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There's No Communication Around Here!

Despite the overwhelming amounts of information passing back and forth in corporations these days – via email, instant messaging, voice mail, Webinars, blogs, and so on – one of the most common complaints among employees is that there's very little communication happening. That's because employees sense the information they get from managers and other company leaders is spun to make it sound like things are better than they are, or it omits important details or has any other number of problems associated with it.

Not surprisingly, these frustrations affect performance. The latest Watson Wyatt Communication ROI Study found that companies with effective communication practices have a 19 percent higher market premium and a 57 percent higher shareholder return over five years than companies with ineffective practices. That's because ineffective communication practices lead to conflicting internal goals, blindness to what other divisions are doing, turf wars, low morale, and more, says Dianna Booher, CEO of Booher Consultants and author of *The Voice of Authority: 10 Communication Strategies Every Leader Needs to Know* (McGraw-Hill, 2007).

As a manager, you have the greatest impact on how your employees view the communication in your company. So what can you do to make sure their assessment is a positive one? A good place to start, says Booher, is to pay attention to the "Three C's":

1. Are you correct?

Do you communicate with truthfulness every time? If not – if you spin the truth to make things sound rosier than they are, or omit information, or outright lie – then you destroy your credibility and your reps' trust in you. Always tell the truth, even when it puts you in a bad light. Sure, it's uncomfortable to be truthful when you've made a mistake but remember this: "Nothing makes people believe you when you're right like admitting when you're wrong," says Booher. "Nothing earns more respect than seeing someone's confidence in owning up to their blunders, decisions or poor performance." Also remember that one untruthful statement can undo months or years of trust building among your team.

2. Are you complete?

Managers withhold information for many reasons, but the number one reason is because they believe it gives them power. On the contrary, managers who withhold information are usually resented and regarded with mistrust. It's the leaders who share all the details – who communicate the "how," not just the "what" of major decisions in an organization – who are the real power brokers. When employees feel they have all the information and all their questions answered about upcoming changes, they'll engage more readily in their work rather than spending time second-guessing what's going on in the organization.

3. Are you clear?

People generally assume their communications are clear and that any misunderstanding is the fault of the listener. In fact, misunderstandings are usually the fault of the speaker or writer. That's because the three main culprits in confusing communication are lack of specificity, excessive jargon or wordiness, and burying the key message. Here's how to fix these three areas: • *Be specific.* Don't tell a rep he can give a customer a "substantial discount" and then get upset when the rep gives a 25 percent discount and you had in mind no more than 15 percent. Don't tell a rep he needs to make "more cold calls" if he's going to hit quota – work the numbers with him. When you're specific in your communication, there's usually little confusion about what you mean.

• *Communicate in plain English.* Ditch the jargon, the big words, and the stiffly formal prose. Instead, say what you mean in clear, precise language.

• *Bottom line up-front.* Always state your key message at the beginning. Many people think they need to provide a lot of background information so people will better understand their key point, but the opposite is true: people won't understand – or want – the background unless they first hear your point.

For more ideas about how you can communicate more effectively, visit www.booher.com.

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