

Master Change by Being a Master Communicator

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From the time that people are infants, they become accustomed to routine and find any changes to their normal schedule upsetting. Even when positive, people still remain resistant to change. In today's day and age, managers, not only, must personally adapt to change, but they must also get their direct reports on board very quickly. It is a difficult task since the rate and number of changes can be mind-boggling depending upon the corporation or the industry. The better the manager's communication skills, the quicker the team will perform at a high level, and the more likely it will be that employees will stay positive and enthusiastic.

First and foremost, any important change should never be communicated via email, video or letter. Managers should call a meeting and communicate the situation in person. By doing so, managers send a strong message that the upcoming change is important and should be a priority. They also demo that they are straight shooters who want to help their people succeed. Face-to face meetings also enable the team to ask questions and pose their concerns. Once issues are clarified and priorities reset, people can move forward very quickly.

Sometimes managers hedge on calling meetings. Often, it is because they are swamped with a thousand new tasks related to the change and just don't have time. Sometimes, it is because they don't know a lot or what they do know will be disconcerting. This is a mistake. The bigger the change, the more damage control a manager has to do. In times of confusion, employees look to their manager for guidance. When managers give them frequent updates in person and tell them their position on the change, it is reassuring. It also helps to control the rumor mill.

If the change affects jobs or income, emotions will run high. Managers need to remember to give people information in bite-sized chunks. Less is more! They should repeat the action steps needed immediately and host frequent meetings since people may or may not be able to process the information well. Additionally, they need to make themselves available for one-on-one meetings whether formally, behind closed doors or informally, by the water cooler or in the company's cafeteria.

When employees listen to change messages, what they want to know is what the manager's feeling is on the change, what they are personally expected to do and why this would be a benefit to them. Knowing what the manager's position on the change frequently moves them off the fence, especially if they trust the manager and have a good working relationship with the person. The action steps and the benefits are critical because employees need to evaluate if they can do it and if it is worth it. The more benefits the manager can outline, the more interested people become in setting new goals.

In order for employees to believe the manager, certain communication skills are essential. For example, the manager must look people in the eye when talking about the change. If the person is looking at the floor, his slides or his notes, people may think the manager isn't really committed to the message. In addition to eye contact, tone of voice and pausing are necessary. With "um's" and "ah's," the manager sounds unconfident, hesitant and insincere. The body and the voice must back up the urgency of the message.

The speed at which people are expected to change will continue. Managers who master the way they communicate these messages will speed time to market and increase productivity.

*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. When you have to have **impact**, phone (847) 438-4480 or visit our web site, www.ImpactCommunicationsInc.com.*