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Do You Know The 8 Clear Communication Standards Of Good Leaders?

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 None of us can afford the lost productivity, costs, client ire, and mishaps resulting from haphazard and inconsistent communication.

By Dianna Booher

Payment on the client's invoice was 55 days past due. The first email asking for a "status" on payment prompted a "I'll check on it" reply from Ryan, our contact.

The next attempt was a call: "Sorry, but I've misplaced your invoice. Please resend. It'll be another 30 days from today before you receive payment." We comply. Still no payment.

Our third and fourth attempts: Another email. Then another call a week later. No response to either.

The fifth attempt, an email to the senior executive, produced results within two hours—along with this explanation: "We're embarrassed. We outsource our accounting, and that kind of thing happens all the time. Sometimes we have to submit requests 2 or 3 times. Our system is crazy. But no wonder you weren't hearing from Ryan. He's out. But I'm



Avoid mishaps by following these 8 practices

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the one who approves these invoices anyway. Let me just give you a credit card to take care of it now. And go ahead and add \$XXX bonus to the total for having to wait.”

Granted, a classy conclusion. But pity the poor employees and customers who have to deal with continuing communication problems like this.

If you're in charge of a project team or organization, you'll want to do better. Much better. None of us can afford the lost productivity, costs, client ire, and mishaps resulting from haphazard and inconsistent communication. 🐦

Today In: Leadership



8 Clear Communication Standards to Operate a Well-Oiled Organization

Standards serve us well in every area of life: Your car has standards for routine maintenance. Your instruction manuals for air-conditioning and heating units tell you the standards for changing filters. Athletic teams have standard warm-ups to get ready for the big games.

As *leaders* in the workplace, you're in charge of setting and modeling communication standards. *Team members* are responsible to find out what they are and follow them.

Responsiveness: “How soon do I need to respond?”

In your culture, what's an acceptable response time on email, phone calls, or texts? Two hours? Four hours? 24 hours? Two days? Do your team members know what situations call for immediate responses and what can wait until it's convenient? If not, clarify the expectations in typical situations.

Format or Media: “How do I document this?”

Should after-incident reports be documented in email? In a formal memo to the file? Stored where? Is it acceptable to text a client with a quote for service, or should quotes be offered only in emails saved to your database? What topics should never be discussed in writing?

Feedback on Disagreement: “What if their feelings are hurt?”

The lack of truth-telling and feedback in organizations can be disastrous. If your organization values face-saving and harmony over direct, clear feedback, the upside may be congeniality. But the downside will be operational deficiencies, lack of innovation, and career plateaus for employees.

In a social setting, ask, “Am I looking older to you?” Few friends will dare respond with “Yes, those wrinkles look like rivets across your forehead.” Tactful responses in such situations are referred to as “social niceties.”

But if “social niceties” replace truth in your workplace, your chances for growth and improvement will suffer.

Does your team know the expectation for truthful feedback? Not necessarily blunt feedback, but clear feedback.

Respect: “So how was I disrespectful?”

Unlike the typical TV anchors, media guests, and politicians with their name-calling and labeling, workplace leaders and team members know that phrasing matters.

But many other communication habits reveal respect—or the lack thereof:

Wasting others’ time by arriving late to meetings

- Failure to show up for appointments without previously notifying the other person involved
- Last-minute meeting cancellations
- Refusal to listen to another point of view
- Dismissive body language

What do people “get away with” in your work environment? Do their standards and systems encourage respectful communication?

Meeting Productivity and Length: “What are my responsibilities?”

The bare minimum expectation for those who lead meetings: A clear, informative agenda sent to attendees ahead of time. A facilitator who actually knows how to guide a discussion and keep the group on track.

Do participants come prepared to contribute—and stay focused without ducking out to take calls or check email?

What's the standard for frequency and length of various meeting types? What kind of evaluation and revamping happens if these standards aren't met?

Gossip: “Is keeping him or her worth the drama?”

What happens to those on the team who continually create workplace drama? Nothing. Strong leaders aim to minimize any backstabbing by either coaching, counseling, or replacing the drama queens and kings.

Writing: “How does this affect our image?”

Poor writing reflects either poor thinking or carelessness. Are employees expected to use a spell-check or grammar checker for outside correspondence? Internal? Do team members understand the damage to their personal and organization's image when disorganized, rambling, inaccurate documents leave their department?

Presentations: “How formal or informal should I be?”

Visual or no visuals? Written references to accompany the briefing or none? Should presenters be free from notes as they talk? A frequent frustration of my coaching clients is knowing how “polished” their audience expects them to be with any given presentation. Obviously, the more elaborate the presentation, the more prep time required. With a hectic schedule, they have a tendency to prepare slides as their talking points rather than spend adequate time learning their content.

As a leader, make sure your team know the rules-of-thumb for their presentations.

How do you measure up when deadlines are hitting you in the face? Let clear communication standards guide you rather than leaving others to guess.

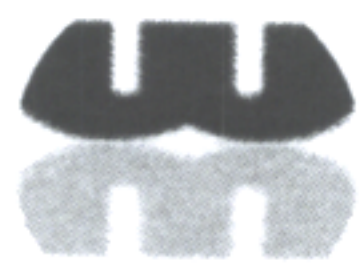
Dianna Booher is the bestselling author of 48 books. Her newest is Faster, Fewer, Better Emails. She helps organizations communicate clearly. Follow her at BooherResearch.com and @DiannaBooher.

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