Communication Safety Talk

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

Communication in the workplace is one of the signs of a high-performance culture. Exchanging information and ideas within an organization is called workplace communication. Effective communication occurs when a message is sent and received accurately. In every aspect of life (both professional and personal), effective communication is important to success and happiness. **Effective communication in the workplace** is central to all business goals.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

CAUSES OF POOR COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Common causes of poor communications in the workplace:

1. **Objectives are not clear**

While a well-worded job description given along with a job offer is certainly welcomed, it is not enough. Make sure to have a face-to-face discussion with an employee in order to go through his or her responsibilities and the expectations that go along with his or her job. If an organization fails to do this, not only could this lead to confusion and frustration, a staff member may end up underperforming without meaning to.

Along with the expectations that go hand in hand with their positions, employees also need to be made aware of the purpose and goals of the whole company itself. By doing this, not only will communications in the workplace improve, staff members are able to align themselves with the objectives of the company so they can be contributors to its progress and success.

2. **Poor leadership**

Staff members look to business owners and their managers for direction. However, if people given managerial roles are poor leaders, it is highly likely that communication in the workplace will deteriorate. While good leaders are able to be good examples and are able to motivate staff members, poor and incompetent leaders are indecisive and are unable to inspire their team. They may also be so bad at communication that they are unable to answer questions and clarify points so much so that their subordinates are left even more confused and frustrated than when they started.

3. **Cultural diversity in the workplace**

The world is getting smaller, and work environments are getting more and more diverse. It is not unusual to find individuals from different cultures, races, religious beliefs, genders and others working in the same workspace, for the same company. While diversity is certainly a good development, it does present a few challenges – including the potential for poor communications in the workplace.

Different people from different backgrounds will relay messages in different ways, with varied nonverbal cues. Interpretations of messages will be different as well. For example, "crossing your fingers" may mean "hoping for good luck" in America; however, it is an obscene gesture in Vietnam.

4. **Demoralized employees**

When staff members lose interest in their work and the organization, they are considered to be demoralized. An employee who is demoralized feels unvalued, unappreciated, and even disrespected and disregarded despite their capacities and talents. He or she tends to be unproductive and irritable, and are more likely to look for opportunities elsewhere instead of helping the company move forward.

5. **Personal issues and challenges of employees**

While employees should only be concentrating on work while at the workplace, some may be distracted by their own personal issues and challenges, such as a death in the family or divorce. Due to distractions and personal issues, a staff member may communicate the wrong way, and react in a negative fashion. When you notice this occurrence, make sure to give your employees time off so they can deal with their personal issues.

CONSEQUENCES OF POOR WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION

A major report revealed that **one-half of employees** have "great" or "excellent" conversations at work. The other half deemed their conversations as "mediocre," "poor" or "bad."

Another survey with executives, managers and junior staff members found that communication breakdowns in the workplace have multiple downsides. When asked about **the consequences of poor communication:**

- 52% of respondents said they feel higher stress levels.
- 44% said they failed to complete their projects.
- 31% said they missed their performance goals.
- 20% said that they experience obstacles in innovation.
- 18% said that they lost new sales opportunities.
- A survey of 400 companies with 100,000 employees cited an average loss per company of $62.4 million per year because of inadequate communication to and between employees.
- Companies with effective communication practices generate **47% higher total returns to shareholders** compared to organizations with poor communication.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

STRONG COMMUNICATION

The importance of strong communication runs deep within a business. Five key reasons.

Team building – Building effective teams is really all about how those team members communicate and collaborate together. By implementing effective strategies, such as those listed below, to boost communication you will go a long way toward building effective teams. This, in turn, will improve morale and employee satisfaction.

Gives everyone a voice – As mentioned above, employee satisfaction can rely a lot on their having a voice and being listened to, whether it be in regards to an idea they have had or about a complaint they need to make. Well established lines of communication should afford everyone, no matter their level, the ability to freely communicate with their peers, colleagues and superiors.

Innovation – Where employees are enabled to openly communicate ideas without fear of ridicule or retribution they are far more likely to bring their idea to the table. Innovation relies heavily on this and an organization which encourages communication is far more likely to be an innovative one.

Growth – Communication can be viewed both internally and externally. By being joined up internally and having strong lines of communication you are ensuring that the message you are delivering externally is consistent. Any growth project relies on strong communication and on all stakeholders, whether internal or external, being on the same wavelength.

Strong management – When managers are strong communicators, they are better able to manage their teams. The delegation of tasks, conflict management, motivation and relationship building (all key responsibilities of any manager) are all much easier when you are a strong communicator. Strong communication is not just the ability to speak to people but to empower them to speak to each other – facilitating strong communication channels is key.

SPECIFIC COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Effective Communication Strategies We Can Use at Work to Increase Productivity

- Use the right tools for your business
- Encourage two-way communication
- Tell people what they are doing right
- Specific and descriptive feedback
- Schedule a compulsory check-in
- Organize engaging team building activities

IMPROVE ORGANIZATION COMMUNICATION

Key Areas

- **Define goals and expectations**– Managers need to deliver clear, achievable goals to both teams and individuals, outlining exactly what is required on any given project, and ensuring that all staff are aware of the objectives of the project, the department and the organization as a whole.
- **Clearly deliver your message**– Ensure your message is clear and accessible to your intended audience. To do this it is essential that you speak plainly and politely – getting your message across clearly without causing confusion or offence.
- **Choose your medium carefully**– Once you've created your message you need to ensure it's delivered in the best possible format. While face-to-face communication is by far the best way to build trust with employees, it is not always an option. Take time to decide whether information delivered in a printed copy would work better than an email or if a general memo will suffice.

- **Keep everyone involved**– Ensure that lines of communication are kept open at all times. Actively seek and encourage progress reports and project updates. This is particularly important when dealing with remote staff.
- **Listen and show empathy**– Communication is a two-way process and no company or individual will survive long if it doesn’t listen and encourage dialogue with the other party. Listening shows respect and allows you to learn about any outstanding issues you may need to address as an employer.

FINAL WORD

Communication can be formal, informal, internal or external. And within an organization, it is important to develop a healthy and beneficial communication process. Effective communication is the key to achieving long-term success, so make sure you follow the above outline strategies. No matter what stage you are in the workplace, you need to communicate ideas well in the workplace.