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Communication – How to be More Effective

**Effective Communication!** What is it?

A simple definition is when two or more people have a “**Complete Understanding of One Another’s Needs!**”

Notice the words “**Complete**” and “**Understanding**”.

We do a lot of communicating.

**The question is how much of it is effective?**

If you review the research about companies and their relationships with employees, virtually without fail the one area of management and leadership that tops the list is – You guessed it, improved communication!

**Why?**

The answers are very simple, and yet we as leaders often times ignore the cause and effect relationships these answers should be telling us to work on to improve performance.

Here are the answers:

1. Employees care.
2. Employees show up and want to do the right thing.
3. Employees want careers, recognition, respect, adoration, and all the other parts of Abraham Maslow’s’ hierarchy of needs including money, but not exclusively money!
4. Employees want effective communication, they want to understand and excel and they want to do the right thing by the company.

**So why does it get all mucked-up?**

A previous employer of mine had a specialized consultant come into the company, and had over 100 key managers in the room, for 3 days, spending tens of thousands of dollars to develop a company improvement list – ten items boiled down from literally hundreds of opinions. At the top of the list:

**Improved Leadership Communication**

I still have the photograph from the top ten list (this was when David Letterman was just starting), surrounded by every single leader in the company signed on the big picture board. It is comical. Why, because nothing ever changed despite all the efforts made by all those really talented and exceptionally smart people.

**The reason nothing changed?**

**Leadership focused on efforts not causes**

There is a HUGE difference between Knowledge and Willpower!

Awareness and Action.

Fast-forward 10 years later, and yes, you guessed it, here we are doing the same routine again, and at the top of the list – Improved Leadership Communication.

The lesson is very clear here: Business as usual gets you results as usual!

*Effective communication requires complete understanding of all party’s needs,*

*and this takes hard work, and it takes a* ***Process****!*

Yes, it takes a Process. Gaining complete understanding does not just automatically happen. It is not a random occurrence!

It happens because the leaders and the owners install a process for communication, and begin to make it a leadership discipline. That is what it is, a discipline, and the discipline only happens consistently if there is a process.

To have a process, one must understand the CAUSE! In our company example above what were the CAUSES of poor or lack of communication leaving the employees wanting to have improved communication?

1. The leadership did not Value Communication as a Core Value
2. There was no Process to insure Communication actually was occurring well
3. There was a fear of communication – a lack of trust among leaders to employees

And while you think this is uncommon, it is far more common than not, in small companies and in large companies.

It stems from one very simple, candid leadership failure:

*The leaders of companies do not want to see (or hear) about reality as it really is, they would rather see and hear about reality as they wish it to be.*

Years later it dawned on me as I read Jack Welch’s book, Jack Welch and the GE Way. He called it. Leaders want optimism not realism. Realism requires communication to go both ways. You **can** have both optimism and realism, it’s just that most leaders prefer optimism and ignore realism or call it negativity. Constructive criticism is essential, and properly handled conflict is valuable, we should learn to embrace it and foster it in our culture.

Communication cannot be effective if it is one way. To be effective all parties must actually have an “Understanding”, meaning they see the same image in the mirror and describe it the same way. This requires a process. A checking system to determine that this is what I said, is it what you heard? That is a skill.

However, the discipline here is that as owners, we believe the options listed above about employees. We need to do a thorough job of finding out about what they want, need, and desire, and work with them through this process of communication and help them as leaders get what they want, so we get what we want.

Often owners of privately held companies, small and large alike, have this incredibly sensitive nature about the overall company performance. Not so long ago, a private industry company which was worth over a billion dollars chose **not to** share any financial performance with its thousands of employees. I was unfortunately one of those employees.

What do you think all of us as employees were thinking? That the company was losing money? Quite the opposite as well figured it was making money hand over fist.

Human nature and basic psychology dictates that people have a fear of the unknown. That fear isn’t that the company is losing money! It’s that we as employees are getting hosed in the deal, and the owners are **making** a killing off our backs! That’s what your employees are thinking whether they tell you or not.

Is that true or false? Look at the options if you don’t subscribe to the idea:

1. They think you are making a killing off their backs
2. They think you are losing money!
3. They think nothing about it at all!
4. They think you are doing well and it is none of their business!

Here are some examples of core values to shape a culture.

**Realism and a thirst for facts**

**Bias for Action based on Understanding**

**Disciplined Organization (in process)**

**Integrity**

**Open/Honest and Respectful Communication**

**Innovative and Entrepreneurial Thinking**

**Customer Focus**

**Employee Focus, Development, and the Best Employees**

**Passion for Excellence**

These examples can make-up the beginnings of a company culture. Each idea stands for a pillar of how a company can begin to look at itself and how it operates.

The company vision, direction, and business plan all derive themselves from how the company behaves and what it believes. In short, the company core values.

This is where the servant leadership style is so very effective.

1. **Create a Climate of Accuracy and Truth**

A climate of accuracy and truth means that the leadership and all of the employees the leaders serve, are willing to make decisions on the basis of accuracy and facts, and not based on opinions or emotion.

An effective method for this is a council of leadership, and this is based on the idea the council can work toward accuracy and facts. Ultimately the leader holds the final decision making authority, yet the council can and

should insist on holding the leader accountable to the facts. If the leader does not hold themselves accountable to the facts, well, the very best people are not going to stay around very long.

1. **Act from Understanding**

Acting from understanding implies the leader and the employees deliberately act when they have reached a deep understanding of what it is they are doing. This requires clear concise standards, metrics, and a passion for details. Once understanding is reached the company can act accordingly, but not until then.

1. **Install Discipline in the Organization**

Discipline comes in the form of processes that allow employees to react and make decisions, not inside of policies but inside of the culture. If you have the very best employees and have trained them on the metrics and the standards, you do not often need policies or close supervision to be sure they are held accountable. If the disciplines through excellent process are in place based on the metrics, then the employees will react thoughtfully about those because it is not only good for them, but also good for your end customers.

This is where the leadership comes in by not just finding the very best employees and training them, but also in creating the processes and disciplines we are speaking of, and working diligently to be sure the employees are trained and have the tools and resources to do their jobs.

Many leaders lead the company by their shear will, or their charisma or force of persona. These are and can be very effective leaders, but as soon as these leaders are removed, they create a vacuum and the company almost always suffers.

This includes the idea of disciplines as well. The leader, who forces discipline through his/her personal desire for discipline, gets the discipline so long as they are part of the process. Remove that leader and the disciplines evaporate like a puddle of water in the desert.

Making the change over to a culture of servant leadership requires a true commitment by the leader to recognize, their personal style needs to change.

Step by Step for Implementation

1. Define your company’s cultural tendencies, as they exist today.
2. Define the Culture you want to have in your company.
3. Determine what changes need to be made to your leadership style if indeed you want to begin the process of transforming the company into a peak performing organization.
4. Define your metrics for the company. What metrics do you use? If none, then the metrics or Performance KPI’s need to be clearly defined so you can apply measurements to your company.
5. Benchmark where you are today as a company against your metrics.
6. Once you have benchmarked where you are today against your metrics, then you must review your disciplined processes (or lack of them) to determine if you get the metric measured in the fashion you need it. This could mean many changes, or few, but the discipline of receiving accurate and timely data is non-negotiable.
7. Begin to define your processes in your company. What are they? Map the processes and determine which processes may need to be changed because they do not allow you or the employees to achieve the desired metric.
8. Prioritize the changes. These include processes, organization structure, personnel and everything you do day-in and day-out to produce results.
9. Train your employees on the processes that need changed. Utilize the leadership council to create the priorities and to discuss and debate in a fact based realistic manner what needs to happen in order to create these changes.
10. Finalize the new process and gain complete agreement and commitment to any necessary changes.

Begin the process of making the changes in your processes.

Why is this Critical to Your Success?

* Implementation of Servant Leadership allows you to reach peak performance.
* Leadership where you are developing your personnel and focused on their environment for success is a large contributor to recruiting and obtaining the very best employees in your sector.
* **Effective servant leadership will make you more Profit!**