



THE OFFICE

on Lagos Talks 91.3 FM

EPISODE 67 - EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKPLACE

Overview

Communication is the process of exchanging ideas, thoughts, opinions, and knowledge by speaking, writing or using other mediums. It is important to understand why the message is being sent, what the purpose of the message is and what one is supposed to do with the message. So, when the message is fully understood, it can be said that the communication has been effective.

There are some communications that are for information only. You are being told because you need to know but you are not expected to act on it. And there are others in the workplace where either approval is required or some feedback or actions are required. So, it is not all communication that is required to have a corresponding action. The important thing is that the purpose to which the communication was sent is understood by the recipient. A communication can also be said to have been effective when there is a follow-up action expected from that communication but it ends at whether the recipient understood the purpose of the communication or not.

Why is good workplace communication important?

Good communication in the workplace ensures that the employees have the information they need to perform work. It is important to stretch this because in many organisations, whether it is the leadership, line managers or heads of departments, they do not necessarily give all the information that an employee requires to perform well on the job. Effective communication builds a positive work environment, maintains strong working relationships at all levels of an organisation and eliminates inefficiency. It also boosts employee morale, engagement, productivity and satisfaction.



Are there some communications that are difficult? Absolutely yes! But employees coming across difficult communication should not shatter or destroy the strong relationships that have already been built. The success, or otherwise, of every change or transformation initiative is determined by the clarity of communication.

Tips for improving and ensuring effective communication in the workplace

1. Understand how personality types affect communication
2. Use personality assessment tools such as DISC to categorise people into four distinct boxes. DISC establishes people's behavioural patterns and how behavioural patterns affect communication or how people want to receive communication or even give communication. For many people, they flow in between all of the boxes but no one individual is in a particular box. However, there are people who have the dominant and traits of a particular box. The four DISC factors are Dominance, Influencing, Steadiness and Compliance. The people who are in the Compliance and Steadiness (C and S) are those who are referred to as people who are task-focused. They are more intense in getting things done. For instance, when communicating with such people, do not go about asking about their families and children because they get irritated and wonder why the questions. It is important to understand that. To be able to communicate effectively with people, you need to understand what their traits are or where they are on the DISC diagram. For the people who are the D and I which is Dominant and Influencing, such people are usually very direct. They like a little bit of communication and love to interact with people and want to be liked. So, when communicating with such people, you need to have a relationship in mind. However, those who are Dominant D will like you to communicate with them directly. Just go straight to the point.
3. Acknowledge age and cultural differences in communication: How an Ibo person will communicate with someone older who is Ibo is completely different from how a Yoruba person will communicate with someone older who is Yoruba. The cultural contexts need to be considered in communication. The truth is that a lot of people have a strong foundational tilt in a culture that shapes the way they behave and the way they approach life.

Communication and Grapevines: The Role of Leadership and HR

Eliminating grapevine conversation in the organisation is a leadership responsibility. Grapevine thrives when there is insufficient communication, when there is no clarity and when there is no role modelling; when leaders are behaving contrary to what they are saying and what their set expectations are. How to deal with grapevine not just from HR perspective but from the leadership perspective are as follows:



1. **Keep your employees informed.** One of the worst things that can be done is not to say anything and allow employees to make up their own points. People can think of all sorts of theories and conspiracies and before you know it, everything has been blown out of proportion. It is important to keep them informed.
2. **Choose the right communication channel to build trust.** You can choose to talk to them in a town hall, email or WhatsApp group. Identify the best way employees believe that if they get the information from leadership through this medium, they trust they meant well for them. Therefore, choose the right way to build trust because trust is the foundation of communication and without trust, communication will not be effective.
3. **Eliminate information overload in the workplace.** While communicating to the employees, do not over-communicate. There are some things that do not need to be said. Weigh the information before communicating.
4. **Engage the employees in a two-way conversation as the need arises.** As a Line Manager or a leader or even as an employee, engage, engage and engage. Conversations or communication should not just be from top-bottom, it should also be from bottom-top. Communication should flow freely sideways.

As an organisation or as a Human Resource Practitioner, support your internal influencers. There are people in the organisation that when they speak or share their opinion, people naturally gravitate towards them. Trust those people and ensure they are brought on board with the business strategy because they will in turn become evangelists to the rest of the people.

For an individual to improve his or her communication skills, the person must learn and also cultivate the habit of reading. A lot of people do not read; therefore, they do not know how to communicate. Communication is not just about speaking; it is also about writing; and to learn how to write or even speak is by reading.

Emotional intelligence and communication

There are five domains of emotional intelligence which includes:

1. Self-Awareness
2. Self-regulation
3. Social Awareness
4. Relationship Management
5. Internal or Intrinsic motivation

Each of the domains can help a leader fix any crisis with lower levels of threats, fewer unintended issues or consequences and better communication. So, emotional intelligence is directly tied to



communication. Emotional intelligence is tied to communication because it simply means being able to build a relationship, reduce team stress, diffuse conflict, and improve job satisfaction simply because they are self-aware, able to self-regulate themselves, do not say whatever comes to their mind, have a good understanding of the environment around them. They are able to take into context, cultural issues, age issues, personal issues, and behavioural issues and they also learn how to manage relationships.

Factors in emotional intelligence that speak directly to communication

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-control
3. Adaptability: Being able to adapt or conform to a certain situation so you can bring out the very best communication.
4. Achievement
5. Orientation
6. Quality outlook
7. Empathy: This is very key. Understanding and feeling where people are coming from in terms of their past experiences is important in communication.
8. Organisational awareness: For communication to be effective, you need to understand the organisation that you work for which is why communication for one organisation is strictly different from another. It is always contextual and situational.
9. Influence: How much influence do you have? How are you able to talk in a line of conversation? Also, you should be able to coach and mentor people, manage conflict, be able to work in a team and be an inspirational leader. These are the precepts and competencies of emotional intelligence that speak to your ability to communicate effectively.

Conclusion

To be an effective communicator, you need to understand what communication is; what medium can be used to communicate and who your audience is. Every organisation that does not have a Corporate Communication Department should have one in place and also train leaders to be able to communicate.