

Communicate

In the definition below, communication is defined as both imparting and exchanging information. Too often, managers forget that effective communication requires listening as much as it does speaking. A strong communicator understands that listening to employees – their concerns, their ideas, their suggestions – is as important as imparting information to them.

Definition of communication

The act or process of using words, sounds, signs, or behaviours to express or exchange information or to express your ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc., to someone else.

Guiding principles

Follow these principles for effective communications.

- Know your audience. This is true whether you are delivering a speech to crowd of 200 strangers or writing an email to your 10 direct reports. Knowing who will be receiving your communication helps you tailor messages to meet their needs and expectations, deliver the right amount of detail and use the right tone.
 - For instance, you may use more informal language in your communication to your team than to your manager and his or her manager.
- Similar to other business functions, any communication should have a clear objective or intent. Ask yourself before sending an email, delivering a presentation or holding a meeting, what it is that you want the communication to achieve.
 - Whether you want to inform your team about a process change, create awareness about a new requirement or update them on the status of a project, make sure you can articulate what you want to accomplish before you begin.
- Clarifying the objective of a communication is important because it will help you determine the right medium for the message you are delivering. The more a message will have a direct impact on an individual, the more personal the communication should be.
 - For example, announcing to employees the appointment of a new CEO by email or through an Intranet post is an effective way to relay important information to a large audience at the same time.
 - On the other hand, email is not an effective way to relay a critical process change to a group that will be directly affected. A face-to-face meeting with time for employees to ask questions and for you to hear and address their concerns is a far better way to get them on board with the changes.
- Use an appropriate combination of formal and informal communication. Sometimes, the chance conversation in a lunch room is more effective than a string of email messages in achieving your intended outcome.
- Be clear and concise in your written communications. Thomas Jefferson summed up the rules of writing well with this idea “Don’t use two words when one will do.” One of the oldest myths in business is that using a lot of big words and long sentences will make us sound more important. In fact, the opposite is true. Leaders who can communicate simply and clearly project a stronger image than those who write a lot but say nothing.
- Commit to listening more and talking less. This will help you better understand how your employees want to be engaged which will in turn improve your communications outcomes.
- Use visuals. A picture really is worth a thousand words. Incorporate more pictures and fewer words in your messages. It not only grabs an audiences’ attention, it can relay a concept or idea quickly and effectively.

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Choosing the most effective channel for your message

While email seems to be the most common communications method in organizations, it is not necessarily the most effective. Choose your channel based on the message you will be sharing. Below is a list of some of the employee communications channels likely available to you and suggestions on when and how to use them.

Channel	Frequency	Audience	Suggested content
Tailgate meeting	Monthly, weekly	A group of three to ten employees	Focus on a road safety issue important to your audience, such as backing and parking issues, distracted driving, new vehicle inspection process, etc. This should be a two-way dialogue with time for employees to ask questions, provide feedback and learn.
Newsletter	Monthly	All drivers across the company	Road safety issues of broad interest to all drivers such as an overview of an updated policy or a new procedure, quarterly safety results, tips about driving skills, etc.
Email	As needed	Specific individuals or groups of individuals	Issues that require immediate action by the audience such as reminders to supervisors that maintenance records to be tallied and submitted at end of month, or a reminder to crew about winter driving hazards on particular route, etc.
Conference call or online meeting	As needed	Groups that are geographically dispersed	Timely issues where you want to impart news and offer employees the opportunity to share their perspective or insight.
Safety meetings	Monthly and as required	Groups that are in the same location	A great place to talk about key safety matters and communicate more involved messages. Consider complex or emerging issues, develop policies or practices, gather information on safety priorities, deliver training or skills development information, etc.
Phone call	As needed	Specific individual	Specific issue, often sensitive or complex, that requires a dialogue to address.
Lunch and learns	Quarterly	Groups of individuals in the same location	Short, specific and topical issues of broad interest to drivers with time for questions and answers.
Face-to-face meetings	As needed	Specific individuals or groups	Significant issues that personally affect a single individual or members of a group

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