

When it comes to communication...

What makes your employees tick?



Sure, we know that money is a big factor in employee motivation. But an employee survey recently conducted by a large human resources consulting firm suggests communication may be even more important than pay as a factor in motivating and retaining employees.

The evidence comes from Mercer HR Consulting, which recently surveyed 2,600 U.S. workers about

their attitudes regarding their job, management, pay and the work environment.

Among employees who report their organization does a good job of keeping workers informed, just 15% say they are seriously considering leaving their organization and only 6% say they are dissatisfied. On the flip side, among employees who say their organization does not keep them informed, 41% are thinking about leaving and 42% say they are dissatisfied.

Communication is a big factor in decisions to stay or leave

The gaps aren't as wide on some pay issues, says Mercer, suggesting that communication may play a larger role than pay in shaping employee attitudes. "Clearly, employees value effective communication with their employers," notes Mercer. "It affects their overall commitment and satisfaction and is a major factor in their decisions to stay with or leave an employer."

Why should managers be concerned about retention and job satisfaction in a tight labor market? Because it's smart business to do so. Low productivity, reduced customer service, lack of innovation and problem-solving and poor execution are the by-products of worker alienation. In a hotly competitive world of business, these kinds of negative behaviors can stop a business plan dead in its tracks. **C**

What do employees want from communication? Here's what they say, and how you can meet their needs:

- **"I want more information about how to do my job effectively and how to manage my career."**
How managers can help: Give clear, thorough work directions. Meet regularly with employees to provide performance feedback and discuss business developments. Link business strategy to work unit and individual goals. Point employees toward info resources and developmental opportunities that can help them learn and grow.
- **"I want to learn more about the future direction of my organization and how I fit into the plan."**
How managers can help: Help employees understand how they fit into the organization by letting them in on major programs, decisions and challenges and how they can contribute to them.
- **"I'd like to see more appreciation from my manager when I do my job well."** *How managers can help:* Say thank you or offer a kind word every once in a while – it costs nothing and people can be just as motivated by sincere appreciation as they are by formal rewards. Target praise for specific accomplishments and not to general work.
- **"I desire a more open, two-way communication climate that allows me to freely share my opinions and ideas with management."** *How managers can help:* Make a strong effort to connect personally with your employees. Encourage dialogue among teams and individual employees. Make your employees feel comfortable communicating with you.
- **"I want my boss to stop micro-managing me."**
How managers can help: When practical, give employees authority to make decisions and the flexibility to set goals for themselves and manage their work. Trust them to do the job they've been hired to do. **C**

**The Office Mood
No News
Isn't Good News**

Source: Mercer Human Resources Consulting survey of 2,600 U.S. workers

OF THOSE WHO SAY THEIR ORGANIZATION DOES A GOOD JOB COMMUNICATING WITH THEM ...A LOW

6%

SAY THEY ARE DISSATISFIED.

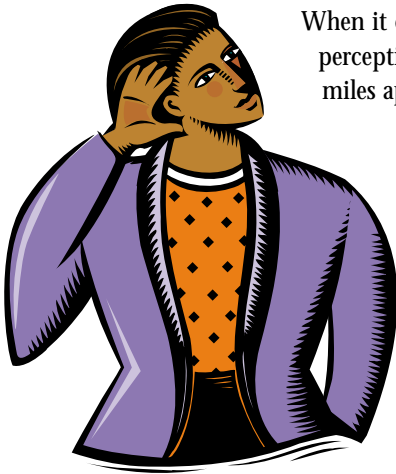
OF THOSE WHO SAY THEIR ORGANIZATION DOES NOT KEEP THEM INFORMED ...A HIGH

42%

SAY THEY ARE DISSATISFIED.

Pssst. Listen up!

Hear ye, hear ye...listening well helps managers gain respect



When it comes to listening, perception and reality are often miles apart.

Communication surveys are usually chock full of comments from employees complaining about the poor listening skills of management. Managers often react with dumbfounded disbelief over these findings.

Today's employees have minimal tolerance for managers who display little interest in listening to what they have to say. In fact, a huge chasm exists between the "casual listening" practiced by many managers and the "deep listening" employees want from them.

"Deep listening" is really "active listening" – intense, visible concentration on what's being said. When managers practice good listening skills, they convey a signal to the speaker that they sincerely care about what is being said.

The dividends of active listening are enormous. Listening well is one of the best ways to gain the respect of those who work for you. It boosts their opinion of you as a leader and they, in turn, are more inclined to listen to you.

"A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he knows something."

*— Wilson Mizner,
American Author*

Achieving "listening excellence" isn't rocket science. Just follow a few guidelines and you've got it. Here's what you need to do:

- **Focus attention** on the speaker, giving them your undivided attention, listening closely for their main message.
- **Resist distractions**, blocking out noise from the surrounding environment or going to a quieter place that allows you to concentrate better.
- **Be patient, avoid interrupting** the speaker. Let the speaker finish what they have to say.
- **Use body language** to indicate interest. Make eye contact, lean in a little, nod your head to show understanding. The nonverbal cues are important.

- **Indicate your understanding** of what the speaker said by re-framing key points or by asking questions to achieve clarification.

- **Don't tune out** the speaker if you disagree with what's being said. Set aside barriers that may exist between you and the speaker, such as cultural differences, differences in frame of reference, or past interactions. Letting emotions interfere with listening is deadly to the process. **C**

"It's still embarrassing. I asked my caddie for a sand wedge, and 10 minutes later he came back with a ham and rye."

— Golfer Chi Chi Rodriguez



Bad mood rising? Breathe in... breathe out

Work life is full of ups and downs. When you, the boss, are happy — everybody's happy. But when you're not, do you contain it? Or, does the thunder and lightning roll through the plant or office and foul everyone's mood?

Passing your bad day along to employees in the form of tirades, nasty glares and other negative actions can be costly to your credibility and effectiveness. It's not uncommon for managers to see all the good will they've worked hard to build up with employees come crashing down in one forgetful morning or afternoon.

When a bad mood comes over you, go to your office, close the door, take a deep breath and let a feeling of "cool" pass over you. It's times like these that test managers' souls.

Some behavioral experts advise that once you compose yourself, do something positive – like stopping by to visit the employee who's due a thank for a job well done. It'll make the employee feel good and, hey, it may lift your spirits as well. **C**

Trust in the workplace...

so important to have yet so hard to acquire

It's one of the toughest things for managers to acquire, yet it's one of the easiest things for them to lose.

We're talking about employee trust. By definition, trust is a firm reliance on the integrity, ability or character of a person or thing. In the wake of recent probes of corporate wrongdoing, trust in the workplace is more elusive than ever. Workers are watching their employers with a most critical eye – looking for signs whether the company and its leaders are on the side of the perceived good guys or the bad guys.

Trust, or lack of it, has made or broken thousands of business leaders, managers and supervisors over the years. When people lose faith in the messenger, they tune out the message and withhold commitment. Employees have long considered trust a sacred value in the work environment and, when they perceive that the bond has been broken, destructive forces enter into play that lead to hostility, over-reaction and productivity loss.

So, what can managers do to build the credibility that leads to trusting relationships with co-workers?



■ **Start by demonstrating a real concern for people.** Provide the personal touch when sharing high impact news that affects the individual or the team. Take time to meet with people, go out of your way to work together with them and find out what they are thinking. Giving them the opportunity to contribute ideas and opinions adds dignity and meaning to a job in the eyes of most people.

■ **When it comes to trust, consistency and fairness count.** Actions speak louder than words and you as the manager must practice a behavior set that includes being reliable, following

through on things, keeping promises, working ethically and fair personnel actions and application of the rules – and doing all these things right all the time. One slip up and it's back to the beginning to re-start the tough climb from scratch.

■ **Keep things out in the open.** Secrecy breeds suspicion, which makes effective communication a key factor in building trust. Find out what employees would like to know and tell them as much as you can (without breaking management confidences, of course) to meet their informational needs and to allay fears. Communicate business strategy and how employees fit into it as it relates to the work unit and their individual job. Explain the rationale for change. Address rumors before they take root and fester.

Getting trust and keeping it is hard work that takes time. There are no magic gimmicks or simple solutions; it's a matter of the manager being real day in and day out. Trust can't be created by big raises, company picnics or a nice work environment. It can only be generated through fairness, honesty and consistency. **C**

KEYS TO COMMUNICATIONS SUCCESS

We're all different... flex your 'style' to communicate effectively with others

They say love makes the world go round, but it's the differences in people that make the world an interesting place to live and work in.

Making an effort to understand the differences in people – and tailoring your talk to accommodate for social style and cultural differences – can go a long way toward shaping your ability to influence others.

Basically, employees at work fit into one of four social styles: driver, expressive, amiable and analytical. Which style are you?

In their book, *Social Style/Management Style*:

Developing Productive Work Relationships, Robert and Dorothy Bolton suggest these strategies for flexing your style to better communicate with team members:

Drivers: listen. Your fast-paced, goal-oriented approach often stresses others, so make a determined effort to listen to others' feelings, suggestions and ideas.

Expressives: restrain. Your high energy, verbal fluency, and louder voice may intimidate others, so restrain your tendency to take center stage and act impulsively.

Amiables: stretch. Your low-key approach may irritate others who are more goal-oriented. Stretch toward challenging goals, straight talk, and concrete results.

Analyticals: decide. Slow, systematic fact-gathering can drive others up the wall unless you learn to take a stand more quickly. To flex, take action, and be more decisive.

Flexing your style to improve communication doesn't mean giving up who you are, but simply adjusting it, at times, for the good of the entire team. **C**

Making communication a priority spearheaded this GE leader's success

Once upon a time, General Electric owned a multi-billion dollar business that was the poorest performer among its 14 major business units. Market share was declining, morale was poor, department and location personnel bickered, and rumors of

divestiture were everywhere.

In stepped a new business leader with the charge of fixing the business – fast – or it would be sold. The new business leader had a good strategy in mind to turn things around, but he recognized he had to win "the hearts and minds" of employees if he was to succeed.

Right after he took the reins, he went on the road –

taking his business case directly to employees, talking with them about his plan and what they as individuals and teams could do to support him in implementing the plan.

He visited every location and spoke with every employee, on every shift, in meetings large and small. The message was real, sincere, and full of truth: he minced no words that the journey to regain competitive superiority would be a tough one.

After he finished his tour, he continued to communicate aggressively through face-to-face and print channels. He encouraged all his managers to make communication a priority and he rewarded those who focused on it and replaced those who did not.

Eighteen months later, GE's electrical distribution operation was a top performer in GE's sea of successful businesses. And it stayed that way. It was one of the most dramatic turnarounds in company history.

The communication champion who engineered this turnaround was John Opie, who went on to star at other GE businesses. He concluded his career a few years ago as Jack Welch's vice chairman. **C**

—By Ron Hess, President, Motiv8 Communications, and a former GE manager. Know of a communication success story from your career? Contact the employee communication office.



Ask the experts

Bad manners can lead to big problems



Q: *Our Human Resources manager told me that several employees give me low marks for politeness. What's that all about?*

A: It's an acknowledged fact that good manners have declined in America over the past decade or so. But the subject seems to be getting increased attention in corporate America. It's high on employee radar screens

Employees perceive impolite behavior by their boss as a sign of disrespect for them. When rudeness occurs over and over again, employees become turned off and dissatisfaction grows. The fact that employees have mentioned your behavior to the HR manager is an indicator that feelings have boiled over among those who report to you.

Watch those off-the-cuff remarks

Examples of "impolite behavior" in the workplace include gruff treatment of lower levels employees, ignoring a greeting in the hallway, inappropriate remarks about or directed toward individuals, being habitually late for meetings, or stopping a face-to-face conversation dead in its tracks to take a phone call. For example, managers who constantly arrive late for meetings with subordinates send the message that they have little regard for people of lower rank.

Bad manners can lead to big problems for an organization. A manager who makes an off-the-cuff remark that demeans the gender, race or culture of an individual or group of people can ignite a firestorm that leads to legal action and bad publicity for the company, or disciplinary action or a reprimand for the manager.

Be careful with e-mails too

And it's not just what you say, but what you write, too. If you receive an e-mail that angers you, let it sit for awhile before you reply. When you write an e-mail, don't inflame and *always* keep in mind that e-mails can travel anywhere in the organization.

Minding manners is a responsibility that a manager cannot afford to overlook. **C**

"The message was real, sincere, and full of truth: he minced no words that the journey to regain competitive superiority would be a tough one."