

# SIGMA

## Leadership Series



**Great Leaders  
Are  
Spokespeople**



## GREAT LEADERS ARE SPOKESPEOPLE

“

The challenge of this century (is) to develop spokespeople.

– Jim Fowler

In the context of leadership, spokespeople act as the figurehead of their team. They communicate on behalf of themselves and their direct reports, and they effectively promote and defend the interests of their team. Leaders may be spokespeople at the organizational level, for example, a President or CEO who speaks on behalf of their company. However, middle and lower-level managers can be spokespeople as well, speaking on behalf of their department, team, or co-workers.

It is important for leaders to act as spokespeople for variety of reasons. First, when leaders act as spokespeople, it ensures that their direct reports' voices are heard and their interests are promoted. Second, it provides a point of contact between upper and lower levels of the organizational hierarchy. This makes it easier for lower-level employees to [manage upwards](#), as well as for senior leaders to engage with those below them. Finally, having leaders act as spokespeople ensures that communication is streamlined, given that employees are able to communicate more efficiently using a singular, unified voice. This, in turn, also promotes more strategic thinking, as messages must be crafted and agreed upon in advance.

In assessing your ability to act as a spokesperson, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I understand the needs and interests of my direct reports?
- Do I promote and defend the interests of my direct reports?
- To what extent have I served as a figurehead for my team?
- How have I bridged the gap between my superiors and my subordinates?
- To what extent am I a point of contact or representative for my team?

### Improve Your Ability to Act as a Spokesperson

**Know your people.** In order to be a good spokesperson, you have to know your people. Take time to understand the employees on behalf of whom you speak. What are their goals? What motivates them? The easiest way to do this is to ask. Meet with your team on a regular basis to ask how they're doing and what challenges they are facing. Meet with people one-on-one to ask how you can support them as well. This will give you a better picture of your team's collective and individual needs, and help you be a more effective advocate for them.

**Know your message.** In addition to knowing their people, a spokesperson must know their message. As you are meeting with your team and its individual members, take time to reflect on what you are hearing. Look for trends and summarize key takeaways. If you're not sure, confirm with your direct reports that an issue you have identified is truly an issue, and that they would like you to advocate for support among your superiors. All this should be done before you find yourself in front of an audience. It's important to remember that you may not always be advocating for your direct reports, you may simply be updating others on progress, or even reporting that there is nothing to report. That's fine too. What is important is that you know your message and are prepared to present it.

**Make yourself accessible.** Part of being a good spokesperson is making yourself available to the people you speak for. Tell your team that you are here to advocate on their behalf. As Jack Welch, former Chairman and CEO of General Electric, once said, "Above all, good leaders are open ... They're straight with people. They make a religion out of being accessible."<sup>1</sup> In addition to meeting with your team and individual employees, make it clear that people are always welcome to come to you to express their needs and concerns. When they do so, make sure you listen, engage with their concerns, and show that you care. Building these relationships will also benefit the performance of your team, as studies have shown that an employee's relationship with their immediate supervisor is a key driver for engagement and performance.<sup>2</sup>

## Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Become a Better Spokesperson

- 1. Create patterns for communication:** In order to be a spokesperson for your team, you will need an opportunity to speak on their behalf. If you don't already have these in place, set up a weekly or monthly time to check in with your superior(s). Be proactive; use this time to voice your team's concerns and commend your direct reports on progress they've made. If there are concerns, make sure you also come prepared with a request about what you need from your superior in order to support your team.
- 2. Take the hit:** As a spokesperson for your team, you will likely be the first to hear complaints. Whether it's a dissatisfied superior or an angry customer, be prepared to "take the hit" for your team. Accept responsibility, apologize for mistakes – even if they were not your own – and stay calm as you work towards a solution. Do not put blame on your direct reports. As a leader and a spokesperson, your job is to act on behalf of your team and shield them from the brunt of the bad news.
- 3. Give public praise:** Fortunately, being a spokesperson is not just about being the bearer of bad news. In fact, this position should be used to intentionally publicize good news! Spokespeople advocate on behalf of their team, and that involves giving public praise and recognizing the efforts and accomplishments of their people. The next time one of your direct reports meets or exceeds your expectations, make sure you praise them for it, privately and in the presence of their superiors. This will help your team see that you are for them and will make them more comfortable coming to you as a point of contact for questions and concerns.

## Resources



[2 Skills To Advocate for Everyone on Your Team](#)



[Emerging Leaders: Why \(and How\) to Advocate for Your Employees](#)



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## Contact

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

SIGMA Assessment Systems, Inc.

Email: [support@SigmaHR.com](mailto:support@SigmaHR.com)

Call: 800-265-1285

<sup>1</sup> Breland, J. (January 7, 2020). 5 Simple But Effective Ways to Advocate for Your Team. *Leaders.Do*. Retrieved from <https://leaders.do/5-simple-but-effective-ways-to-advocate-for-your-team/>.

<sup>2</sup> Kittaneh, F. 3 Ways Leaders Can Become Outstanding Advocates for Their Team. *Inc*. Retrieved from <https://www.inc.com/firas-kittaneh/3-ways-leaders-can-become-outstanding-advocates-for-their-team.html>.