

COMMUNICATION: THE FOUNDATION OF LEADERSHIP

When a culture of trust exists in an organization listening skills on the part of the leadership team are well known. The effect of those skills on an organization causes people to work hard and willingly comply with standards. Customers can sense when your employees are energized and they are naturally drawn to your company because they want to share in the enthusiasm. In turn this state of mind makes retention easier.

We can discern two important characteristics from the previous paragraph. First, leaders maintain the endorsement of their employees by building upon relationships. Second, they know how to communicate effectively. In fact, strong relationships cannot exist without good communication.

What is communication?

The state of any relationship depends on the level of communication between two parties. If we choose *not* to listen to someone, we do not have a good relationship with that person. In turn, if we choose *not* to speak with someone, we do not have a strong relationship either. Communication therefore includes both listening and speaking. Employees become emotionally willing (motivated) and ready to learn when they believe that they are understood and that their manager is concerned with their being successful as well as the company being profitable. In essence employees are disposed to follow their leaders due to the level of trust that has been built. A high level of trust exists between individuals when there is regular and genuine communication.


It cannot be stressed enough that true communication involves both listening and speaking with the emphasis on listening. By way of illustration let's say an expert is hired to present findings to a select audience. The expert is speaking in his/her native tongue – Greek. However, the audience speaks only Japanese. The Japanese speaking audience is hearing the same presentation that has been heard with great appreciation throughout the land of Greece but unfortunately they don't understand a word. This illustrates that when you know how your audience thinks and what's important to them, you can frame your message accordingly. This level of communication is made possible only if a person is engaging in *active listening*.

During the Olympics if a runner in a relay race dropped the baton it would most likely contribute to losing the race for the entire team. Outcome and productivity are affected by such things as not following up on emails and voice mails. You can see that problems occur in the hand-offs (dropping the baton). When conversations are weak, misunderstood or take place in a culture of distrust projects are delayed and time and money are wasted. Most importantly customer expectations are not met. If issues of this nature exist in your company rather than pointing the finger of blame, the management team should begin asking a very important question: What is my individual contribution to the problem?

Listening – The vital part of communication

Communication is one of the most important skills in life and the most important part is *active listening* and not talking. When we actively listen, (not just hear) something powerful is created...*trust*.

Listening builds trust. In turn trust is the high-octane fuel for the engine of performance. When conversations take place in an atmosphere of trust, new ideas are readily accepted. The reason this is allowed to happen is that the conversation partner is not in a defensive mode questioning everything that is being said. Thinking becomes clear and creative since there is not a lot of 'noise' in their head. This conversation has become a powerful conversation!



Trust is the high-octane
fuel for the engine
of performance

When someone has finished expressing their thoughts are you able to restate what has been said? Doing so will assure your communication partner they have been heard. For instance you might say: “As I understand it, what’s important to you is...or what I heard you say is ...” and then restate what you have heard. Next ask: “Is that correct? Or is that an accurate picture?” If they say YES, they are now assured they have been heard. You have verified your understanding of the issues and the both of you are on the same page.

Humility and Communication

Which affects performance more – getting it right or being right? If you were to survey others in your workplace, which would they say was truer of your behavioral style? How willing are others to approach you with ideas or to get your feedback? When a project does not get completed on time do you immediately blame others? Or do you ask yourself – what could I have done to get this project completed on time? What should I do differently the next time? What should I stop doing, start doing; do more of or less of?

Humility is not only vital to good communication it is also part of good leadership. A leader should be willing to engage in a learning conversation. What may stand in the way however, is ego. It’s important to have self-confidence but do we allow how we feel about our own knowledge and experience prevent us from listening to others? Do you ever find yourself completing other’s sentences? Or have you ever noticed that when someone is talking you are thinking about what *you* are going to say as soon as they stop talking? When someone tunes us out when we are speaking it usually leaves us feeling frustrated, angry and perhaps hurt. If *we* can tell when someone is not listening to us certainly others can tell when we are not really listening to them. Don’t fool yourself by thinking you are good at faking listening. Trust me...you’re not.

One of my favorite expressions is ‘Wherever you are, be there’. So if a fellow employee is speaking...*be there*. Don’t allow your mind to wander. Practice this at home. If you are involved in a project at home and your son or daughter starts pouring out their little heart to you, stop what you are doing and...*be there!*

Effective leadership requires influencing – not commanding or directing people. Influence happens through powerful conversations. Powerful conversations require clarity, authenticity and alignment around actions and issues. If a leader is to be successful they need to establish two things – Trust and Rapport. Strong active listening skills are what make trust and rapport possible.

Exercise: Over the next few weeks summarize what your conversation partner has said making sure they agree with your capsule summary by asking... Is that correct? If they say yes, you now have the green light to provide your feedback and thoughts.

About Jason Kleid: Jason is focused on optimizing performance and getting results. Underscoring this philosophy is a belief that it is always the individuals in any organization, where the greatest potential for improvement and possibility of change resides. It is the mind (one’s thinking) where new ideas broaden understanding and cause things to happen. However, it is the heart (inner person/motivation) where transformation occurs.