. Delay can provide time for tensions to grow and rumors to spread.

Talk regularly with each of your direct reports

Set up recurring one-on-one meetings with all your direct reports to review workloads and assignments and to discuss expectations and concerns. Regularly scheduled time with employees is the best way to ensure that people understand the work and have the support they need to be productive.

Take the time to explain and review goals. Research consistently shows that when employees feel connected to the business and understand how their actions can support it, there is less employee turnover and greater productivity. Reviewing individual goals is a productive way to spend your time as a manager. Tie the work to organizational objectives so that employees understand not only their work but the business as well.

Listen and ask questions at your meetings with employees. Employees need to know what's expected of them on a given project or assignment. Have you reviewed the project timeline together? Are they certain about what all the deliverables are? Do employees have the tools they need to do the work?

Be sure employees know where they can go for coaching, answers, and information. Encourage people to sign up for training and other opportunities so they can grow professionally. Point out how projects and short-term, cross-functional team assignments are some of the best ways to learn new skills. Continually stress the importance of learning new things.

Communicate with respect and give praise both often and regularly

Your workforce is diverse and is made up of people of different ages and backgrounds. People's ways of communicating may be different from your own. Be respectful of these differences, and model that respect for employees.

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Keep in mind that people have different personalities and communication styles. Some people are uncomfortable with a very direct style or with responding on the spot to their manager, needing time to process their thoughts first. Some people need lots of detailed data and information, while others want to understand issues from a big-picture perspective. Make it a priority to observe people's individual differences in communication styles and try to engage with them in their preferred way as much as possible.

Actively listen. Make the effort to fully understand what another person is saying—before you respond. To give your full attention, make eye contact, and don't interrupt, check your email, or take calls while you are having a conversation with them. Paraphrase what they have said using your own words to be sure you understand. It's a way to clarify and confirm information.

Ask people what they think. It's a sign of respect. You can say, "How do you see it?" or "What do you think?" or "Walk me through your thinking on this."

Set a positive tone. Being a positive communicator means offering recognition, support, feedback, praise, and encouragement. It means discouraging negativity, gossip, and unproductive complaining among the employees you manage. Lead by example. Your ability to stay even-tempered and positive, can help your employees stay focused and engaged at work even in challenging times.