

leadership instalments

Share your Plans

By Dan Gaynor

WORDS ARE A LEADER'S MOST BASIC AND MOST POWERFUL TOOLS and there are so many ways to say something. Good communication skills can mean the difference between success and failure. This time of year offers a powerful communication opportunity – your annual plan. Communicating well can build commitment and even enthusiasm for it. Embrace this as a time to strengthen your relationships with your team. Put simply, people talk to people they care about. When you open up the plan you send a powerful and basic message of caring. And employees don't like to disappoint leaders who care about them.

Well-developed communication skills boost performance by reducing fear and preparing people for the road ahead. With market conditions as they are there is lots of fear to contend with. Fear is always a distraction; it never builds focus or energy. When you inform your team honestly, openly and empathetically they take a deeper interest in problems and opportunities and are more likely to do something positive about them. Let's take a look at this communication formula a little more closely.

Honesty: Honesty is the foundation of trust. Trust is the glue that binds leaders and teams together. People will act courageously for leaders they trust. Manipulation is the only motive for dishonesty. Manipulation destroys trust. When a leader is caught in even a single deception, it can be very difficult to rebuild trust. The team wonders what else he or she will lie about. Don't ever deceive the members of your team, even when you may think you are doing it for an honourable reason.

Openness: A great many leaders err here. They are not dishonest but they are not saying enough. When you open the business up by talking with your team about it you send a powerful message of trust and caring. They won't want to disappoint you. And in a difficult economy like we have today you can allay a lot of fear by talking about what's going on and what you are doing about it so don't leave people in the dark.

Empathy: Without empathy honesty can be hurtful and cruel. Too many people have said things that were deliberately hurtful under the cover of honesty. Good leaders are sensitive with their comments.

In tough times, like those we face today good communication is indispensable. It cannot remove the stress that accompanies these periods, but it reduces stress and the dysfunction that typically accompanies it.

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Communication improves performance by giving others something they can do about the problems. This reduces feelings of victimization.



If you lead other leaders you are also responsible for their communication habits. At both the St. Catharines Standard and the Calgary Herald, I directed our senior executives to present their annual business plans to employees in a series of meetings. These answered the questions: Where are we going and how are we involved? The meetings were new, and without exception, they were appreciated. They helped people place their roles in a larger context. Because they could see their work as part of something bigger, it became more important. Then when leaders throughout each newspaper met with employees to set goals, the big picture was there. We followed the annual meetings with regular staff updates throughout the year. They answered the questions: How are we doing, and what should we do next?

Whether you lead a large organization or a small department, include a team meeting in the launch of your plans this year. You'll send them a powerful message of involvement and caring. They will work hard to help out.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. **What are your plans for sharing the business plan for the coming year?**
2. **How often will you meet with employees to provide updates in the coming year?**
3. **What information will you include in monthly updates?**

For more on the fundamentals of building strong productive teams call for a workshop.

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