

Stellar Podcast No.8 – Communication

Welcome to the Stellar Leadership Podcast – Effective communication is undoubtedly one of the most important skills for every manager to master. It is the base skill that is used in leadership activities like coaching, negotiating, influencing, making presentations and giving feedback. For this reason, it is vital for personal, team, departmental and organisational success.

Communication is the exchange of information, knowledge and feelings between people to create a shared understanding. People often think of communication as being speaking, listening and writing but the reality is that everything you do communicates something to those around you. There is an old saying in management, “you cannot not communicate”. Ultimately, people judge you on actions taken rather than the words spoken! But that doesn't mean that the words aren't important too. Your team will be watching to see if your words and actions match up and if they perceive a difference this might create problems for you around trust.

Most managers find that they need to constantly reinforce key messages so that they are fully understood and absorbed by their team. The communication of key messages also involves:

- Being clear on the key message you want to get across
- Thinking about what your audience wants to hear and more importantly, what you need them to understand
- Taking account of the impact your message will have
- Understanding what questions it will raise.

I think about it as a probability – I mean that in any group of people there is a probability some will understand a message and also that some will misunderstand it. Your task is to place the odds in your favour by using some simple techniques.

When we are speaking we often focus on the words we are using, but research has shown that words only account for 7% of the understanding in verbal communication. In reality, the tone of your voice accounts for 38% of understanding and body language a huge 55%.

I mean, if 93% of the understanding of your audience will be derived from your tone and body language then it is vital to get this right. Imagine you ask an employee are they all right and they reply that yes, they are ok. Everything about their expression suggests to you that they are clearly upset and emotional. Which form of communication do you trust most? It's also true that in a conversation when we hear something we want to respond to, we often stop listening and start thinking about our response.

It is important to remember that communication is a two-way process. Listening is another often-overlooked yet important aspect of communication. Good listening involves not only actively absorbing verbal information but also analysing the other behaviours such as body language and tone, looking out for hidden messages and confirming understanding.

Change, for many, is not easy to accept, and communicating change is therefore one of the most difficult tasks faced by those in a management position. You may often be

involved in making or communicating decisions that will affect or change the way people work.

It is really important in these circumstances to keep in mind the receivers reaction and needs. Being empathetic to these needs and concerns does not mean agreeing with them, but it is an important part of getting your messages across.

Try to anticipate and address individual concerns as far as possible and indeed follow up with individuals where it is obvious they need convincing. I like the idea of underscoring key points and allow interaction to explore. I contrast this to the “spray and pray” method used by many in sending out corporate messages.

Lastly, you need to own the change process and message for it to be successful. If you present it as something that is being done to you (i.e. by head office) and you don't agree with it, your team will quickly understand that you are not serious about the change and it will be all the more difficult to implement.

In summary, remember that wider context and not just the words used is relevant to what is being communicated. Everyone has a responsibility for communicating and doing so clearly and effectively will make your job much easier and more enjoyable.

If you would like more information on Leadership, or any of the topics discussed in this podcast, visit www.stellarleadership.com, where there is a wide range of downloadable materials on the practical application of leadership techniques.