



Managers' Guide

ON COMMUNICATING CHANGE

COMMUNICATIONS IS KEY

*This **Managers' Guide** is an effective communications tool to assist you in sharing information with your staff.*

Your role in communicating change

You are a communicator. As soon as you accepted a leadership or management position, communication became one of your top priorities. In times of change, this role becomes even more essential. You share the responsibility for regularly engaging employees in dialogues to ensure that they know where they stand, their expected contribution and that they're important and appreciated. You will also see a shift in your role. As important as delivering the messages will be to listen and respond with empathy to the concerns of others.

Employees' perceptions of managers during times of change

Employees value face-to-face communication with managers and supervisors above all other forms of communication

during periods of change. They trust immediate supervisors most and rely on them to:

- play a vital role in communication;
- regularly convey and explain messages from senior management;
- focus attention on the most relevant information;
- tailor the information to their staff;
- provide support through open communication during times of change; and
- raise their concerns with senior management.

How to prepare to communicate

Preparation is key. Every time you intend to communicate with staff, it is important to consider:

- your message, including the tone you want to portray;
- your staff's current concerns, opinions

IN THIS EDITION:

- Overview
- Do's & Don'ts
- Six Handy Tips
- Questions and Answers
- Contacts & Resources

and perceptions regarding the change initiatives;

- your staff's communication vehicle preferences; that is, how do your staff prefer to receive information – by email, face to face, team meetings, a combination? and
- what reactions to expect from your staff and how to address these reactions .

Ask yourself:

- What do my staff need to know?
- What do they want to know?
- What questions might they have?
- Where can they go for more information?
- Where does the issue stand now?
- Where might the issue lead?
- What are potential areas of resistance?
- What might they need from me?

Do's and don'ts about Change Communications

Understanding the message

Don't assume you have communicated because the message was delivered; it is successful only when it is heard and understood.

Do communicate until the whole message is understood. When change impacts people deeply, they need an opportunity to ask questions, to think about the message being communicated to them, and to discuss the impacts of the changes. Often times, conversations will need to be repeated to ensure your staff fully understands. Because a message is communicated does not mean the communication is finished.

Delivery

Don't use the same methods to deliver change communications that you use to deliver corporate communications.

Do engage when delivering change communications. If you are communi-

cating major changes, then your communications require methods that get people's attention and engage them in the change dialogue.

Communication is a process

Don't treat communication as an event.

Do treat communication as a process. Communication is complete only when the receiver has integrated and understood the message. This often requires delivering the message multiple times, using different vehicles, including face-to-face meetings where people have an opportunity to ask questions.

Be flexible

Don't assume that communication can be planned according to a predetermined timeline.

Do expect the unexpected. Change is so dynamic that you will never know with certainty what will emerge, and thus

needs to be communicated throughout the change process. Much of your communications will need to be far more spontaneous than those you have predetermined on your timeline. Some of your most important communications will emerge as the dynamics of your change unfold.

Say something

Don't assume that you should communicate only when there is a decision to announce.

Do share the questions you are working to answer, the process you are undertaking, or the anticipated timeline when actual answers will be known. During transformational change, more is unknown than is known. It is better to communicate something rather than allow fears and rumours to spread.

Actions speak louder than words

Don't assume that the "talk" will speak louder than the "walk".

Do understand that when there is a major change in an organization, leaders must demonstrate the new ways through their words, and their actions. Leaders cannot communicate one expectation for change and then continue to behave in the "old-state" ways. Employees will know the change is real when there is congruence between words and actions.

Building relationships with your staff

In times of change, employees rely on managers and supervisors. Having a good relationship will open lines of communication. Knowing employees' opinions and perceptions of the change initiative will put you in a better position to provide the most appropriate information, to better anticipate how the message will be received, and to prepare replies to tough questions.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS



Answers to commonly asked questions will assist you in opening the dialogue with your staff.

These sample questions are to help answer concerns you may have about communicating change.

1. My team is concerned with a known upcoming change (i.e., a move, strategic review) and ask questions for which there are no answers yet. What can I do to minimize the stress associated with their concerns?

Advice from the experts

Get together as a management team to see where you are at regarding the change as a team. Share information and strategize so that consistent messages are given across the directorate.

Be transparent. Let your staff know that you do not have all the answers. Share what you do know and what you don't along with a commitment to do so when you are able to.

Get your team together and brainstorm a list of questions that you, as the manager, will raise with your superiors and then report back on to the group. Ask staff what they need in terms of support. Be aware that needs will vary from person to person and that you as the manager will have to adjust in order to meet these various needs.

2. A process needs to be improved to gain more efficiency with less capacity. However, as in any change process, there are some staff with the mindset of: we've always done it this way and it works for us, so why change?

Advice from the experts

To get buy-in to change, you must communicate openly. This involves clearly stating the drivers for change, listening to employee concerns, involving people from the outset and giving them a stake in the outcome.

In order to "sell" the idea of the change, involve each part of the organization in telling their story of how and why they do things. Then challenge them to think about better ways, not just for their part but for where they intersect with other parts of the organisation. This will get them to think about the bigger picture and their part in it.

When the first iteration of the new process is ready for wider discussion, introduce formal presentations which include the why as well as the how, and give the opportunity to staff to comment. By doing this, managers will help their staff to reframe limit-

ing beliefs such as "I can't do this", "They don't care" and "The department can't change" to empowering beliefs such as "I can make a difference", "I've succeeded in the past and can do it again" and "There is always a solution". Managers should encourage their staff to be innovative and to embrace the change effort.

3. During meetings with my staff regarding the current changes within the organization how can I manage their expectations while at the same time, manage the expectations of my superiors?

Advice from the experts

The most powerful tool for defining the scope of a conversation is to explain objectives and manage expectations as soon as you open the session. Be clear about objectives and about what you will and won't be talking about.

People may not like the message. This is completely reasonable given the impact of the change. Your role is to deliver and discuss what people need to understand: the reason for the change, how it affects them now, how it will affect them in the coming weeks and months, and the support available to them as they transition.

Six Tips for Creating Trust

Nothing replaces trust. Your behaviour, more than your words, will help instil it. It is important to keep in mind that the change process can bring a lot of stress and anxiety to your staff. It is important to support them during this time.

1. Share often.

Make a point of sharing ideas, information, plans, concerns and updates often with colleagues and staff. Tailor your message to the audience so that you are addressing its needs. Withholding information that could serve the organization or individuals can be seen as a dangerous “I know more than you do – I have power over you” power play. In the absence of information, people will fill in the gaps. Make sure that the stories they have are the right ones. Each well-informed colleague is a potential champion and ambassador.

2. Be available.

Make sure that your staff sees you as easily accessible and open to dialogue. To trust, people need a sense of what their managers and supervisors are like, that they are human, not just a title. This requires that you provide opportunities for contact and interaction. Formal means include town halls, team meetings, bilateral meetings, etc. More important for building trust are the informal possibilities such as walkabouts, hallway chats, coffee or lunch breaks.

3. Answer the hard questions.

Create a culture in which people can ask tough questions and where you reply honestly and thoroughly to the best of your knowledge and ability. When you can't answer on the spot, tell people when you will or promise to get the answer from someone who can.

4. Deliver on your promises.

“Actions speak louder than words.” No matter how well-honed your communication skills, how great your charm, charisma and power of position, you must follow through on promises to maintain credibility. Manage your promises and keep an eye on deadlines you set for yourself.

5. Show that you recognize and appreciate people and their work.

Say “Thank you!” in many ways, both in private and in public. Appreciated colleagues are happy colleagues. Never assume that people know they are appreciated. Meet and get to know newcomers.

6. Personally congratulate, support, show interest or concern with regard to important personal matters.

Show that you have your staff's interests at heart. The best managers have a personal touch for employees who are celebrating births, weddings, milestones and other happy events or who are going through difficult times, such as illness, mourning or an accident.

CONTACTS & REFERENCES

Information for this guide obtained from **The Six Faulty Assumptions About Change Communications**, by L.A. Anderson and D. Anderson (2009, Being First)

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