

Talent Development 45 Communications Strategy

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Section 3.4 in the CPTD Certification program for ATD is Talent Strategy and Management. Section F states, “Skill in designing and implementing communication strategy in order to drive talent management objectives.”

All strategy needs to start with some fundamentals, and that is true for a communication strategy for talent management. We need to start with a clear vision of where we are going. Without that,

we will flail around like a flag in a hurricane.

Knowing exactly where we are going with the talent development effort is always the first step. Second, we need to create logical steps to get from our current position to the vision.

It is essential to understand the gaps so people can visualize how our path will help us arrive at our objective in a finite period of time. That specific plan is what we need to communicate to everyone involved.

Sometimes we have the luxury of time to develop and communicate the plan in a logical manner, and sometimes we are forced to do it with blinding speed.

A Classic Example

For many groups, the date of March 13, 2020 sticks out as a prime example where speed was required. In numerous organizations, people went home from their work that Friday, and by Monday, March 16, the entire operation needed to be recast to allow people to work virtually. The pivot to pull off that feat required a kind of communication effort that few people could imagine just a few days earlier.

That weekend was a scramble few people will ever forget.

For the Talent Development professionals, the situation was just as chaotic. I recall teaching my leadership class live on Friday morning and having to retool my entire program over the weekend to be totally virtual. When there is no choice, it is amazing how quickly things can happen.

For most leaders, the need to retool how they communicated with people in the entire organization was just as abrupt. Some people needed to upgrade their systems or borrow a laptop from work to allow a constancy of communication that was vital in those frantic days. The need for accurate information being given was even higher than before Covid hit.

The Bar is Being Raised Even More

In his Trust Barometer, Richard Edelman described a shift that is ongoing. When asked, “How many times to you need to hear something about an organization to believe it is true?” the answer used to be once or twice. Currently the answer for most people is three to five times.

The need to be creative and frame up important communication in several different ways is a skill many leaders have not mastered yet. A simple “town hall” meeting is no longer adequate to convey important or complex information. Here is an idea of the steps needed to be sure information is conveyed accurately.

1. Send out a meeting notice with the essence of the message to be conveyed.
2. Have a meeting to convey the message in person or virtually.
3. Ask the participants what they just heard (to verify the message).
4. Follow up with an email explaining the message and the rationale.
5. A week later, ask some people what they recall the announcement was.

Conclusion

The ability to communicate important concepts, like talent management objectives, is a lot more complex in the current environment than it was a few years ago. I suspect the higher bar will be with us always, so we need to adjust our communication patterns accordingly.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals, Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online, Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind, and Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.

