

Successful Supervisor Part 95

Communicating Effectively with your Employees

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPLP

A major role for all supervisors is to be a conduit of information for their groups. The task of keeping all workers on the same page during constantly evolving conditions is a daunting task. In this article I will share some tips that should prove helpful to keep communications flowing efficiently.

Beware of relying too much on email

I know many supervisors who believe they have communicated information well to their groups once they have sent out an email. They forget that communication has not happened unless everyone in the group has opened, read, and internalized the message correctly. A complex technically-correct email may be opened by most people, but the meaning may go over their heads as they only have time to scan the message for key points or read only the first sentence.

It is important to have a track record of very brief emails that people will not dread opening. Summarizing key points in bullet form at the end of the note may help. I think another helper is to make the text reader friendly. Try to have the signature block appear at the bottom of the first page, so when workers open the note they can see they are looking at the whole message in one glance.

Use multiple exposures to critical data

The 2011 Edelman Trust barometer noted that for people to believe information about the group, they need to have it communicated to them 3-5 times using different modes of communication. If you have a monthly "Town Hall" meeting, that counts as one form of communication, but you will need to present the same information at least two more times before most people are likely to absorb and remember it.

You may have a bulletin Board where you can put up a poster. You might supplement other forms of communications with a voice mail or email summary of the key points. The idea is to not rely on a single point of communication to be sufficient for important information.

Recognize that some people will hear only what they think you were going to say

I found it fascinating when I would circle back after a public meeting to find out what people heard. A significant percentage heard the opposite of what I said because that was their preconceived notion of what I was going to say.

Take the time to verify what people have internalized

To communicate well, make sure you go through a verification step after a major speech or meeting. If only a small percentage of the information was internalized, then you have not communicated well.

Learn to listen better

I have discussed this aspect of communication before in this series. Learn the technique of “reflective listening” and use it whenever you are approached by a person in a highly emotional state. I use the image of **putting on my listening hat** in these circumstances to remind me to listen with more intensity.

Use stories to embellish your points

People can relate better to information if it is presented along with analogies, stories, or humorous anecdotes. If you just ramble on with dry content and no spice to break up the ideas, people will tune out and look like they are listening when in reality they are checked out thinking about tonight’s dinner menu.

Don’t hypnotize people with too many PowerPoint Slides

Learn to keep PowerPoint presentations short and interesting. The rule is to have no more than seven short points on a slide and to have a pictorial image that relates to the content on each slide. Each bullet should be 7 words or less. Having too much information and no image on a slide will allow people to check out mentally.

Share the stage

Let other people do part of the speaking by artfully designing your content so you can invite other people to present some of it. Also, make your presentations conversational in nature so people will feel free to inject thoughts of their own. In this way you keep the audience engaged in the conversation.

Watch your body language

Recognize that people are constantly reading meaning by looking at how you hold yourself when communicating. They will pick up (at least subconsciously) any hint of duplicity where your words are indicating one point while your body language is sending a different meaning. Have someone in the room who is an expert on body language and have that person debrief every important presentation so you become more of an

expert yourself. Body language is critical in communication, and many professionals do not have enough experience to recognize how they are coming across.

One of the most important communication aids is to create a culture of high trust, so people will not be afraid to share a counterpoint. In a high trust culture, people know it is safe to raise an issue and that they will not be punished for it.

Being a supervisor is an extremely challenging role. It requires a mastery of all communication techniques. Use the above points while communicating with your group, and you will be among the elite leaders.

This is a part in a series of articles on “Successful Supervision.” The entire series can be viewed on www.leadergrow.com/articles/supervision or on this blog.

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