LEAD

Notes from LEAD Editor

*Effective communication is at the core of a successful organization. It is important that leaders have diverse communication styles that they can use with the different personalities they encounter. In part, leaders must be effective listeners and create a question-friendly work environment. This month in **LEAD** you will find a number of articles that provide tips and guidelines for effective leadership in today's workplace. We encourage you to use and share the ideas you find in **LEAD**.*

L E A D article

Are Employees Willing to Ask Questions?

Does your organization have a question-friendly culture? As a leader, do you encourage employees to come to you with their questions? Creating a question-friendly workplace is important to success, so remember the following tips:

Let employees know that questions are welcome

This may sound simplistic, but saying "If you have any questions, I sincerely want to know" will go a long way toward making workers feel comfortable approaching you.

Always respect the question

People tend to clam up if they're made to feel their question is "silly." Acknowledge the validity of the person's question by saying something like "I appreciate your question, let's explore that for a moment."

Give the asker your full attention

Don't address someone's question while you're answering your e-mail or reading a report. And don't take a phone call in the middle of the conversation. Otherwise, the person will think you don't care or aren't listening.

Practice active listening

If someone comes to you asking a question, repeat back to them what you think was said. This technique helps clarify the question.

Clarify that you can't solve every problem

It's not your responsibility to do all the work yourself. It is your responsibility to engage employees or team members in a problem-solving dialogue. When people are aware of your boundaries, they will make more of an effort to help come up with their own solutions.

-Adapted from *Positive Leadership*, (800) 878-5331, www.ragan.com

COMMUNICATION: THE KEY TO ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS

No matter what industry you're in, these days you're more and more likely to be working with employees from all different walks of life. Organizational success relies on your ability to communicate with everyone. Remember these tips to help improve your communication with all employees:

Listen to yourself

Watch out for slang words or idioms that people from other cultures may not catch on to right away.

Speak slowly and clearly

Slow down a little when you speak, and make an extra effort to pronounce words properly.

Repeat your words exactly

When a person asks you to repeat yourself, use the same words. If you paraphrase your statement or question you might confuse the employee.

Encourage questions

Some employees may be shy about showing confusion. Encourage them to ask for help whenever they need it, and treat them with respect when they do.

Avoid yes or no questions

Open-ended questions allow the listener to show that he or she really understands what you've said. Otherwise, the employee may say "Yes" just to end the conversation.

Summarize your important points

At the end of your talk, go over what you've just said in case the employee missed or misunderstood something.

-Adapted from *Positive Leadership*, (800) 878-5331, www.ragan.com

FEEDBACK – Not Silence – is Golden

Some managers follow the philosophy that if you don't hear from employees, they are doing okay. They believe that most workers are self-sufficient and want to be left alone, just as these managers may prefer. But most experts tell a different story: You're better off offering regular feedback. Offer workers all the information they might be interested in. In fact, ask them what they want to know: company information, department objectives, training opportunities, etc. If they hear from you only when they're wrong, will they ever want to hear from you?

-Adapted from *The Positive Power of Praising People*, by Jerry Twentier, Thomas Nelson Publishers

Ask Questions to Ensure You're in Sync with New Employees

Asking the following questions will help build better working relationship with new employees while helping them succeed in their new positions:

- Is it clear what's expected of you in this position?
- Do you believe these expectations are achievable in this environment?
- If not, what needs to change (deadlines, equipment, resources, etc.) in order to meet these expectations?
- How do you like to be recognized when you successfully achieve results?
- What would you expect to happen if you were unable to achieve the desired results?
- What would it take for you to derive satisfaction in this job?
- What would undermine your ability to find satisfaction?
- Can you think of anything significant that's lacking in this position?
- Where do you expect this position to lead?

Use these questions to initiate dialogue with prospective and new employees, encouraging them to be honest about their expectations and concerns.

-Adapted from *The Motivational Manager*, (800) 878-5331, www.ragan.com

LISTENING

BENEATH THE SURFACE

Hearing requires nothing more than functioning ears. However, listening requires both attentiveness and comprehension, and "deep listening" requires a powerful interaction that blocks out all distractions and creates mutual understanding between both participants. Deep listening makes speakers know that you are following their words. To master this skill, start by practicing these techniques:

FREE YOUR MIND. What's the most common excuse for misunderstandings and communication faux pas? "I just have too much on my mind." It's true that we live busy lives and may sometimes feel a bit overwhelmed, but we still choose what to prioritize. And if we want to improve our relationships with coworkers, we should find ways to eliminate the clutter in our brains at least long enough to give full attention when others are speaking.

NARROW YOUR FOCUS. Make a mental commitment to block out extraneous chatter or activity while you're in conversation. Make regular eye contact. Don't answer the telephone unless you've said in advance that you're expecting a call you must take. Don't do all, or even most, of the talking. Ask questions or take notes to show you're following the speaker's thoughts. Concentrate on the speaker's body language to gain a better understanding of the message – and make sure your body language conveys attentiveness and interest.

KNOW YOUR PURPOSE. Why are you having this conversation? Is it obligatory? Or do you truly have an interest in what this individual is saying? For deep listening to occur, you must be genuinely interested in what the speaker is saying and welcoming their individual perspective. If you're not, it will be difficult to listen deeply – no matter how hard you try.

-Adapted from *The Motivational Manager*, (800) 878-5331, www.ragan.com

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