

Leader Strategies

Issue Five

Using The Power Of Communication To Turn Plans Into Actions

A business goal is only that – a goal – until employees act upon it. Today, more than ever, communication is about creating meaning that drives action and ultimately organizational performance. Used skillfully, communication is a strategy enabler.

Common Sense, But Not Always Common Practice

Here are eight strategies you can use right now to improve communication and enhance business performance:

- **Plan your communication.** Instead of thinking about what you want to say, think in terms of the outcome. What do you want people to think, feel and do as a result of your communication? What are the key points you want people to take away. Keep in mind the average leader spends 80-90% of their time per week communicating, but only 10-20% planning.
- **Know your audience's mindset.** Understand where they are coming from, what positive and negative perceptions they may have and what they're concerned about.
- **When communicating with employees, know the seven questions.** In order to engage employees in your strategy you must first answer the questions that are most important to them:
 1. What's my job?
 2. How am I doing?
 3. Does anyone care about me?
 4. What does our organization stand for?
 5. Where is our organization going?
 6. Where is my work group going?
 7. How can I play a role?
- **Always check for understanding.** Communication takes place in the mind of the listener. Good communication is a dialogue where questions can be asked, ideas can be challenged and meaning can be personalized. One of the best ways to gauge the effectiveness of your communication is by the questions people ask. If they ask basic questions that get at the core of what you communicated, you somehow missed the mark. If they are forward-looking or more detail-oriented, your team is with you. They got the message and are thinking ahead of you about what's next.
- **Walk the talk.** People believe much more of what they see or experience than what we tell them. Build trust and credibility by doing what you say before you actually say it.
- **Be conscious of your energy.** Neuroscientific research shows that the delivery is more important than the message. In a recent study, neuroscientists observed two groups. One received negative performance feedback accompanied by positive emotional signals – namely nods and smiles. The other group was given positive feedback but delivered with frowns and narrowed eyes. Subsequent interviews were conducted with the two groups to compare their emotional states. The people who had received the positive feedback, accompanied by the negative emotional signals reported feeling worse about their performance than the participants who had received good natured, but negative feedback.

Continued

Turning Your Plans Into Actions, Continued

- **Show your true self.** Internal and external stakeholders want authenticity, honesty, and accessibility from their leaders. Being real creates trust. If people trust you, they will follow your lead and the company's direction.
- **Don't run the risk of waiting until you have all the information.** Many leaders wait until they have all the facts before communicating. Waiting can be a risky proposition. Employees just want to know what you know, your take on the situation and when you will have the rest of the information. The information vacuum will be filled whether you want it to be or not. When you remain silent, you have no chance to influence the conversation.

The Bottom Line

According to a study conducted by Watson Wyatt Worldwide, effective communication has a strong impact on the bottom line. Companies with the most effective communications see: a 29.4% increase in market value, a 26% total return to shareholders compared to -15% in the worst communicating companies and employee turnover rates 50% below the worst communicating companies.

You can learn more about effective leadership communication by contacting Kimberly Paterson at kpaterson@cim-co.com or by calling 732.681.0700.

About CIM

CIM has 31 years' experience in working with insurance/financial organizations to strengthen performance. We work with companies to build the vision, strategy, customer insight and leadership skills to energize people and achieve outstanding results. Our value lies in our ability to quickly get to the heart of organizational issues and leverage opportunity.