

Communication Skills For Effective Leadership

Great Leaders Have Great Communication Skills



Good communication skills are crucial in a leader if they are to remain a leader. A leader can be defined as someone who plays a prominent role in a business or a department within it. There are also religious, political and community leaders, leaders of groups and teams, and so on. In this guide, we will be looking at business leaders and how good communication skills are an important part of effective leadership.

Let's start with a definition of a good leader, and how they show they are a good leader through their communication style and choices.

WHAT IS EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN A GOOD LEADER?

Some people seem to be born leaders, while others have leadership thrust upon them. History shows us that many people who come from fairly humble origins have been suddenly transformed into legends in their own time and beyond. What creates a Julius Caesar or a Napoleon? What creates in our own era, and with less conquering involved, the likes of Richard Branson, Steve Jobs and Warren Buffett?

The one thing they all have in common is that they are effective communicators, and one might even say "spin doctors". They understand the importance of conveying a vision people want to participate in. Julius Caesar and Napoleon both understood propaganda and were able to convince people that their defeats were actually victories. Effective modern leaders like Branson and Jobs built companies from scratch, with every worker becoming convinced of the importance of the mission and willing to do their part.

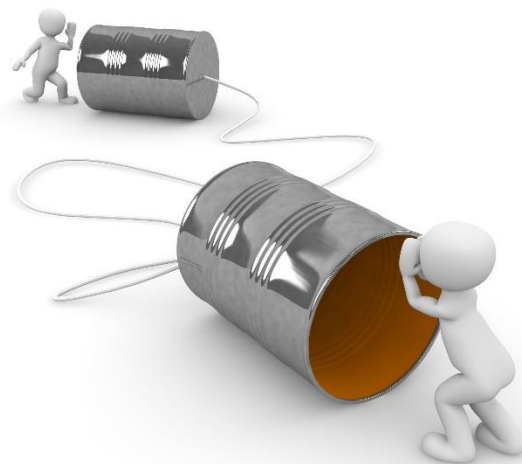
In every opportunity for leadership, there will be obstacles, pitfalls and tough times - not just successes. It is how someone responds to these tough times, and to their many critics who want to pick them to pieces, that can be the sign of a great leader.

As with many things in life, timing is also critical. Learning how to communicate effectively to your chosen audience at the right time and the right place can be difficult, but can reap great benefits.

Know Your Audience

The most important aspect of any effective communication is knowing your audience. This audience will vary, so being flexible in your communication styles is a great skill for any leader to have. In the course of a single day as the leader of a business or department, you might speak to:

- Staff
- Shareholders
- Business partners



- Prospective business partners
- Vendors
- Customers
- Children taking a tour of your facility

...and more.

How you speak to them, and what you choose to say or not say to them, is key to successful communication. For example, you wouldn't go over your Q4 sales results with the children. And you wouldn't give departmental reviews to your customers - only to your staff.

The Right Timing

Timing is also key. For example, no business leader looks forward to giving out bad news, but sometimes the more you avoid it, the worse things can become. If there is a downturn and you have to start laying off people, this needs to be conveyed sooner rather than later.

The Right Style

Using the example of having to give bad news, you also have to choose your moment and communication style. Should you say nothing to anyone other than those getting the pink slip? Email everyone? Or should you send out an email to make a date for a very important meeting?

Once everyone is at the meeting, how should you announce the news? Do you just blurt out that there will be layoffs and leave it at that? Or will you explain the reasons behind the decision, what the next steps will be, and what you think will happen going forward?

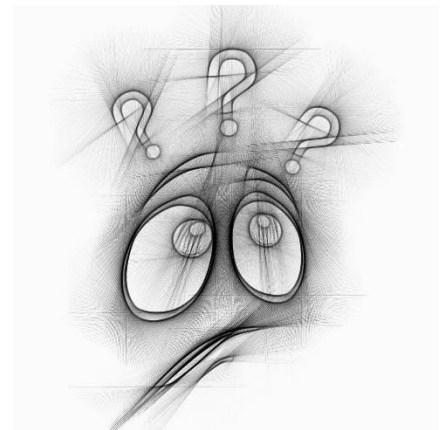
Listening is just as important a leadership skill as speaking. Will you give staff a chance to ask about the redundancies and the situation as a whole? Or leave it to your managers?

Once the meeting is over, you will then have a number of follow-up steps and options. Will you speak to each person getting the pink slip, or let your hiring manager do it? Or will these workers just be given notice and no-one will say a word of regret or appreciation for all their past efforts?

Sometimes communication, for good or ill, comes from not saying anything at all. A worker with a pink slip who has not been given clear reasons or thanked is likely to feel a lot more disgruntled than one who is treated like a human being.

What You Say and Don't Say Does Count

On the other hand, going into too much detail might open up an entire legal minefield if the worker believes the lay-off is because you "don't like them" or some form of discrimination is going on. Accusations of racism, sexism, age-ism and other forms of discrimination can all damage your company and even leave it open to serious financial repercussions.



Therefore, it is very important to be clear about the way all workers are spoken to, and this will come from you as the leader, to filter down to managers and staff. Any forms of off-color jokes, bullying or aggressive tendencies should be discouraged at all times, and in all forms - including email and social media accounts, as well as face-to-face dealings between colleagues. Even "harmless teasing" can be hurtful and seem bullying to some individuals.

Following Up

Whenever something important is being conveyed, follow-up can make all the difference between success and failure.

Using the lay-off example above, for those staff who remain after the cuts, holding another meeting to talk about the next steps will be important. Meetings will also need to be held in order to make sure every task that the people who were laid off were doing will be covered now that they are gone.

Being Visible

When times get tough, even the best leaders want to just go in their office and hide. But being visible can often be one of the best forms of leadership. So too can an open-door policy, in which people feel that they can come to you with questions and concerns and that these will be taken seriously and treated with respect.

Setting the Tone

The most important aspect of leadership can often be to set the tone. A positive, upbeat leader with a can-do attitude is more likely to gain followers than someone who delivers consistently negative messages. Even when things are bad, a leader with good communication skills will be able to reframe the issues in such a way as to maintain a loyal following.

For example, in terms of the lay-offs, it should be made clear that these short-term losses are being made in favor of long-term gains.

If two departments are merged, a good leader would indicate all of the benefits and how the work can be done more efficiently.

Conveying Change

Many people hate change. Even though it is an inescapable fact of life, people get so comfortable in their routines that any change can be very upsetting and even seem like a serious threat to all life as they know it. In most cases, this will not be true, but having empathy for this point of view can help smooth out the transitions.

Holding Regular Meetings

Regular meetings are a chance to communicate clearly and get feedback. Don't just have meetings for the sake of having them. Have clear reasons to meet, agendas, and action steps at the end of each meeting. Follow up in a timely manner on any of the action steps that result from these meetings.

Being a Good Listener

Communication Skills for Effective Leadership

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