

## Supervisors As Communicators Outline

- A. Every study known finds employees – at all levels of the organization – prefer to get needed job information from their immediate teamleaders.

*(We use the term ‘teamleader’ here to describe anyone who “manages” others or coordinates a group)*

- B. In the contemporary lean, flattened organization, any teamleading (managerial or supervisory) position now emphasizes 3 responsibilities.

1. **Being a 3-way communication channel – up, down & lateral**
2. **Coaching, training, championing, cheerleading**
3. **Managing (not resolving) conflict**, so the clash of ideas is encouraged to stimulate scrutiny but personal clashes are discouraged

- C. The very idea of openness & empowerment urges adoption of this system, with its principles of open communications & participation.

- ◆ Many organizations are dropping or totally revising traditional internal communication modes – e.g. employee newsletters – to make it happen.

- D. But supervisors often resist or don’t really know how to move into this new role. What works is a method that combines:

1. A **Triggering Event**, to get everyone’s urgent attention
2. Some **Substitutes for Willpower** that assure the meetings take place.

Here are 2 methods for instituting the behavior throughout an organization.

## OPTION I. HOLD AN ORGANIZATION-WIDE SERIES OF CASCADING MEETINGS

- A. Use some **critical topic that is important & timely & requires that every employee understand the subject** – & how it impacts their work group & them personally. If the topic is linked to some current important event in the organization or its environment, it will be more compelling. This is the “**triggering event**”.
- B. Use this to have each supervisor **hold pilot meetings** in his/her work group to discuss the issue. This gives them a chance to start being 3-way communications channels in their units.
- C. To prepare supervisors for the pilot meetings, senior managers **conduct training courses** at which they present – and supervisors can discuss, debate, question – the topic in detail, plus any related issues.
- D. In the training course, **cover basic skill info** on conducting meetings, being a 3-way communication channel, the new role of supervisors, etc.
- E. **Set deadlines** for completing the sessions; involve selected supervisors in analyzing effectiveness, opportunities for improvement in the new communication system; have definite plans for a second series of meetings to present a draft of the new system to all employees. This should start to **obtain supervisor buy-in** – especially since their role as the key communicators will be part of the new system.

## OPTION II. HAVE TEAMLEADERS FACILITATE RESEARCH TO DESIGN A NEW EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

- ◆ Research is essential in reengineering internal communications, in order to identify the ways different units or folks **want** to receive information.
- ◆ Surveying to get this data allows employees a chance to **shape the decision**.
- ◆ Therefore, the research ought to use a 100% sample of employees – partly as a means of **informing them** of the vital role of internal communications & **their responsibility** for it.
- ◆ This creates the opportunity for supervisors to facilitate the gathering of the data by conducting meetings for the completion of survey questionnaires by members of their work groups.

### HOW TO GO ABOUT IT:

- A. Have **teamleaders conduct group sessions** with their units to fill out the questionnaires. This means they have to explain the purpose & importance of the research, and how the findings will help make communications easier & better.
- B. Follow steps similar to B, C, & D in Option I above.

Without being aware of it or making it a big hassle, supervisors are **doing the communications job** when these projects are instituted.

## OPTION III: ADD AN EVALUATION COMPONENT TO ASSURE SUCCESS

To further make either method self-reinforcing – a “**Substitutes for Willpower**” – add **2 evaluation documents** to the process:

1. **Filled out by supervisors**, telling how they feel the sessions went, what questions were asked most, whether they'd like help getting better at being a key communicator, etc.
2. **Filled out by attendees**, not to rate how well their supervisors performed (too early, could chill the process), but to determine what information they took away.

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“**FOOT IN THE DOOR**” describes these strategies – the 2<sup>nd</sup> of 5 steps in motivating behavior change in organizations:

1. **Positive reinforcement** builds self-confidence,
2. **Foot in the Door** gets them practicing the behavior,
3. **Motivation techniques retain the behavior**
4. **Role models** reinforce & harden the behavior,
5. **Culture change** brings social acceptance.

Research is clear: teamleaders – not middle managers and definitely not executives – are not only the most effective **communicators**, but provide the only **means** to establish 2-way communications.