

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 team leaders.

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

- B. In the contemporary lean, flattened organization, any team leading (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 team leader **hold pilot meetings through appropriate channels, face-to-face, online, site visits** in his/her work group to discuss. This gives them a chance to start being 3-way communications channels in their units.
- C. To prepare team leaders for the pilot meetings, senior managers **conduct training courses** at which they present – and team leaders 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 team leader, etc.
- E. **Set deadlines** for completing the sessions; involve selected team leaders 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 team lead 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 team leads 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 **team leaders 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, team leads 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 team leads**, 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.

In addition, make sure "communication responsibilities" are part of every team lead job description and evaluation.

“**FOOT IN THE DOOR**” describes these strategies – the 2nd 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 realistic **means** to establish trusted 2-way communications.