



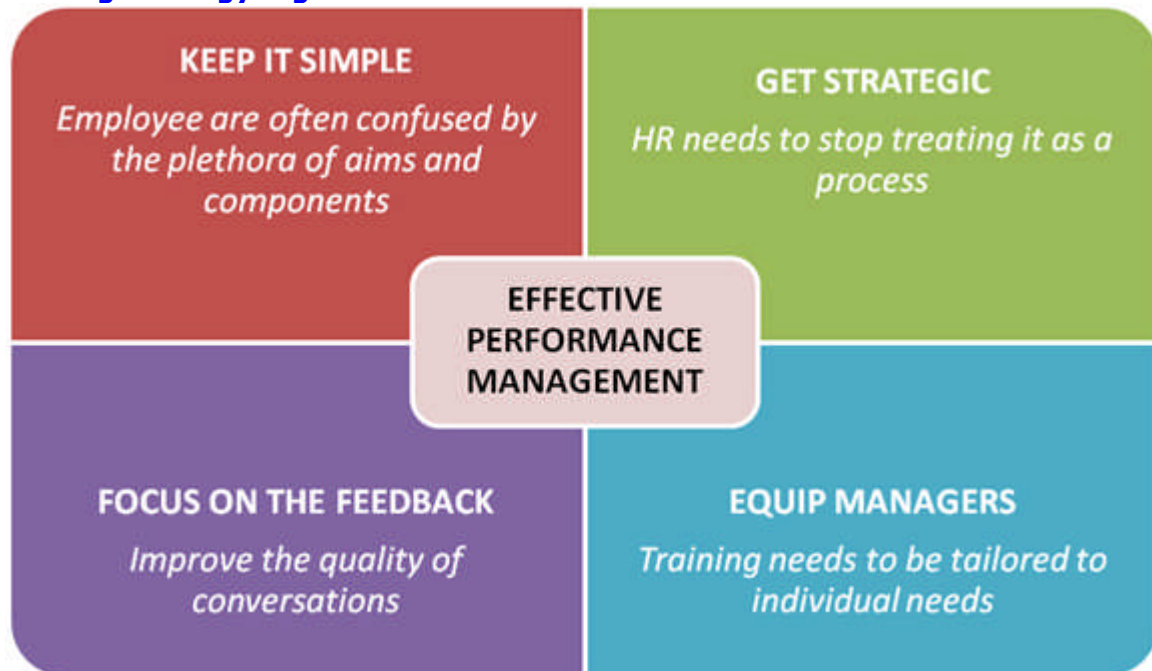
CAVENDISH

THE SECRETS OF SUCCESS

Have you got it all mapped out?

Read on and see how you can achieve success!

Getting Strategy Right



Every Cloud...

Recessions bring about change and that`s the perfect environment for `Communicating Change for Success`.

In times of change -- which these days means pretty much *always* -- the leader's role calls for imparting clear, informative communications. Unfortunately, not all CEOs come equipped with built-in communications skills. Some know what to say and how to say it purely by instinct; most have to learn. Others resist counselling and assistance, thinking it's enough for them alone to know what's happening in the company. They generally leave the communication side of things to other people.

This attitude can be a major disadvantage these days for `all` organisations, it's become an absolute necessity for the leader to communicate effectively with anyone who has a stake in their company, whether they be staff, shareholders, clients, the board or potential investors. When things are changing, staff need information and motivation to keep up, to know what's going on, to meet changing objectives, to make decisions that will ultimately affect the `bottom line` and the well-being of the organisation.

A Chief Executive needs to make change personal because it's personal to the people who are being asked to change.

Context is crucial. Regardless of the project or initiative, it's vital to address the broader elements needed to achieve success, including:

- What are the reasons behind our proposed change?
- What are our goals?
- Who does the change affect?
- What are the likely repercussions of change throughout the organization?
- How will we all benefit from change?

The goal is always reducing ambiguity and uncertainty. Think of communication as a pre-emptive strike against rumour and gossip. By sharing truthful information in a complete and timely manner you diminish the hurtful effects of the grapevine. Also, make no mistake about it: your company has a grapevine. Every company does.

In an information vacuum, tension increases a natural human response where major change is involved. The best leaders anticipate this response and prepare for it with an open, deliberate communications strategy.

There's almost a direct link between trying to maintain executive silence and misinformation proliferating on the company grapevine. Instead, communicate as early as possible and always within a broader context than just the nuts and bolts of the change initiative. Explain the underlying causes so that employees understand the importance of aligning their new behaviours with the needs of the customer.

Also, note that *quantity* of information provided will not get the job done. The message has to be clear, concerned, consistent and connect with their hearts as well as their minds. It's the broad overview that will do the job. When leaders share too much detailed information that may be important to them but irrelevant to employees, the end result is confusing and unconvincing.

Additional tips for combating the pernicious reach of the grapevine include:

- **Know what's going to change and why.** The starting point for any communications plan has to be the company leader. If he or she hasn't got the change message straight, it's virtually impossible for anyone else to understand.
- **Repeat, repeat, repeat.** One common mistake is assuming that once communicated, the message has been totally absorbed. On the contrary an important message needs to be followed up fairly rapidly. Keeping employees 'in the picture' must be part of the CEO's plan. Unfortunately, many CEOs move on to other things and their employees begin to feel neglected, ignored and forgotten, all of which undermine the honesty and sincerity of the CEO's presentation.
- **Listen to others.** Change initiatives should be inclusive; contributions from others are valued, not dismissed. Create opportunities for employees to express their concerns and offer their ideas. At the same time, incorporate opportunities to communicate project updates, so feedback becomes a steady element in the change process.

Strategic Communications

Much as they might like to think of themselves as being "pretty good speakers," many business leaders fall woefully short when it comes to face-to-face presentations with larger groups. Part of the issue is the belief that if you know what you're talking about, that alone is a guarantee that you're getting through. Nothing is further from the truth.

Think of the assumptions you carry into any exchange. It's unlikely that the other person walks in with the same preconceptions, hence, the almost inevitable misunderstandings that so often occur in the workplace. In conversation, therefore, try to clarify and confirm what you believe to be true and then determine if others see things the same way."

When is face-to-face communication most appropriate? These situations apply:

- **Significant news.** Any information that significantly affects the audience (layoffs, merger, etc.) should be shared in person.
- **Emotional circumstances.** Handled properly, a difficult or potentially explosive situation can be defused through a rational face-to-face exchange of views. Thrashing an issue out in person offers both individuals to vent frustrations, cool down and hopefully build a bridge toward understanding.
- **Influence and persuasion.** You stand a better chance of converting others to your position when you're in the same room with them, talking, listening, clarifying specific points, emphasizing others.

A good presentation:

- ✓ Is knowledgeable and articulate
- ✓ Is sincere and honest
- ✓ Creates empathy and rapport
- ✓ Projects enthusiasm and even passion
- ✓ Is persuasive
- ✓ Gets into people's minds and hearts
- ✓ Is personalized
- ✓ Builds trust
- ✓ Shows you care

The opening of your presentation must capture their interest immediately. The best way is to talk about them, not yourself or the company. That's for later. Everyone likes to be talked about as long as it's in a positive light. Create a sense of excitement and interest. Give a preview of what's in it for them.

Communicating the Vision

As the business grows, the CEO tends to get farther removed from daily operations and that's often a good thing. Issues/Problems occur when the leader's vision doesn't get communicated to the people who can help make it a reality. CEOs think that others think like they do themselves. For better or worse, it's simply not so.

The mandate for CEOs is to spend time making sure that their vision gets communicated to people in a clear, coherent manner. Sometimes the dots have to be connected.

The golden rule: If people do not understand you, it's *your* issue/problem, not theirs.

Perhaps most important, the vision must be communicated *consistently*. When the leader keeps saying the same thing long enough, employees will eventually come to believe and accept it. Staying focused and consistent sends the message that you're fully committed to the company's direction. Messages that change frequently only lead to confusion and disorder.

Some tips for you:

- Make sure all employees are aware of the vision.
- Reassure stakeholders that the proposed change is justified, properly managed and moving forward.
- Praise individual contributions that boost progress.
- Address and resolve any problems that occur.
- Keep people informed as change progresses through the organization.

Strive to fully explain the *why* behind your vision. People want to understand how their individual efforts contribute to the larger objective.

Many CEOs think that transmitting information alone is enough to satisfy employees' need for communication. They believe the more information they give, the more convincing they become. In fact, most people make their decisions based on two factors, the information they get and the emotional impact of the whole presentation on them. People often make major decisions based more on how they feel than what they think.

Other ways to forge an emotional connection:

- **Communicate your passion.** As leader, you have certain values and ideas you feel passionate about. Make that passion known to others. This powerful emotional tool enables you to forge a link with peoples' hearts and souls.
- **Communicate in person.** Even if your employees read every single one of your emails and memos, an unlikely possibility, they're still only encountering words on paper or on a computer screen. When it comes to emotional impact, nothing comes close to the leader walking the halls, talking face-to-face with staff and customers, teleconferencing with branch offices. Your presence alone carries great weight.

Finally, maintain a regular schedule. Do not think one presentation will do all that you need it to do. The CEO should have a plan that guarantees consistent communications (quarterly, monthly and, when necessary, weekly) that keep the company's story fresh, pertinent and vivid, so that the audience always feel part of the plan.

A systematic approach offers the best method of persuasion. Influencing others is an ongoing process. It means testing the message, altering it based on the feedback you get and then trying again.

Out of this admittedly time-consuming effort comes credibility that simply cannot be acquired any other way.

Talking to (and with) Employees

How can a CEO expect employees to make meaningful contributions to the organisation if they lack accurate information about business plans, goals and strategies? Without information, they can play a part in long-range planning or in efforts to improve products and services. They cannot offer input on enhancing work processes. Most important, they cannot change the way they conduct business in response to changing marketplace conditions and factors that could prove crucial in a company's economic survival.

For this reason, a company should strive to eliminate as much unnecessary bureaucracy as possible and anything that might stifle messages coming through upward communication.

Do employees in your company find numerous check-points they have to fight through to get a message to you? Are you aware there might be uncooperative and insensitive layers of corporate bureaucracy getting in the way? If so, it's hardly surprising when employees throw in the towel and senior management has little knowledge or understanding of what's happening at ground level.

Effective communication builds morale and boosts productivity. This should not be confused with "pep talks," which are often just puffery and never a factor in genuine morale building.

Sharing information results in pride of ownership and the desire to maintain quality products/services. The opposite -- an information-stifled environment with low employee morale -- leaves people with no emotional investment in their workplace and only an urge to get out.

When preparing to communicate with employees, the best approach is to reduce the amount of information based on what you think is important, and to emphasize the information *they* think is important. What information has the greatest impact on them and how should you present it? Ask yourself, 'If I were the other person, how would I prefer to hear what you have to say?'

Of course, having to divulge bad news is never easy. But there are ways to do it that convey sympathy, respect and understanding:

- **Be real.** Let people know you have to make some very difficult decisions and that the survival of the company is at stake. Be real and you'll get the benefit of the doubt.
- **Do not get fancy.** It's a mistake to dress up bad news in euphemisms or elaborate language. Frame the message with optimism but always speak the truth. Make it clear and comprehensible to your audience.
- **Do it yourself.** A leader doesn't hide behind e-mails. This is a function of treating people with respect. If there's bad news, employees deserve to hear it from the leader.

One difficult area of employee communications is performance feedback. Have helpful suggestions on getting this message across, particularly when critical comments are necessary.

If you are elevating someone and you have to be tough, it's a good idea to start by recounting their virtues and achievements. Examples include: "You've been one of our best and most reliable workers, but lately you seem unhappy and unmotivated" or "A short time ago you were a model of motivation, your sales figures improved almost every month, but now everyone's overtaking you -- What's gone wrong?" If you still want them to continue working for you, then at the very end of the process you *must* leave them feeling as though they're getting real support and leave them with their dignity intact."

Keep the conversation focused on the performance element you're expecting. Then you can say, 'I have some ideas, but I want to know if you agree with me.' Talk about the behaviour, but do not make it personal."

Here are other tips for giving performance feedback:

- **Be clear and focused.** Offer clear, honest and supportive feedback. Choose a place and time when both you and the person you're addressing can focus on the message, and when there's adequate time to outline a process of clarification and coaching.
- **Be respectful and precise.** Feedback can be provided in a respectful and concerned manner. There's no need for adversarial language in a situation where both parties are seeking an improvement in actions and behaviour.
- **Illustrate effects.** It's likely the person under review doesn't understand the effects of his or her actions. If these effects are quantifiable (lost sales, missed appointments, etc.), provide enough detail so the individual can see why a change is necessary.

Positive feedback is a must. Many studies show that large numbers of employees frequently get the negatives, but rarely receive positive feedback. A few good words now and then, even more than a pay raise, can inspire people to greater heights of achievement.

Overcoming Communication Barriers

In the cacophony of messages that assault us all in our day-to-day lives, it's easy to forget that communication is a two-way street. There's talking and there's listening. Without both elements, you cannot have an effective exchange of ideas and information.

A common mistake is not creating the right environment for listening. We send the wrong message by reading a memo while others are talking, interrupting, answering phone calls in the middle of a conversation and so on.

Instead, leaders need to manage by "walking around, sticking your head in peoples' offices, ask them what's happening with their work, what's exciting, what's challenging." The simple act of sitting down in *their* space, not yours, shows that you care about them as individuals.

Leaders need to have "active listening", an exercise aimed at opening the mind to truly hear what the other person is saying. One method of doing this involves writing down what you hear and thinking about it before framing a response. Benefits of active listening include:

- Deeper comprehension of other perspectives, which in turn broadens the listener's grasp of the situation;
- Enhanced relationships with staff, business partners, customers, etc., all of which builds a stronger sense of teamwork
- Greater competence as a leader

Many of us really are listening, but do not *look* as though we are. There are 'good listening' techniques that can be learned. For example, you have to be willing to let the other person take centre stage. Rather than waiting out their comments and thinking about what you'll say next, clear all distractions from your mind and focus on what they're saying and the way they're saying it. Often, you will get insights into what's really going on with them.

The next step is to take on board successful solutions to help you below;

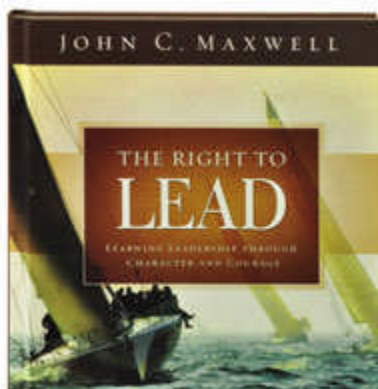
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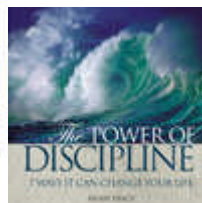


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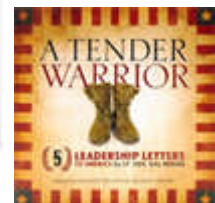
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About the Author Colin Thompson

Colin is a former successful Managing Director of Transactional/Print Manufacturing Plants, Print Management/Workflow Solutions companies and other organisations, former Group Chairman of the Academy for Chief Executives and Non-Executive Director, helping companies raise their **`bottom-line`** and **`increase cash flow`**. Plus, helping individuals to be successful in business and life in general. Author of several publications, research reports, guides, business and educational models on CD-ROM/Software/PDF and over 400 articles published on business and educational subjects worldwide. Plus, International Speaker and Visiting University Professor.

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