10 Steps Toward Better Business Communication

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Ultimately, no matter how high-tech your business tools are, the development and implementation of new initiatives will depend upon effective, productive communication between real live people.

Why do some business meetings result in boredom and lack of focus, whereas others send attendees charging out equipped to wage battle? Why do some supervisors confuse their workers with vague, contradictory suggestions while others support their charges with vision and assistance, helping them build their own path to success?

It boils down to good old human interaction - a subject somewhat out of vogue since the advent of the motherboard - but guess what? It's not going away. Without good clear human connectivity, a mile-high stack of computers won't save your company from faltering.

Here is a list of steps you can take to improve your business communication:

1. **Remember your vision.** You are doing things for a reason. What is it? When you remember why you are doing something and can really feel its importance, that is the time to share your vision with others. Encourage them to speak of their vision for the future. Charge each other up with thoughts of where you want to go. Catch a buzz from envisioning the big picture.

2. **Keep the vision alive.** People will get mired down with the day-to-day details. Find time to stoke the dream, even informally.

3. **When a mutual vision is established and accepted, it is time to talk about how to get there.** These talks have two distinct parts: brainstorming and action planning. In brainstorming, you share ideas about what kinds of actions can get you to your goal. These ideas should be loose and a little wacky. Pick a few uncommon ideas and throw them out to model creative thought. Let your co-workers know that it is time to think freely without criticism. Have fun and laugh. Have a poster board and write the ideas for all to see, in order to foster associations which could lead to even better ideas.

4. **When the ideas seem exhausted, it is time to get serious and build a plan.** Cross off ideas which are clearly unworkable. Boil the ideas down to 3-5 action items.

5. **There should be one person assigned with overall responsibility for each action item.** That person is accountable for its development. They might solicit others to assist. They might assign tasks. Nonetheless, they are the key person for that work item.

6. **Follow-up is a fundamental business activity.** Without follow-up, all the good work and ideas which are in play will wither and die. Meetings or other follow-up venues must be scheduled regularly to keep all the pots boiling. The top person for each action item must be asked about progress by the person responsible for the overall plan.

7. **Review and analyze results and make necessary adjustments.** Then build on the good and drop the bad.
8. Do not stigmatize failure. Remember that failure is necessary for success. If you can really internalize this idea, you will be able to fearlessly and logically parse the good and bad in your plan. If you truly embrace failure as a part of the success process, you will be able to make the review/analysis phase engaging, creative and extremely useful.

9. Notice when people do good things and tell them. Some very hard working people toil for a very long time without hearing even one positive sentiment. It's an idea as old as Andrew Carnegie and Reader's Digest, but it may be even more important today. Our computers separate us from human contact even as they connect us. Reach out in a human way. Pay a well-earned compliment. Then watch the startled, then untrusting, then relaxed and very gratified looks you get back in return.

10. Remember that you are a role model. People watch you. If you act fairly, they will trust you. If you are mean or egotistical, they will dislike and undermine you. If you help them, they will help you. Think of the people you most admire. Think about their effect on you. Can you absorb some of that goodness and pay it forward?

Mark Meshulam offers the Poingo Productivity Suite, a suite of simple software programs which make your work easier and much more fun at www.poingo.com.