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WHO KILLED COMMUNICATION? 10 WAYS TO SHED MISCOMMUNICATION AND STAY ALIVE AMIDST UNCERTAIN TIMES!

by Kathy B. Dempsey



EVERYDAY, COMMUNICATION

IS KILLED. And when this happens, there is always a price to pay; lost revenue, decreased productivity, low moral or a fleeting of top talent. In these uncertain and turbulent times, no one can afford the cost of miscommunication. The crime is often committed innocently, but the costs can be deadly.

Recently, a manufacturing company took a large supply order from a customer. The dispatcher shipped the order out the next day to Portland. A week later the customer called to inquire why the delivery had never arrived as promised. Upon investigation, the order was shipped out and did arrive in Portland, Maine. Unfortunately, the customer was located in Portland, Oregon, over 3,000 miles away. The miscommunication cost the company over \$100,000.

After years of working with Fortune 500 companies, non-profits and healthcare organizations, here's what I've found to be the top 10 communication killers.

1. Not focusing on the outcomes. Most people start communicating and never stop and ask what outcomes they want. What do you want people to know, feel and do different as a result of the communication? Diving deeper into how you want people to feel and do can dramatically change the outcomes and how you communicate.

2. Not listening. Listening is the least taught skill growing up in school, yet it is the number one most important skill after you graduate. Most people do not practice active listening and aren't paying attention when someone is talking. They are busy thinking about their response. Understand that people want to feel heard more than they care about whether you agree with them. Acknowledge changes that may be difficult or inconvenient. Acknowledge the fears and emotions that may be going on and express that change may be difficult or inconvenient. If you see things from a different perspective, discuss how disagreements will be handled.

3. Not addressing WIIFM. What's in it for me? Whether you verbalize it or not, every person is asking this question at some level. To communicate most effectively and get the results you desire, take a moment to look at the situation from the other person's perspective.

4. Not getting feedback. Just assuming you understand what is being said can be dangerous. Always summarize the conversation and ask for clarification. What did you hear me say?

5. Not agreeing on next steps. Who is doing what when? Don't forget to obtain consensus with next steps and a time line. Be open to possibilities and give people as many choices as possible. Especially when people are communicating about something they might not want to do, choices give people a sense of empowerment. Growing up, my mother knew this well. "Kathy, do you want to take out the trash or do the dishes?"

6. Not following through or holding people accountable. Are you following through with what you committed to do? Are you holding other people accountable for what they have agreed to do?

7. Not using the most effective communication tool. Many people default to one or two communication tools and over use them for most of their communication whether the tool works best or not. (i.e. face to face, phone, group, email.) All of the tools have advantages and disadvantages.

Sometimes you need to use multiple tools. For example, after face to face meeting, which lacks documentation, follow up with an email summarizing what you understood and the agreement on the next steps.

8. Not choosing the right time. You can have the right message but if it's delivered at the wrong time, it can lead to disastrous results! Remember, timing is everything!

9. Being judgmental. Jumping to conclusions is very easy to do, especially when people have their own biased mental models of how things should be. Respond, don't react. A few words to avoid are, "You always. . . , You never. . ." These words elicit defensiveness in others. Using words and phrases like "Help me understand. . . , I am confused. . . , When I see. . . , I feel. . . , or I've noticed. . . ," all help create a climate of trust and openness.

10. Not acknowledging and rewarding good communication. Catch people doing things right! Celebrate communication success!

Here is your investigative assignment to keep communication alive!

Share the above list with your team. Discuss with them which ones they feel are the biggest opportunities for growth. Star the top three that are most relevant to you. If you recognize some of these communication killers within your organization, this may be a clue that taking a different action can help prevent further communication issues.

In the end, with your help, the mystery can be solved. Who Killed Communication? "Miss Communication" always kills communication! ■

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