



## Communication – Your Achilles Heel? Six Ways to Avoid It

Read any survey, talk to any leader, any employee – Communication ranks at the top of the list for “things leaders need to do better”. We all know it, and yet, most of us still struggle with communicating. And now that we live in the world of instant communication and information overload, it has only gotten harder. We have more tools, more resources, more access and we are **less** effective. This reminds me of the famous quote of George Bernard Shaw: “The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” There are some things that we can do to get better.

First, recognize that there is no “silver bullet”. We cannot approach a communication strategy/method as a one size fits all. We live in a complex world with complex challenges that defies this approach. While part of our role as leaders is to simplify the complexity, we must accept that the methods, mediums and tools of communicating can be very complex. We need to be well-versed in all of them or at minimum, be surrounded by people who are...and be willing to take their advice.

Second, some leaders find a method of communicating that works for them and become so attached to it that they lose sight of the purpose and intent of communication. Communicating cannot be about “what works for you”. This is not to say that you cannot have a preferred style or method. You must be willing to adjust if you want the message or information to be heard and understood. Remember that good communication is art and science...they must be in sync.

Even though we live in the age of information, studies indicate that employees do not think that there is good communication in their organization. The third element of better communicating comes from understanding the definition of good communication. Leaders need to define good communication with their employees. Leaders make too many assumptions about what their employees’ communication desires are. Too often we rely on the input of the most vocal and/or those in close proximity. Realizing that there will always be those who will never be happy with the communication should not deter you from seeking the input from all your employees to improve communication.

The final point I would like to make is more of a challenge than a point....become an innovator of communication and challenge other leaders to do the same. Here are some ideas to consider:

- Create guidelines for how and when to communicate. Guidelines will help create the desired culture you envision for your organization. It gives structure which will streamline and ensure uniformity.
- Design better ways for teams/departments to document and store knowledge and information. This is where “simple” should be the key component.

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- Be collaborative. Utilize a variety of collaborative technologies and a dispersed team of communication planners.
- Be willing to shake things up. Author Jim Collins talks about the value of taking empirical risks. Some leaders that have been “burned” by taking risks. So, they decide to keep the status quo because it’s safer. Often the reason they failed was because they did not do their homework and didn’t test the risk. Be willing to explore new communication concepts. Ask the appropriate questions. Then experiment with the risk by working with a group that will give you good feedback. Make sure your group is a good mix of your organization with the will and desire to create better ways to communicate.

We could list numerous benefits of good communication, but it is only when communication actually takes place that you realize its benefits. You must be willing to make a conscious effort with concrete steps to reap those benefits. What’s your first step?

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