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Communication is Key

Quality company communication is essential for day-to-day operations, highly regarded by most and consistently one of the top concerns expressed in employee surveys. If this is the case, why is company communication so often lacking, even by those that believe they're doing a great job? We often do not fully realize that we communicate with one another in different ways and that it involves both sending (writing, speaking) and receiving (listening) information.

Individuals often assume that the way they do things is also the way others do them, but personality research has revealed that people communicate in very different ways. For example, some people are very precise and specific when communicating. They choose their words carefully, take things literally and often need specifics regarding goals, actions and timeframes, while others tend to communicate in a broader sense. Instead of being specific, they assume others know what they mean. These differences can lead to misinterpretation and misunderstanding and may wreak havoc on your organization if not understood.

So, how can an organization ensure clear, understandable messages are received by the entire workforce? The first step is a simple one – increase communication! Employees most commonly report that they are left in the dark about their performance and the company's plans, which is often due to a lack of communication. There may be times that company business must remain confidential, but most employees just want honesty and a straightforward message. When communication is unclear or non-existent, gossip takes hold and fills in the communication gaps while morale and productivity suffer.

Another key aspect of communication that is often unappreciated is listening. Good listening skills are essential for effective communication. Proficiency in listening means paying attention and understanding the purpose, agenda and perspective of the speaker. It is also important to control distractions while listening - if you don't pay full attention, you will not receive the complete message. Also, don't interrupt - let the person finish what he was saying, even if you think you know what he will say next. Finally, if you don't understand the message, ask for clarification. Don't walk away guessing.

Listening to the entire workforce is as important as listening on an individual basis. To evaluate your company's communication effectiveness, ask yourself: Are your employees encouraged to bring ideas and concerns to management? Does your company even have an avenue for employees to do so? When an employee does bring a concern to his/her supervisor, what happens next? If the idea immediately goes into the circular file never to be seen again, a plan is needed to handle and respond to these concerns. Every suggestion can't be implemented, but when employees are kept informed about the process and feel like they're being taken seriously, your company will benefit from both new ideas and increased motivation. In the end, you will see how an effective communication process can lead to business success.

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