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## Effective Business Communications

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### Article:

**Can you name a great leader who wasn't also a great communicator? Nor can we.**

Companies and organisations are often looking today to accomplish three goals that are all related:

- Create an environment that attracts, engages and retains the best talent.
- Manage a steady course through times of change, transition and difficulties.
- Stay at the leading edge of change through constant renewal and innovation.

Each one of these goals requires a well-planned and well-executed communication strategy. The leader's role in planning, developing and delivering this strategy is one of his or her most important roles.

A survey by PR Week revealed that 85.4 per cent of CEOs believe that it is important to be perceived as an influencer in their industry. When Marc Bolland took over as CEO of UK supermarket giant, Morrisons, the chain was struggling to compete in a tough retail market. Bolland made sure that he was available to whoever wanted to speak to him.

He said, "The first thing I did on my first morning was call the top five shareholders, analysts and journalists. I said, if there is anything you would like to know, this is my mobile number, give me a call."

It is important to understand that effective communication is much more than speaking at conferences or to large groups of people and making "effective presentations". It involves the communication that leaders have with people, not simply words spoken, or information given to them. In many cases, it can be unspoken and passive but must still deliver the message and provide the influence the leader intends.

**Effective communication programmes must address four areas:**

- What you say and how you say it.
- Whom you talk with.
- How you get people talking with you.
- How you get people talking with each other.

When leaders manage communication effectively, work relationships are strong and well-informed, as well as purposeful and creative. Both the leaders and their teams become more engaged. Trust levels become higher, information becomes freely shared and the education, knowledge and purpose of the workforce become stronger.

Perhaps the most important role of the communicative leader is to set out the vision ensuring that no mixed messages are received, creating simplicity and clarity.

If you asked most people what they would like from their CEO, they would probably say "more communication". Wrong!

They are probably already receiving way too much of it in the form of documents, memos, reports, newsletters, press clippings, minutes of meetings, presentations, budgets, etc – not to mention hundreds of emails each day. And if you ask them, they will probably say they still don't really know what's going on.

What they need is not more communication but less, and better, communication.

As a leader, your job is to wipe out as much of the paper and electronic avalanche as possible, introducing a culture of real, direct, face-to-face communication.

- Be clear and concise using direct and logical sentences and leave spaces to listen.
- Be consistent and impose clarity. Don't deliver confusing and different messages on different days.
- Be simple and brief. Get your message over quickly.
- Be specific and aimed at your audience. What do they want to know? Tell them.
- If you set targets or if you say something is important, ensure it happens.
- Never use "I", only "we".
- Be friendly, warm and approachable even if the person you are talking to is antagonistic.
- Never lie.
- Don't blame or criticise other people or the competition. Accept responsibility and show humility.
- Always appear to be optimistic, even if you don't feel it.
- Be yourself, look confident and assured, and don't degenerate into American over-positive euphemisms.

It is important to build trust and integrity and to give out an assured confidence. One way of doing this sometimes is to develop a number of stories around the messages you are trying to communicate. This can quickly add meaning to the experience of work, will enable your colleagues to remember the messages, and will ensure that they see you as an authoritative, confident leader who they feel able to trust.

Talking the talk and being a committed communicator is essential to the influence you will bring to bear over your organisation. If it's not a strong point, challenge yourself to learn!

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