

Talent Development 23 Communication

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Section 1.1 in the CPTD Certification program for ATD is Communication. Section A reads, “Skill in using communication strategies that inform and influence audiences.”

Communication is such a basic part of leadership that we often take it for granted. If you study the numerous employee satisfaction surveys that are taken around the world every year, it turns out that poor

communication is often the most mentioned gripe for workers.

The Root Cause

I believe the basis for this problem is that leaders believe they have communicated if they have said or written something and people appear to have heard the verbal output or opened the note.

Unfortunately, communication has not happened until the majority of people fully understand the content. Sharing information verbally in a Town Hall Meeting (live or virtual) and telling people about the latest policy change is not fully communicating, but most leaders think it is adequate to get the job done.

In the [2013 Edelman Trust Barometer](#), Richard Edelman made an observation of a large shift in responses to the following question: “How many times in general do you need to hear something about a specific company to believe it is likely to be true?”

Edelman noted that prior to 2013 the most common response was one or two times. Starting in 2013, he saw a shift where most people responded three to five times. That was a major change that most leaders did not recognize or factor into their communication strategies. Of course, 2013 was a long time ago, but Edelman believes the bar for good communication remains at three to five times.

The implication is that leaders need to find creative and different ways of putting information out so people really grasp the meaning and believe it to be true.

Examples of Different Strategies

1. You can often involve people in the decision while it is still in the formative stage. If people have contributed to a decision, they are much more likely to support it.
2. The Town Hall format or webinar (which can be recorded) is one method of communicating to a large group what is about to happen, but we cannot stop there and think we have communicated.
3. Follow up with individual or small group meetings where people can relax and ask any questions they have.
4. Verify people have heard the real meaning by asking questions about what you just said.
5. Involve people emotionally in the content by asking their reactions to a decision or action.
6. When people tell you something relative to the decision, be sure to wear your “listening hat” and absorb the input deeply. Ask clarifying questions and use reflective listening techniques.
7. Consider that currently, and in the future, there will be a hybrid situation where some people will hear the content live and others will be virtual.
8. If part of the audience is international, take into account the time zone differences that may limit the coverage. You might consider recording an important message to be played at a more convenient time.
9. Put the information in writing either with a physical letter or an email, because some people need to read the material several times for it to sink in.
10. Consider texts or tweets to reinforce the messages and provide for dialog if there are questions, but recognize you will not reach all people with social networking.
11. Post the information on a bulletin board or on the internal company news channel or employee website.
12. Circle back a few days after an announcement to identify if there is a deep understanding of the implications of a decision.

You do not need to do all these steps for every decision, but do strive to have important announcements disseminated in three to five different ways for maximum understanding.

If leaders would put more energy into how they communicate with people, we could reduce the problem of people feeling that communication from their leaders is lacking.

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