4 Questions to Evaluate Your Leaders' Communications

(And How You Can Instantly Improve Them)

How many times have you heard how important a leader is to your employees' engagement? Even for your own engagement – your direct boss usually has more influence over your engagement than a leader in another department. The way your leader communicates, can very well be the deciding factor between employees staying at a company, or leaving.

But how do you know if the leaders you support are communicating effectively?

As an HR business partner, it is important for you to evaluate the effectiveness of each of your leader's communication styles, to ensure their messaging approach (or non-approach), is not cause for turnover down the road.

QUESTION #1: WHAT IS THEIR OVERALL COMMUNICATION APPROACH?

By reviewing a sampling of their emails along with the interactions you've had with him or her, what is their overall approach? Do they tend to talk around an issue? Are they blunt and to the point? Do they ramble on in long paragraphs, losing the important details along the way? Or maybe, they refuse to communicate at all and ignore emails or calls, in favor of "doing the work?"

Understanding their "default" approach to messaging, will help in determining their overall effectiveness – and help you create an effective plan to move forward.

There isn't a good or bad approach – well, except perhaps for ignoring communicating altogether, but there are more effective approaches in messaging – which will come into play in a bit.

➡️ **Takeaway: Review what they're currently doing and determine their strategy (and lack of strategy/consistency will tell you one is urgently needed!)**

QUESTION #2: HOW ARE THEIR GOALS TRACKING?

It may sound odd to ask about goal accomplishments when considering messaging, but often times how their team is tracking towards set annual goals and initiatives, tell a story around the leader's communication effectiveness. Think about it for a minute – if your boss clearly communicates expectations, isn't it easier to achieve them?

Look at the group's goal progress and/or achievement information. Does it seem like people are generally on track and marching towards the goals, or are they consistently stumbling and missing deadlines?

➡️ **Takeaway: Goal progress is a good indicator of communication effectiveness. If you have a leader who seems to swim against the current all of the time to accomplish something, communication is the best place to start.**

QUESTION #3: WHAT CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION DO THEY USE?

Every person tends to have a default messaging channel that feels most comfortable to them. It can be email, instant messaging/chat, phone, texting, town halls, meetings, videos, pigeon mail, and so on.

How does your leader usually connect with their audience? It is only one messaging channel, or do they change things up often?

While your leader may have a default messaging channel that works best for them, their employees' preferred method could be different. It's critical in order to reach the leader's entire employee population, to communicate in different channels depending on the circumstance and the employee. If they aren't already doing this, they're likely missing a large part of their organization... and by definition, their communications are not effective.

➡ **Takeaway: People learn and hear things in different ways. If your leaders are only communicating through one channel, they are losing a significant amount of their audience.**

QUESTION #4: DO THE WORDS THEY USE, MAKE SENSE?

I've seen this be the stumbling block more times than I can count. Leaders tend to be smart – they've risen to the top for a reason. But with those smarts, can sometimes include a tendency to use too much jargon, talk in circles, leave out information they think you should already know, type/speak in a way that isn't easily understood, and so on.

Does your leader make sense usually? Do you easily understand their requests and the next steps you need to take to accomplish them? Do you have to look-up acronyms or words to fully understand the conversation? Do you feel left out of the bigger picture?What happens to the business (and HR) if the time to fill rate is too long? How can you tell that story with your daily HR-interactions and activities?

If your leader is stuck "at the top" in their messaging, not only will their communication be ineffective, but they are also wasting precious time (and money) for their team. This may sound like I'm asking you to have your leader "dumb down" their messages, but in fact, it's asking them to be more effective – to craft messages that are quickly understandable and actionable... not showing off their "smarts."

➡ **Takeaway: Always go for the easy way in communicating something. Using complicated language, trying to be fancy or using acronynms will instantly decrease understanding and comprehension.**

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