

# Achieving Results

## Effective Management Communication

By Greg Stebbins

Do your employees know the direction you want your company to take? If you haven't communicated to them the goals you've set, it is entirely possible they will work toward goals of their own — goals which could be counterproductive to yours. More small businesses fail because of poor internal communication than any other reason.

Whether you have one or 100 employees, it is your responsibility to keep them moving in one direction, toward goals you've set to accomplish. This may also be one of your greatest challenges.

The essential first step in effective communication is understanding the people you want to influence. The more you know about your employees' receptivity and predispositions, the better chance

you have of ensuring that effective communication takes place.

### COMMUNICATION IS EFFECTIVE WHEN YOUR MESSAGE IS:

1. RECEIVED BY THE EMPLOYEE FOR WHOM IT WAS INTENDED
2. UNDERSTOOD TO MEAN WHAT YOU THOUGHT IT MEANT
3. REMEMBERED FOR MORE THAN A FEW SECONDS
4. PRODUCES THE RESULTS THAT YOU WANT

A message that does not cause a person to take action is not communication. It's just noise.

Efficient communication differs from effective communication. According to well known management specialist Peter Drucker, efficient is simply minimizing the cost of whatever you do; effective means doing only those things that produce the results you want.

Effective communication requires a little time and effort and essentially calls for a face-to-face dialogue with the person you are managing. Other forms of communication are more efficient, such as memos, voice mail and electronic mail. But before challenging that statement to argue that the alternate forms of communication are also effective, you need to determine if your communication effort met the four conditions above. If it did, then the communication was effective, regardless of the medium. However, experience has taught many managers that efficient communication is not often effective.

Because most humans are essentially social creatures, the most effective communication is through frequent face-to-face dialogue.

Eyeball-to-eyeball communication ensures that rule number one is met, the correct employee receives the correct message. It also ensures attention. An employee

may be able to ignore a piece of paper but that same employee can hardly ignore your physical presence. Additionally, by investing your time to speak directly to someone, you provide tangible proof that your message is important.

Frequent communication is effective because it eventually finds its way into an individual's long-term memories. Information stored in the long-term memory is considered more important to the individual. If you want your message to stick, repetition is the key.

### IALOGUE IS IMPORTANT FOR FOUR REASONS.

First, the method of communication sends a message of its own. If I

action as a result of your communication. Unless you have agreed upon the next physical action to be taken, your message does not meet the last of the four requirements for effective communication. You cannot expect your employee to produce tangible, physical results unless he or she understands the action that will have to be taken to do this. Dialogue allows the opportunity to remove doubts — yours and the employee's — about the likelihood of the action being completed. And, because the plan that emerges from dialogue is partly the employee's creation, it is more likely to be acted upon.

As your company grows, your channels of communication will grow larger and deeper. More people will be interacting with you and with each other. One of your highest leverage activities for continued success is polishing your communication skills

and those of your employee's. Developing good communication takes time, but the payoffs exceed the effort.

Among the fine points of effective management communication are tone and emphasis. For example, your voice tone and word emphasis can convey entirely different meanings. Consider a simple example: You look good today. You look good today. You look good today. You look good today.

The words are the same in all four sentences. The first three are usually interpreted as complimentary, while the last one is often heard as an insult.

The meaning of your communication equates to the response you receive, regardless of your intent. ■

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lecture you, there is an implication that what I have to say is more important than what you have to say. On the other hand, if I invite you to help me arrive at a conclusion that satisfies us both, the gesture shows respect for your point of view.

Second, dialogue holds the attention of your employee. Never knowing when he or she might need to respond, the employee must remain alert. The outcome of any two-way discussion is never completely predictable. The employee will be curious to see what happens next.

Third, you have an opportunity to fine tune your message as you go along. If part of your message doesn't make sense to your employee, you can reword or re-emphasize to clarify your intention. An employee can't ask a written document what the message means.

Fourth, you're in a position to direct the employee's next physical

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