

Four Communications Mistakes New Managers Make

1. Writing memos (or e-mails) when everyone else in the organization just picks up the phone. Or, doing something else organizationally distracting. In one dysfunctional technology firm observed, much of the senior leadership spent a vast amount of time on Internet Messenger with one another. Not just a little bit of IM, but lots of it. Huge amounts. People practically stopped going into their colleagues' offices. Live conversations and phone calls were nearly replaced by the ping of the IM. With a change of leadership, the IM traffic (fortunately) diminished, and the place began making its way back to more face-to-face discussion. Figure out what gets written, and what gets spoken.

2. Being overly restrictive (or expansive) on the distribution list of who gets your messages or participates in your meetings. Not inviting the right people will cause some hurt feelings. Invite too many and you not only end up with too large a crowd to get anything done, but you've wasted a lot of people's time.)

3. Changing trusted communications channels. One CEO we know faithfully does a Saturday morning "radio broadcast" via voice-mail to his 300 top managers worldwide, and gets both voice-mail and e-mail responses. People have become very accustomed to it since he initiated it some four years ago. Is this approach (or something similar) right for you in your new role? [Just don't send uninvited text messages to personal cell phones, as you may cause people to incur extra charges on their bills.]

4. Communicating with the wrong level of frequency or tone. It's really important for you to figure out how you'll hit the right level of touch, in both tone and frequency. As you might suspect, over-communication is rarely the problem that needs correction.

The list could go on and on, and would include the timing and frequency of staff meetings or call-ins, organization-wide meetings or communiqués, informal lunches for data gathering, etc

The bottom line, as you make your way in, is clear. Find the right rhythms and systems that will work FOR you, retaining those methods that are culturally important to the organization, and introducing or discarding others so as to increase the level of trust inside.

For more information, visit: <http://www.thetrustedleader.com/newsletter/issue22-feb-05.html>.

Closely Manage the Overall Customer Experience

Many of today's most successful leaders routinely call their own support centers, pretending to be their average customer (both internal, such as a worker from another department, and external). This is brilliant because leaders should know exactly what kind of service their front-line people are delivering. They know that if their workers aren't helping their clients [customers] properly, some other organization will. This is the principle mystery shopping is built upon. Smart organizations want to know how their customers are being treated.

Do your workers greet people with a smile (smiles can be conveyed over the phone)? ask if they need assistance? express gratitude for the other person's business? Are people waiting too long for your staff to acknowledge and help them? Are they receiving the experience that you expect?

It is best not to assume anything when it comes to serving your customers. Verify what you expect as a leader. Every single time a customer walks through your door, it's "time to shine." Remember that customer experience counts for everything!

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Avoidance of Sensitive Topics at Work



If you want to set a tone of appreciation for diversity, don't discuss it. I kid! What I mean is, exercise prudent judgment about workplace conversation. With few exceptions, people should refrain from discussing sex, religion, politics, and other sensitive topics in the work environment. At a minimum, such a talker may be seen as lacking in professionalism, and more likely, the instigator of hostility and division in the workplace.

As a Supervisor, you are responsible to react immediately when you see signs of intolerance or abuse. These are typically obvious and easily spotted. What can be more difficult is setting limits about topics not okay for discussion. It is definitely a gray area. Positive workplace relationships are critical (to productivity, retention), and meaningful conversation builds relationships. However, when does casual colleague chatter become dicey, and what will you do about it?

The first step to consider is setting reasonable limits and consistently honoring them. This means that if you become concerned about certain discussions, don't wait to act! Remind people that [the topic] is not a good idea to discuss in the workplace. Tell them that discussion of controversial subjects can deteriorate workplace relationships and cause friction among friends. Do not tolerate any instances of discrimination, teasing, or other attacks on people based on their beliefs. Besides communicating directly about appropriate behavior, model the treatment of others that you wish to see. Don't say one thing to your employees, and then gossip about a colleague.

Most employers stop short of banning specific articles of clothing or discussion of particular topics. However, you should have formal policies and a complaint system related to workplace harassment, and they should be prominently displayed in the department. Use discussion of those policies as a launching pad to review examples of inappropriate discussion, provocative subjects, and the like. If the problem is limited to one person or a small group, arrange for training in respectful workplace behavior. Demonstrate tolerance for others' belief systems with your own behavior. At selective, appropriate times, show appreciation for your organizations' diverse talents. But keep the primary focus on the team's similarities and common goals. People who focus on their common interests and abilities tend to minimize the significance of their differences.

We in America cherish our freedom of expression. Diversity has been a source of workplace strength as far back as we go. However, a diverse workforce loses its strength when members become overly focused on perceived differences rather than on working toward a common goal. Supervisors are in the position to enforce clear limits and model appropriate behavior.

Deer Oaks EAP Services, your Employee Assistance Program, is always available for management consultations and training on a variety of topics including effective leadership, communication, and dealing with difficult people. If you are having issues with your employees, or if you are interested in scheduling a seminar for you and your employees, please contact us at eap@deeroaks.com or at 1-866-327-2400. You can also download supervisor training presentations at www.deeroaks.com.

