

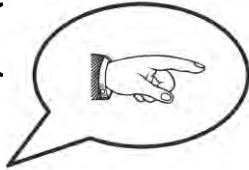
# HOW TO BE A BETTER COMMUNICATOR



Practical communication  
tips for busy managers

**SAMPLE PAGES**

# IT STARTS WITH YOU



## 1

So how does the way you communicate as a manager impact on the performance of the organisation? And what does employee engagement actually mean for you and the way you lead and manage?



## CONGRATULATIONS – YOU’VE GOT THE JOB!

Chances are that, when you became a manager, nobody talked to you about employee engagement. It may not have come up in the interview. It might not even be in your job description. But you *are* in charge of employee engagement in your part of the organisation. Why? Because your people put you in charge, that’s why! Your team see you as their communication channel of choice, especially in times of change. The extent of their engagement depends on you. So congratulations, you’ve got the job.



## BACK TO BASICS

Once you've got your key messages straight, take every opportunity to reiterate them. Remember the old adage for structuring communication: "Tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them again." To which you should add: "Ask them what they heard" because the greatest danger facing any communication is the assumption it has been achieved.

① It starts with you

## WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

During busy times it can be tempting to stop communicating with your team to save time. Some managers even become invisible to their people. The opposite should be true. When the going gets tough, you should be more visible, stepping up communication and engagement activity to help the team meet the challenges you face together – keep your door open, eat in the canteen, walk the floor and ask people how they're doing.



# PLANNING TO COMMUNICATE

## 2

What do you want to say?

Why are you saying it?

Who to?

When by? How?

And is it working?

## KNOW THE HOT TOPICS

Find out what your people are talking about at the moment. What are the hot topics of conversation at the water coolers and canteen queues? They may not be the same things you want to talk about, and may be a barrier to getting your message across. Equally they might help you, so keep your ear to the ground.

## WHAT'S IN IT FOR ME?

The first time you hear about something new, chances are you'll think to yourself "What does all this mean for me?" Your people are no different. Your job is to think about what all this means for *them*. And then explain it in a relevant and meaningful way that makes sense to them. (For more, see chapter 3 'Understanding Your Audience').



# UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

## 3

Edward De Bono says:

“Communication is always understood in the context and experience of the receiver, no matter what was intended.”

So, the better you understand your audience, the more likely you are to be able to accurately target your messages and engage them in what you are trying to achieve.



## BROADCAST VS. NARROWCAST

The needs of your audience might be many and varied. Applying a one-size-fits-all “broadcast” approach to engaging them might not be best. It might be more appropriate to “narrowcast” your messages to small teams with similar needs, as far as operationally possible. The investment in time will pay dividends if everyone gets it. The alternative is no-one gets it, and you’ll spend more time putting right what needn’t have gone wrong in the first place.

ENGAGING  
PEOPLE IN



# CHANGE

## 4

It used to be said two things in life were certainties: death and taxes. This may have been true in days gone by, but in modern life three things are certainties: death, taxes and change. And during times of change, line managers play a vital role as communicators, role models and change agents.



## MANAGE PEOPLE THROUGH THE CHANGE CURVE

When change is happening, people typically go through a series of responses. First they deny the change, then they actively resist it, next they explore it, and finally they commit to it.

Let people know you understand that change can be stressful, but resist saying: “I know what you’re going through.” You’re not them, so you don’t. And remember – not everyone works through the change curve at the same speed. So, get close to your people, listen for the telltale signs, and adjust your one-to-one communication accordingly.



## LISTEN TO NEGATIVITY

Staff and colleagues may express negativity. You can be supportive by acknowledging their concerns, listening to, but not encouraging, negative comments or behaviours, and by responding in a positive, empathetic way, but always remaining focused on the need for the change.

## ENCOURAGE EXPLORATION

As people begin to explore the benefits the change might bring, share them more openly. These ideas might help bring other people along on the journey. But keep an eye on business as usual. It can often suffer as people get carried away with the possibilities of it all and forget the day job.



# FACE-TO-FACE MATTERS

## 5

Face-to-face communication with line managers is most people's channel of choice when it really matters. That's why briefings and other face-to-face interactions are central to employee engagement.

## DELIVER ON TIME

Deliver briefings on time. Be well prepared and don't be the last to arrive. Never cancel a planned briefing without a very good reason. Your people could misinterpret the reasons for the cancellation. They'll guess at your motives and they won't always get them right.

## A QUESTION OF STYLE

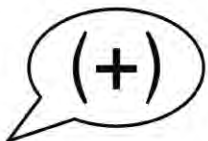
Once you know the content of your briefing, think about the style in which you deliver it. Should this be a formal slide-based event or is it more appropriate to use a round-table discussion format to make it more interactive? Be creative – especially if you want to involve people or engage them in a subject that's dry and detailed. Think about your own presentation and facilitation styles and make sure you, and other speakers, are prepared.

## DON'T JUST READ THE SCRIPT

Don't just read out your materials, bring them to life. Elaborate on them, add local examples. It shows you know your subject and it encourages your audience to listen to you rather than read the slides.

## START WITH A BANG, FINISH WITH A FLOURISH

People remember the first and last things you say, but often “check out” in the middle. This effect is called primacy and recency. So, start with a bang. Tell people what you are going to tell them and what the benefits of listening will be. And make sure you end on a high too, often by reminding people of your key messages. You should spend just as long thinking through how you are going to end as you do thinking about how to get started.



## TEAM MEETINGS: GETTING IT TOGETHER

### 6

Although you sometimes have to deliver formal briefings about particular subjects, it's important to get your team together regularly to talk about a range of topics and generally to interact with each other. Team meetings are a key to successful engagement, so it pays to get them right.



## ROTATE THE CHAIR

Consider rotating the chairmanship of the meeting so that team members can take a turn in chairing the meeting and setting the agenda. This can empower team members to facilitate the discussion and talk about the things they want to talk about. If you then take your place among the rest of your team, avoid the temptation to steer the meeting and do most of the talking. Sit back and let the chair run the show.

## INVITE GUESTS

Bring in guest speakers or colleagues from other teams to add some perspective to your discussion. Invite other managers to observe your meetings, or have a Q&A session with a colleague from a department you deal with regularly. Be prepared to vary your team meetings in this way – be open and responsive to suggestions.

## BE A RESPONSIBLE FACILITATOR

Encourage debate but keep it focussed and keep an eye on time. Allow challenge if it's constructive, and avoid imposing your own opinion. Give team members the opportunity to get things off their chests but try to steer the debate to a positive conclusion – look for suggestions and ideas for improvement, ask how people would prefer things to be. And pass feedback up the line.



# HIGH-IMPACT PRESENTATIONS

## 7

Most managers get asked to make presentations from time to time. For many, it can be nerve-wracking. But it's a great way of engaging a group of colleagues.

## HUMOUR

Consider the appropriateness of any humour you might be thinking of using. You might like to go for a laugh to settle you in and win over the audience, but be ready for the consequences if no one does laugh. And go for chuckles, not belly laughs.

## SLIDES ARE NOT THE SCRIPT

Visual aids are just that – they're there to reinforce your key messages, not to replicate what you're saying. It should be possible for someone to get full value from your presentation even if they didn't pay attention to the slides. It's up to you to get your message across – not your slides.

CHECKING  
YOU'RE GETTING



# THROUGH

## 8

Research has shown that unless you do something clever to change it, after a month people only remember 18% of everything you've told them, the rest they've forgotten. The thing is which 18% do they remember? You won't know if you don't ask them.



## DEALING WITH STONY-FACED SILENCE

You'll probably know what it's like to finish a briefing and ask if anyone has any questions, only to be met with total silence except for the echo of your own voice. Of course your briefing could have been perfect and addressed every query anyone might have had. More likely, you've just asked a stupid question yourself. The main reason people don't ask questions at the end of a briefing or meeting is because they don't want to look stupid. So instead of asking for questions, ask for or comments or observations – what people found that was positive, or negative, or just plain interesting. These comments will often come out as questions, and it kick-starts the dialogue.



# EFFECTIVE EMAIL – AT LAST!

## 9

Email can bring out the best and the worst communicator in all of us. Line managers often complain most about email overload, and yet they are often the worst culprits for filling other people's inboxes! Like it or loathe it, we can't ignore email. So it pays to make it work for you rather than against you.

## DON'T SEND TO EVERYONE

Check the relevance of a distribution list. Don't send messages to people who don't need to see them; they won't appreciate you clogging up their inbox and may be more inclined to ignore important messages from you in the future.

## DON'T CC THE WORLD

Use the cc facility sparingly. Some people have a habit of cc-ing dozens of people to every email, and then cc-ing the whole original distribution list when replying to an email. We all have busy enough inboxes already without having to cope with dozens of unnecessary emails. Only cc the people who really need to be included.



# THE WRITE STUFF

## 10

Whether it's writing emails, presentations, team briefings or reports, all managers have to put pen to paper at some point. Not everyone is born a great writer, but there are some basic techniques we can all follow to make our words more effective.



## THINK BEFORE YOU WRITE

As with all communication, investing time in planning will pay off. Don't start writing without having first decided your purpose (are you trying to inform, entertain or motivate?), worked out your key messages (three is usually a good number to aim for) and noted down the supporting points you want to make.

## GRAB YOUR READER'S ATTENTION

People have short attention spans, especially at work where they're bombarded with communication. So your job is to grab their attention in your very first line. Put yourself in their shoes and make sure your first line answers their key question: "What's in it for me?"