



Real Communication!

There is a lullaby out there for managers; and, the “higher up the food chain” the louder the lullaby plays. You ask which one...it is the one that goes...you are welcome to sing along as you know the words...

“You are the boss so I will tell you what you want to here...

Chorus: la, la, la...

Even when it is not true...

Chorus: la, la, la...

And sometimes I will just withhold information that you need to know but I don't want to be the guy to tell you...

Chorus: la, la, la

Now for those of you who are saying this does not happen in your organization I would suggest you check in and see if they are singing that lullaby to you. The lore of making the boss happy can often position employees, peers and other leaders to not say what you really need to hear. And it happens everywhere, in every organization, everyday.

Creating an environment that offers a safe place to have clean communication is vital. Frequently, the boss finds themselves in a position of saying, “what is going on around here or how come I was not aware of this situation?” Promoting clean communication is one part of the puzzle and even when you have given your people a forum to speak out and may still chose not to.

You have to stop this poor communication if you want to optimize your people and their productivity. Millions of dollars are lost annually due to poor communication, gossip, withholding of information that would allow for better decisions, pettiness and the like.

Having witnessed many a town hall, employee appreciation meeting or fireside chat, one thing always stands true. People only speak up when they feel it is safe to do so or when they are at their wits end and feel they have nothing to lose. When their bosses are in the room, they are generally not talking as there likely to be hell to pay later no matter how sincerely you promise that there will be no repercussions.

Another approach to poor communication is that you can have a coaching discussion on the fly. Most of us are very busy these days and finding time to “talk and bond” with our people in a meaningful way requires us to give up time we just don't have. And I will tell you that proactive communication keeps you out of all those “let's meet with the HR Director Meetings or worse yet attorneys.

When people feel apart of the work, when they have ownership in their contributions and the vision at hand they will participate differently and communication will become more interactive. We always suggest that when you are meeting with an employee they should be doing 80% of the talking unless you are terminating them.

80% you say? Well, great communities create an environment of 100% responsibility and if you are doing all the talking then you are the person taking responsibility. When people communicate they not only share problems, ideas around solutions but they feel apart of the work. They also move from the problem to the resolution and this triggers taking responsibility and ownership.

Recently I experienced a situation where there was a manager coaching an employee in the kitchen area for everyone to hear and see. The manager felt “good” as they had shared their expectations and felt that the situation was resolved. Ironically for 3 weeks I was not aware of this situation which was explained to me as “we didn’t want to bother you...” Of course we have all the policies (open door, own your voice and the list goes on) and yet no one told me and everyone knew and was talking about it. And everyone said that things were “good”.

Evidently not, as when I met with the person who was coached and cornered in the kitchen she was wondering if she should just quit. She felt that she could not speak and that she was too embarrassed to be apart of any solution. She just wanted to escape. And she is not alone.

We as leaders must understand that our voices are usually heard and heard loud and clear so picking our words (which only represent 7% of what we say); our tone of voice (which represents 38% of what we say) and our body language (55% of what we say) effectively is critical to setting the stage for others who have the solutions and can take responsibility for resolution to have a voice.

Just because you don't like what you are hearing doesn't make it wrong or not true.

3 Tips you can apply today to create an environment of clean communication:

1. Be curious, ask questions and stop talking
2. Acknowledge each person regardless of if you agree with what they are saying. It might sound like: “what I hear you saying is...”
3. Ask them what they think they or we should do to improve the situation. Responsibility means that the answer is in the chair over there not in your chair.

Sorry for the bold truth this month...just looking for a little clean communication with you!

Oh and one last thing...this works at home too!

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