

Five Tips To Communicate Better As A Leader



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Wouldn't it be easy if you could just push a button and say the right thing every time? I would like such a button- one that ensures, without fail, that I find the perfect tone for each situation and individual. This needs to be a filter of sorts that could help me find the best mix of words to [communicate the message](#) that my brain wants me to say, but in a way that takes into account the sensitivities of individual personalities and the general complexities of human interaction.

But alas, we know that no such button will ever hit the market. And so this mother of all skills, communication, is something that all of us –whether acting in the capacity of boss, employee, colleague, spouse, sibling, parent, customer, team member, etc.– must work on pretty much every day of our lives.

In this article, I focus on the communication challenges you leaders out there face. How do good leaders do it? Is there a single way? Well, the answer is both yes and no. In the words of motivational speaker and author Tony Robbins, “To effectively communicate, we must realize that we are all different in the way we perceive the world and use this understanding as a guide to our communication with others.”

So that is the “no” part to the answer for “Is there a single way to communicate?” But the “yes” part comes from reminding yourself that there are a few basic rules you can live by in terms of how you interact with others, and if you keep these absolute essentials in mind, things will go a lot easier for you– and be a lot easier on those employees of yours who are, in many respects, very much at your mercy.

Let's now take a look at a list of five essential [leadership communication](#) skills -or rules, or logic, or whatever we wish to call these– to live by. Type them up, print them out, and hang them on your wall. Just make sure to put them into practice every chance you get.

1. Do not criticize

Let's be clear– it's ok to be critical as a boss, and your feedback and analysis of the end result are both required and expected. But what those looking to become effective leaders must know is that word choice here is everything. You must be extremely careful not to criticize or

put a negative spin on things, and though you may think this is rather easy to achieve, it is at times a lot trickier than it appears.

Here's an example that highlights the "delicacy" of the challenge: let's say you are speaking with your [sales team](#), rounding up the end-of-quarter results, and you put forward something along the lines of: "Great overall numbers as always, guys, but we have come up short in Region X."

Now this may not sound critical to you at all, but the word "but" is actually a negative word in this context. Essentially, what is being said is "You did really well here, here and here, BUT you FAILED here."

Shift the words just a little bit, and take a better approach. Something like: "We had some fantastic numbers here, here and here. Terrific work, team. Now why don't we sit together and brainstorm to see how we can get those numbers for Region X looking just as good? We will crack this."

You are still communicating what you want to say, but the inference here is different. While you once again start off by stating the positive, this time you do not add that "failure message" at the end. Rather, it is just a clear challenge to be met (Region X), and you are framing it in a somewhat positive light by suggesting that you are going to lift Region X up to that level, instead of making it sound like a thorn in the side of the overall success.

Perhaps you are thinking here that, no, people are not that sensitive. But yes they are –we all are– and as the boss in particular, your words have a tremendous significance. You should therefore remind yourself of the great responsibility you have to not negatively affect the [wellbeing of your team](#) through potentially harmful phrasing that could come across as criticism.

2. Take the time to understand the situation before commenting

There's an old saying that we'd all do well to keep close to heart in so many situations in our lives: "Never judge a man until you've walked a mile in his moccasins."

In terms of leadership, the message is clear: if you are going to comment on a situation, at least have the decency to understand the ins and outs of it first. After all, as anyone who has either managed or been managed knows, it's very easy to shout from the sidelines when things go wrong, but it's a whole different ball game when you're out on the field.

Demonstrating your understanding of any given situation to your team starts with, well, properly informing yourself. Let's take the example of the sales meeting again from the above point. Can you really comment on low sales in one particular region based purely on the numbers you see in front of you? You cannot. There could be any number of reasons why one region's sales are lagging, such as a cultural or political situation that is making trade difficult, for example. So before you decide how you are going to approach things, do your homework.

It's one of the most important lessons when it comes to [properly communicating](#): Before you even have a right to involve yourself in a situation, you first need to know the score. Otherwise, not only do you risk offending others through assumptions, you also stand a good chance of looking like a complete incompetent. It puts you at big risk of losing credibility with your team.

3. Speak in a way that gets others to want to come up with the ideas for building

A big part of leadership is, of course, getting others to perform the tasks you give them to the best of their ability. Much of this is done through leading by example. Demonstrate a good [work ethic](#) and a commitment to high quality, and your team will know that's the standard and up their game accordingly.

But if you have serious ambitions for growth, you need your team to not just deliver the work you give them to the standard you set, but to also take the initiative to come up with their own ideas and their own way of implementing things. In other words, you don't just want doers; you want thinkers and builders.

So how do you achieve this? It is a matter of knowing when to actually stop communicating—to stop talking, and pull back. As a leader, it is your job to [shape the vision](#) and give clear direction, but to also know when to step out and let the team run with things. Too early and it could lead to cracks in the execution; too late and it could mean you've constrained your people by not giving them enough flexibility.

To put it another way, with the latter, you have not given the chance for the “shiners” to shine, and that is what you need to do if you want others to start building for you. Your goal is to pass the “ideas and building” baton on to the stronger members of your team. How you communicate (or how you “stop communicating”) is the key here.

4. Avoid arguments

Ever worked under an argumentative boss? If yes, are you still working for them now? Didn't think so. Even when you are at the top of the tree, arguing doesn't get you very far. While your staff may concede and capitulate, at the very least, you know they are not behind your idea, and at worst, you may have damaged their morale and engagement levels and undermined your authority.

Great leaders know that while everyone doesn't have to agree, they won't get much done by arguing, and opinions can be changed without forcing your own on someone else. How can this be done? As already alluded to in the above few points, the art of [good communication](#) is a mix of strategy and word choice. When it comes to differing opinions, then, the first step in getting someone to see your point of view is to make it clear that you understand theirs.

Your attempt must be a sincere one. You'll want to have a very open discussion about how the other parties' plans may or may not work if you were to implement them. When doing this, be sure not to highlight the “negative points of their way of thinking” or “why their

ideas can't possibly work". Rather, look for opportunities to give praise to aspects that you feel are in fact applicable.

Once you have thoroughly talked through their side of things, you are then much better placed to offer your own thoughts, gently comparing your plan of action with theirs. Wrap up by acknowledging that both have their merits, then see if you can in fact apply some of their ideas to your preferred plan before summarizing your final decision and making clear how things will be carried out.

Now, such an approach in no way guarantees that there will be no hard feelings, but it will certainly not cause the harm that comes with telling people it's your way or the highway. And that's because what you have done with the above approach is displayed an empathy towards the other party, which, according to Kevin Du, author of *Split-Second Persuasion: The Ancient Art & New Science of Changing Minds*, is key to properly managing differences. Quite simply, Dutton says that empathizing with someone else's point of view is one of the most effective ways to change their mind.

5. Praise carefully

I will wrap up this article with an entry that you may think is somewhat out of place. I mean, surely, praise can only ever be a good thing, right? I'm afraid not. While praise is an incredibly powerful tool in the leader's arsenal, it only works when it is used "responsibly" (read strategically).

[Bosses](#) who tend to heap praise on their employees do so because they want to motivate them. But too much praise can have the opposite effect. While all great leaders should acknowledge a job well done each and every time to ensure credit is given where credit is due, genuine praise is something else, and should be saved for the truly exceptional results.

And you can probably see where I am going with this and why: essentially, applauding the basics and heaping adulation on your team simply for doing their jobs is likely to lead to a [workforce that does not strive for excellence](#). If getting the basics done is considered an accomplishment, then the desire to go above and beyond will diminish and eventually become non-existent.

When a culture like this starts to grow, you can be sure your business won't.

So, sure, share success stories, offer incentives, show your excitement when a team member does something truly amazing. But just be sure to set a high bar for what will lead to such praise. Because believe me, those big accomplishments will taste a whole lot sweeter for everyone when true praise is not doled out at the drop of a hat.