

# Eight communication habits to be a better boss

Have you ever worked for someone who micro-manages instead of strategising and supporting the team? A newly promoted leader who's brilliant at their job, but whose presentations fall flat? A seasoned manager whose meetings ramble without clear, actionable outcomes?

Or maybe you've been that leader. After all, few of us have ever been taught leadership communication in a formal, academic setting.

"People don't leave an organisation; they leave a boss" has become a truism in the workplace for good reason. Poor communication can lower productivity as surely as malfunctioning equipment. If this situation sounds familiar, a few tips from my new book *Communicate Like a Leader* can help. From my coaching sessions with executives during the past three decades, I've compiled a list of their challenges, along with solutions.

If you find yourself in a similar situation, here's how you can course-correct quickly to become a better boss.

## ● Make sure your team knows the deliverables

In survey after survey, managers report that their team understands organisational goals and initiatives. Yet team members themselves say they do not! In a recent worldwide Gallup poll among 550 organisations and 2.2mn employees, only 50 per cent of employees 'strongly agreed' that they knew what was expected of them at work.

Obviously, there's a disconnection here. The reasons vary: Inconsistency in the message. Inconsistency in policies and reinforcement. Little or no accountability for how leaders deliver the stated outcomes. But the results remain the same: Disengagement and lowered productivity.



## ● Build a culture of trust

If you've ever worked with a liar, you understand how quickly their deception can destroy relationships, dampen morale, and poison the culture of an organisation. Without trust, a relationship goes bankrupt. The distrusted communicator's words carry no more weight than currency from an overthrown government or stock from a bankrupt corporation.

As a leader, you build trust by following these practices: Avoid deception in all its form. Give your team the reasons for your actions and decisions. Make your actions match your words. Demonstrate both competence and confidence, with humility and a positive attitude.

## ● Guide with strategic questions

Strategic thinkers use leading questions to advance a discussion and their case. With a well-planned series





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of questions, you can lead a group or an individual to rethink their position or decision without a direct challenge to their position.

The beauty of this approach? Once voiced, people 'buy' their own data and reasoning revealed in their answers to your guiding questions.

### ● Dislodge log-jamming directives

No leader intentionally creates a logjam. All too often, however, new leaders (or seasoned leaders taking over in a new position) start out with directives or statements that set their team up for disappointment rather than the intended positive reaction and productivity boost. But no matter the intention, the result is often delay, disillusionment, disengagement, and even derision.

Avoid lines like this that stop workers in their tracks: "Let's just put everything on hold until I get a better understanding" or "Check back with me before you make any final commitment on that." Such statements put a brake on productivity.

### ● Give kudos that count

The best bosses personalise recognition. Recognising employees for specific work well done improves overall performance, but not in the way you might think. Those winning the kudos don't necessarily work harder – but those not recognised do. Also, recognition that becomes routine stops being a reward; it becomes an expectation. These and many other findings make rewarding employees a fascinating field of study for leaders who want to motivate their employees to higher achievement.

### ● Be accountable for bad decisions

Nothing starts you as a leader on the road to recovering trust like admitting your lapse in

judgment for a bad decision. It's the failure to do so that infuriates others and compels them to keep pointing out the poor decisions and the consequences. To maintain accountability, you need to hear from the troops regularly to stay grounded. Ask difficult questions – questions that may generate troubling answers. Guard against punishing people for telling you hard truths!

### ● Respond promptly in the age of twitter

On social media, the expected time for response is 0-4 hours. How fast do companies typically respond? Ten hours, according to various studies by social media experts and bloggers. Big disappointment. If you as the boss take longer to respond to text, emails, or requests for approvals, big disappointment.

Have you as boss communicated clearly to your team what the response standard is? Four hours? Eight hours? 24 hours? Are there exceptions to this standard? Once you've communicated the standard, live by it.

### ● Win hearts to persuade minds

As a leader, you'll need to inspire your team with passion and enthusiasm about your mission and goals. In business, of course, you have to present a logical case. But never depend on logic alone to win your argument. You have to touch others emotionally to change behaviour and attitudes. To move both heart and mind, according to Aristotle, you'll need to demonstrate goodwill and good intentions. Consider that as you select stories to engage your listeners and deliver those stories with impact.

Every communication is a strategic opportunity to develop your team. As your conversations stretch end to end and you practice these habits, you'll realize you've become a better boss in the process.■