

SIGMA Radius

360 Leadership Assessment



Leadership Series

Great Leaders
Communicate



GREAT LEADERS COMMUNICATE

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

– George Bernard Shaw

The ability to communicate effectively is essential in successful leaders. These individuals keep their direct reports, as well as their fellow leaders, up to date on the important information in the organization. Information is often filtered down by leaders to the general employees, starting at the top of the organization with strategic planning. Therefore, the organization requires leaders to be skilled at communication. In addition, the way information about major decisions or changes in an organization are presented to employees will influence how fair they perceive these changes as being. Effective communicators know how to have their messages received in a positive light.

Communication involves the exchange of information. As a workplace-relevant trait, communication is the process of keeping direct reports and leaders informed about the decisions, events, and developments that affect them. Effective communicators do not share all information with all employees, but rather, are skilled at directing information to the individuals to whom this information pertains.

In assessing your ability to communicate effectively, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I effective at sharing information with the correct people?
- Do I tell my employees about relevant decisions or events before they take place?
- Am I honest and understanding when communicating with my employees?
- Do I update employees during times of change or uncertainty?
- Do I provide my employees with information as I receive it?
- Have I explained the reasons or impetus behind decisions?

Improve Your Communication Skills

Understand the importance: It is easy to overlook how important communication is but not all communication is equal. Effective leader communication has been related to high employee commitment during times of change¹, low rates of employees wishing to leave the organization², and high performance³. Communication can also be related to a number of other leader characteristics, including conflict resolution and persuasiveness.

Remember that communication is a two-way street: Although it is often up to a leader to relay news to their colleagues and direct reports, good communicators should also be good listeners. By listening carefully to employees, leaders can develop a better understanding of who they are working with, and can use this knowledge later when communicating tough decisions or changes. People generally like good listeners, so employees may be more receptive to hearing from leaders if they have had positive interactions with them in the past.

It's not just what you say, it's how you say it: There is no shortage of suggestions for how leaders should behave when communicating with employees. These tips can actually do more harm than good. The most important thing to remember is that good communicators appear honest and sincere. Attempting to apply too many tips can come across as rigid or awkward, which may affect how your message is interpreted.

Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Communicate More Effectively

The following steps can help you become better at communication:

1. **Be calm while communicating.** Research has shown that when attempting to get an employee to accept a decision, the most effective tools include presenting a logical argument and providing factual evidence. This does not mean being emotionless: leader enthusiasm can increase positive reactions. Just remember, the least effective methods of communication include appearing demanding or menacing, and using authority as the reason why employees should accept your decisions⁴.
2. **Actively share information.** For leaders looking to implement difficult decisions or changes, early communication is key. Leaders should make employees aware of potential issues that will impact their unit. A good policy to remember is to share early and often. Updates are as important as the initial communication of information. Employees will lose trust if they perceive their leader as withholding or concealing.
3. **Try to ensure accuracy of information shared.** This can be a fine line. While leaders should try to update their employees often, they should also ensure they share information that is validated. Leaders who begin rumours will be seen as unreliable, while those who withhold information for too long will be seen as secretive. Either situation could result in employees losing trust in their leaders. Updating employees often will reduce this problem, especially when leaders clarify when a situation is still ongoing or uncertain. By keeping employees informed along the way, they will trust that their leader shares what they know, when they know it.

Resources



[What is Organizational Communication?](#)



[Why Communication is Today's Most Important Skill](#)



Develop your ability to communicate by taking advantage of SIGMA's coaching services.

Contact SIGMA for coaching on developing your skills as a leader.

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

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References

¹ Luo, W., Song, L. J., Gebert, D. R., Zhang, K., & Feng, Y. (2016). How does leader communication style promote employees' commitment at times of change? *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 29, 242-262.

² Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (2007). The effects of leader communication on a worker's intent to stay: An investigation using structural equation modeling. *Human Performance*, 20, 85-102.

³ Sagie, A. (1996). Effects of leader's communication style and participative goal setting on performance and attitudes. *Human Performance*, 9, 51-64.

⁴ Yamaguchi, I. (2009). Influences of organizational communication tactics on trust with procedural justice: A cross-cultural study between Japanese and American workers. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 33, 21-31.