

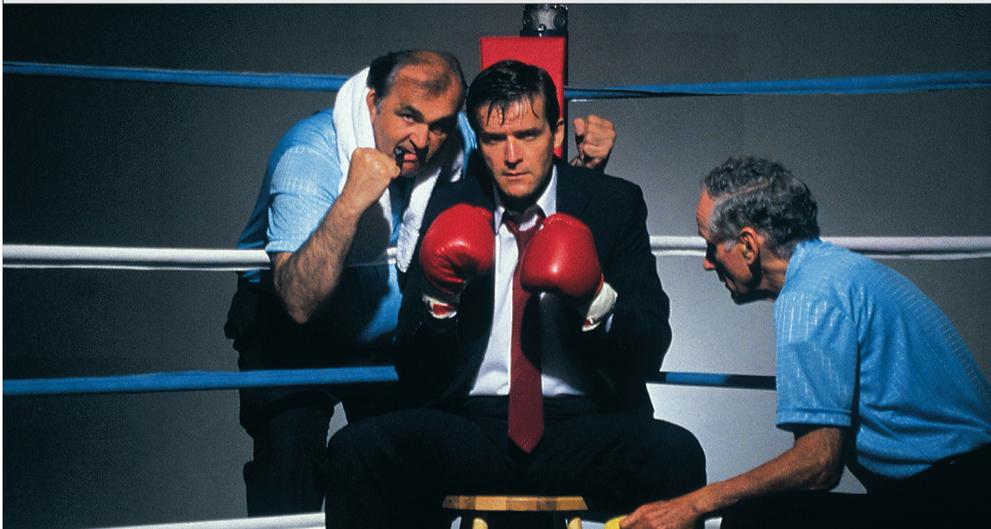


Harry Franzheim—an HR/OD Practitioner for over 30 years—has published this newsletter to bring you careful insight into reducing costs and unlocking employee potential.

AT ISSUE

Is communicating at your company more like a prize fight? Is there more talking than listening? Maybe the problem isn't with the messenger, but with the individuals who don't bother to listen to the message.

How Does Your Company Communicate?



HR Fact:

We judge our own performance based on our intentions. Others judge us based on our actual behaviors. What we do is much more obvious than what we thought we were doing. *How* we communicate is sometimes more important than *what* we communicate. Behaviors are easy to spot. Our nonverbal communication speaks louder than any words.

The biggest complaint among employees I survey and clients I work with is “workplace communication.” It seems to be a catchall “gotcha” that employees at all levels like to complain about—but do very little to resolve. Employers try to do better by writing newsletters, hosting luncheons, or holding quarterly business meetings. These are all good activities but probably not sustainable or effective. This is because these efforts are attempting to improve or increase message sending and not message receiving.

It is far too easy for employees to complain about being “out of the loop” or “not getting the memo.” These are convenient excuses that drive leaders crazy and cause more (louder) work. Effective communication is a two-way street. Yet most people think that the responsibility for clear communication falls to the sender. I suggest that it falls largely to the receiver. After all, I

know what I am trying to say. I think I know what I am saying. But I have no clue what you are receiving!

Effective listening is elusive because it is the epitome of personal accountability.

Listening skills are the problem. Not communication skills. If I don't understand what you are saying, the problem lies with me! If I am confused by what you are telling me, the problem rests with me. I am responsible for my own confusion and my own lack of understanding. Not you.

Suddenly there are no more excuses! I can't blame my boss, my co-workers, or my customers. Rats!

But wait, there is more. Ask employees if they understand how the business is performing and you will likely hear something like “No, no one tells us anything around here; we are always in the dark.” Watch out for that trap! Continue to ask the employees if they have ever inquired or approached their

manager to get the information they desire. The answer will likely be a defensive jab like “My manager? I never see my manager.” This is simply an attempt to bypass the obvious lack of personal accountability.

Once we accept personal responsibility for our own part of the communication mayhem, we begin to improve the situation. **Listening is part of the learning process.**

Employees that find it difficult to listen—truly listen—will also have difficulty learning. This is because effective listening requires one to suspend judgment about what is being said. Just as learning requires the ability to unlearn previously held beliefs, so too does listening.

What gets in the way of listening (learning)? My friends at Parallax Consulting (parallaxconsulting.com) explain it in these simple terms. We all have a set of lenses through which we observe and understand the world. But no two sets of lenses are the

same. We are all limited to our PAST:

- Preconceived ideas
- Assumptions
- Stereotypes
- Tunnel vision

Every interaction we have with one another is filtered by these lenses of our PAST. This is hard stuff to break through.

Highly effective leaders have a childlike curiosity that allows them to listen and to learn. They realize that it sometimes works best to draw an answer from the employee.

We judge ourselves by our intentions. Others judge us by our behaviors.

Consider these two sets of behaviors:

TO LEARN	TO PROTECT
Actively listens	Interrupts others
Open to opposing views	Closed to others' ideas
Explores ideas	Needs to be the expert
Shares information	Hoards information
Suspends judgments	Punishing and judgmental
Asks open-ended questions	Asks closed-ended questions
Risks not being correct	Protects point of view
Discloses limit to knowledge	Has no limit to knowledge

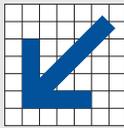
An effective leader demonstrates the behaviors under the **TO LEARN** column. These behaviors will improve the communication process and yield more and better data. And when data improves, so too does problem solving, which will speed up the organizational learning curve. The opposite holds true when the behaviors of **TO PROTECT** dominate the culture. In that kind of climate, no one is taking risks, sharing information, or telling the truth. And that is what is meant when employees say that communication is the No. 1 complaint.

Knowledge is not complete until you understand others' points of view and why they feel that way.

You have heard this a bazillion times—Stephen Covey's "Seek first to understand, then to be understood." We suggest you go deeper, and don't even try to be understood. Just listen. Don't argue or agree. Just

TIP FOR KEEPING

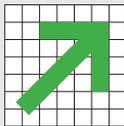
Costs Down.



To solve problems, you need real information and data. A climate of blame, fear, and competition will cause employees to "play to win." This behavior will come at almost any cost, even if that means fudging the numbers; distorting the system; underreporting or overreporting; or hiding products, scrap, injuries, and so on. To lower your costs you will need to know the truth about everything. Do away with internal competition and start building trust within the workplace. You will soon be shocked to learn where the opportunities for improvement lie.

TIP FOR KEEPING

Productivity Up.



We teach leaders to have short but frequent meetings with their teams. The purpose of the meetings is to find out what is working and what needs improvement. It is important to hear the "good stuff," but it is critical to hear the areas for improvement. Some teams use a simple "3 up" and "3 down" technique. At your next meeting, make the topic your leadership style. What are three things I am doing that are helping the team? What are three things I am doing that are getting in the way? Productivity and problem solving will soar.

listen. Ask deeper and deeper open-ended questions until you think you understand the other person's point of view and why they are saying it. And when you think you've got it, summarize or paraphrase and check for a confirmatory reply indicating that you actually understand. Then stop.

We teach the PRES model for sending and receiving messages. It is simple and effective:

- Make your **Point**
- Explain your rationale or **Reason**
- Give an **Example**
- **Summarize**

Use PRES to listen effectively, asking for a reason, an example, and then summarize for clarity. PRESing is simple and effective.

In addition to PRES, the following five key skills should be learned and used by all leaders, from Dennis C. Kinlaw's *Coaching for Commitment* (Jossey-Bass, 1999):

- 1. Attending:** Using nonverbal behavior to communicate and listen without evaluating.
- 2. Acknowledging:** Using verbal and non-verbal indicators of being involved in the conversation.
- 3. Probing:** Asking open-ended questions.
- 4. Immediacy:** Responding to what is happening in the conversation. Being in and out (of the conversation) at the same time.
- 5. Summarizing:** Pausing in the conversation to confirm key points and feelings.

Effective leadership requires effective communication skills. More importantly, effective listening skills are paramount. Listening is the pathway to personal accountability and to learning. And learning is necessary for continuous process improvement. Leaders that listen are much more capable of solving problems, building teams, and creating an environment of dignity and respect where employees' ideas are genuinely valued. **ne**



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