

Article for Module 7

Five Strategies to Improve Communication with Team Members

FIVE STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION WITH TEAM MEMBERS

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January 8, 2020

Even though almost 75% of employers rate collaboration and teamwork as "very important," according to data from Queens University of Charlotte, 39% of employees think that people in their organization don't collaborate enough.

Improved communication between team members in the workplace often brings fantastic results, including:

- Smoother team building
- Greater agility
- Enhanced focus
- Efficient performance
- Reduced workload

In light of those benefits, it's easy to agree that workplace collaboration is critical. But achieving these results can be difficult. Here are five tips to streamline communications in the digital age:

1. Purposeful Communication

When it comes to workplace communication, improving quantity is not the same as improving quality. The wrong kinds of communication, such as water-cooler gossip, can waste time and spark conflict between team members.

To avoid empty or hurtful communication, remember this: Every interaction should have a clear purpose. After establishing the purpose of an upcoming interaction, ask yourself:

- Who is my audience? Team members? Executives? Vendors? Clients?
- What is my desired outcome?
- Will I need to refer back to this conversation later or show details of it to others?

By taking just a moment to consider those questions before initiating communication, you can save valuable time and set yourself up for success.

2. Productive Meetings

According to a study from the University of North Carolina (via Harvard Business Review), 71% of senior managers surveyed said meetings are unproductive and inefficient. That's a surprising statistic considering the fact that meetings are designed to align group goals and increase team productivity.

If every interaction needs to have a clear purpose, meetings should be no different. To make sure that your meeting stays on track, try these tips:

- Keep meetings short. Limit them to 50 minutes or less to allow attendees time to reset afterward.
- Only invite team members who need to be there.
- Create a detailed agenda, and send it to all attendees before the meeting starts.
- Clearly communicate when and how to attend, whether in a specific room or through a specific app.
- Assign a meeting leader to guide the conversation.
- Follow the agenda during the meeting.
- Add important non-agenda issues raised during the meeting to your next meeting's agenda.
- Schedule the next meeting at the end of your current meeting.

3. One-On-One Interactions

At times, sensitive issues arise that need to be handled delicately. In those situations, one-on-one interactions are often the best way to avoid miscommunication and save time.

Scheduling a one-on-one interaction — whether in person, over the phone or through a video chat — shows your audience that you value their time. Those types of interactions also serve to build trust while giving you a greater chance to gather honest feedback and understand the other person's perspective.

4. Effective Channels

Whether your team functions in a traditional office or in a digital workplace, you can take advantage of a range of communication channels, such as:

- Voice calls
- Texting
- Email
- Instant messaging

- Videoconferencing
- Collaboration applications

When deciding what channel to use, remember the purpose of the communication, your audience and your desired outcome. Then, when communicating, make sure that you're using the channel in ways that are accessible and easy to understand. Make sure everyone knows the chosen channel of communication and how to access the meeting, such as knowing to download a certain app. Additionally, if you're communicating with a group that includes members outside your core team, avoid using alienating inside jokes or group-specific jargon.

5. Progress Updates

Each project or team has tangible goals, deadlines and milestones that need to be communicated clearly. Without effective team communication, deadlines can be missed, and employees will get frustrated, which may negatively affect clients.

When looking at a list of established goals, deadlines and milestones, figure out who is involved and who needs regular progress updates. Once you've created your group, be sure to promptly update them whenever a new goal is set, a milestone is achieved or a deadline changes. High-quality project management or employee intranet software may be able to facilitate these kinds of concrete updates.

Efficient communication brings your employees many benefits, thereby bringing your business many as well. You can communicate effectively in the workplace by avoiding empty interactions and unproductive meetings, choosing the best ways to communicate your message and making sure that regular progress updates are given to everyone who needs them.