



## The Blake Group Newsletter

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**The biggest problem with leadership communication is the illusion that it has occurred."**

Boyd Clarke & Ron Crossland, *The Leaders Voice™*

It is a New Year -- what better time to reflect on what's working and what needs work; for example communication. Every year, trainers and managers rank it as one of the top 10 training and challenge topics. In many cases, we know we need help with communication because problems have already occurred:

- Profits are down because information and resources weren't shared;
- coworkers are resisting the path of change;
- supervisors don't know how to interact with employees or tap into strengths; or
- opportunities for real improvement are missed because of ineffective or non-existent performance management.

Whether it's the way we talk, listen, or react to certain individual styles, and situations, improving communication is the most important investment we can make in our professional and personal lives. With the right tools, we have the capacity to address communication before problems occur.

### Planning for Better Communication

Communication is so pervasive in work lives that we take it for granted and often overlook it as a source of problems. Sorting out how communication impacts organizations can be difficult. But three communication problem areas remain among the most pervasive and well-documented: communication in teams, lateral communication, and communication during organizational stress.

How exactly does communication become a problem and get derailed? Within teams, individual problematic communication behavior gets coupled with varied interpretations of the task or individual role. Among and between groups and management, conflicting needs, expectations, and communication norms can break down. As organization stress increases, improper methods, timing, withholding, and content of information can intensify.

Taking a proactive approach helps to eliminate communication problems before they happen -- and eliminate the hidden costs of fixing problems. The Blake Group's work with a client clearly showed that due to miscommunication and conflict they were losing \$16,320 per week. Effective team communication can be achieved by establishing a common set of guidelines that includes the following:

- Negotiate shared meanings
- Use direct feedback to address communication problems
- Share all relevant information.
- Listen actively

### Your Management Responsibilities

1. **Define policies and objectives.** Ensure they are understood and accepted. Management sets expectations for the organization as a whole before employees can do their jobs, satisfy their customers, and strive to improve the quality of their work. This is accomplished by

developing and implementing specific policies and objectives that reflect the operating philosophy of the top management. Once these policies and objectives have been established, all managers must take the necessary actions to ensure each employee shares the manager's vision of the organization's purpose.

You can work on the clarity of your organizational vision and purpose by asking a few basic questions:

- Does the way we define the business pull us together in a way that makes sense?
- Does the way we define the business concentrate on real opportunities for the years ahead?
- Do our strategies make sense for our company and our times?
- Do our strategies provide us the right direction?
- Do our objectives clearly state our key targets?
- Do our objectives specify success measures?

2. **Specify roles and responsibilities.** Each employee must take responsibility for the work he or she performs. Everyone contributes to quality and to meeting performance objectives established in concert with management. It is management's obligation to ensure employees understand what is being asked of them. Individual and team performance is the key to achieving management's objectives.
3. **Specify and communicate expectations.** Identify and allocate resources to achieve them. Management identifies resources and capable individuals for carrying out the organization's work. Management provides employees with the material and training necessary to accomplish their tasks. Before taking responsibility for their work, employees must possess
  - knowledge of management's expectations,
  - knowledge of why the task is being performed, and
  - empowerment to carry out assigned tasks.
4. **Strive to improve.** Management creates an environment that encourages employees to improve the quality of the work and work processes with which they are associated. Employees must consistently seek new, more innovative ways to increase quality, efficiency, and effectiveness.
5. **Invest in your people.** Management ensures each employee is capable of performing his/her assigned tasks. Employees should be afforded the appropriate education and training, including professional development and on-the-job training.
6. **Ensure the right people have the right information at the right time.** Make information needed to make decisions available to employees when they need it.
7. **Seek and use relevant experience.** Collaborate and use each other as a resource. Management makes use of information, such as new technology or lessons learned, from internal and external sources, which could potentially affect operations. By recognizing past failures and successes, management will be better prepared to promote a culture committed to excellence.
8. **Plan and control work.** Work is carefully planned and controlled to ensure that management's objectives are met. This requires that needs be thought out, organizational

goals be identified, lines of communication be established, and required manpower be provided.

9. **Use the right material, tools, and processes.** Control any changes to them. Management ensures that the right material, tools, and processes are in place and used so that the organization's products and services are of the highest possible quality.
10. **Assess work to ensure it meets expectations.** All employees assess their efforts and determine whether they have accomplished what they set out to do as part of meeting management's expectations. As a way of providing additional assurance that product and service quality has been attained, a system of assessment is established and implemented by management. Work performance should be measured against defined standards. The assessments are performed by competent individuals who are performance-oriented and focused on improving product and service quality.
11. **Identify and remedy errors and deficiencies.** Problems should be identified, documented, analyzed, and resolved. Management must be committed to preventing problems and improving quality. Foster a no-fault attitude with which problems are viewed as opportunities for improvement, not punishment.
12. **Management, at all levels, continually assesses its systems and processes.** These assessments determine the effectiveness of the management process, rather than establishing compliance with organization and statutory requirements. They address broad categories or management issues, such as the mission of the organization, employee understanding of management's objectives, and customer expectations.

Excerpted from: *Leading the Total Quality Mission: aligning principles, practices & management*, and *Leading Continuous Improvement: building capability & commitment* by Orlando Blake, Ph.D., CPT.

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