

Managers Listen Up!

Here's How To Communicate Change Effectively

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Communicating change effectively can seem like a Herculean task. When companies institute changes, they do so to keep a competitive edge. The speed at which changes are embraced is often critical. Employee foot dragging can cost a company an industry advantage or market shares. The better your ability to communicate change, the quicker your team will perform at a high level and the more likely you will be to boost eroding morale and promote company loyalty once again.

The problem is when changes are announced, many managers bury themselves in tasks behind closed doors. They do little face-to-face communicating. The bigger the change, the more damage control a manager has to do.

The first cardinal rule for managers to remember is to **communicate all significant changes personally**. People who face changes want to be able to understand these changes and ask questions about them from someone they know and trust. If you are tight lipped and hard to read, they will assume you don't really support the changes. Furthermore, your subordinates expect that **any time you speak to them, you will be honest and sincere**. If you are looking at the floor, speaking quickly and wringing your hands, your employees will question your integrity. Remember you are honest *only* if they see you as such. Your body language and voice must be consistent with your words. Consider how you phrase your statements. Obviously, tentative or negative language will be noticed. Words like "kind of," "hopefully" and "maybe" do not inspire confidence or urgency.

Secondly, **talk to your people even if you don't know a lot**. Employees look to their immediate

supervisor for guidance. Give them frequent updates and tell them your position on the change. It will reassure them or move them off the fence. **Talk to them early on so that the rumor mill doesn't take over**. The more significant the change, the more frequently you need to meet with your staff. When people's emotions are involved, they can only process information in bite size chunks. They tune in and tune out. Be clear and concise about what action steps you need immediately. Also be clear about what things should now become a low priority. Most people have their own priorities, and these may need to be rearranged. **Focus your subordinates on results that are attainable**, such as sales or production goals. Answer any and all questions with conviction. Make sure to stress over and over again the personal benefits for achieving these goals. Anyone above the fifth grade level will want to know what is in it for him. If the only benefits seem to be for the company, your subordinates will start combing the want ads.

Lastly, **be sure you understand your audience and gear your message to them**. Speak to them in the language they understand. **Be very visible during any change**. Walk through the aisles and address people by their names. Be observant of those people that need shoring up and those people that seem ready to abandon ship. Your more talented employees will be recruited heavily by your competition or by search firms. An informal situation, such as lunch in the cafeteria, is a great way to keep the communication going. Be profuse with compliments to those who are getting on board or working extra hours. A personal thank you note means a lot. Do your best to reassure people, but never make commitments you can't keep.

The number of changes companies make is not expected to diminish any time soon. With good communication skills, you can be better able to implement changes quickly and successfully. Consider how you currently communicate change. How effective have you been? Identify your problem areas and work towards improving what you do.

For more information on communicating change read, Daryl R. Conner's book, *Managing at the Speed*

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of Change — How Resilient Managers Succeed and Prosper Where Others Fail or Harvey Robbins and Michael Finley's book, *Why Change Doesn't Work — Why Initiatives Go Wrong and How to Try Again and Succeed*.

Impact Communications, Inc. consults with individuals and businesses to improve their face-to-face and over the phone communication skills. It is not what you know but how you communicate it that makes a difference. To reach us, phone (847) 438-4480 or contact our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.