

# **The Manager's Communication Handbook**

**A Practical Guide to  
Build Understanding, Support,  
and Acceptance**

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# Introduction

*“We know that communication is a problem, but the company is not going to discuss it with employees.”*

– Supervisor, *Fortune 100* Company

**W**hat is the greatest frustration for most employees?

Could it be they think they’re not getting paid enough? Or that the workplace is cramped or noisy? Maybe they think management expects too much from them? Could organizational bureaucracy or politics be number one on the frustration list?

All of these possibilities are easy to imagine ... and justify. However, in survey after survey, employees place ***communication problems*** at the top of their frustration list.

Communication?

Yes, communication. Most managers spend so much time and effort communicating, it’s hard for them to believe it could be a major problem. The paradox is that while employees are frustrated by a perceived lack of communication with their managers, most managers feel they are outstanding communicators. In a recent study, researchers asked a group of managers to evaluate their personal communication skills. The study discovered that 90% of the managers rated their communication skills in the top 10% of all managers. Obviously, 80% of the managers think they are better communicators than they actually are. Do you think their perceptions are a little off from reality?

We often hear that “communication is the key” or “leadership is communication” or any number of slogans about the importance of communication. These slogans are common because they’re true – communication *is* critical. It’s one of the most powerful tools managers have in their “toolbox.” Communication can be as tactical as posting the daily numbers or as strategic and profound as sharing the purpose and vision of the organization.

With so much emphasis on communication, how could it be such a big problem?

Actually, communication may not be the problem, and communicating more may not be the solution. In most cases, employees don’t need more information. Most of the information they receive doesn’t get read; that which gets read is frequently not understood; and that which is understood is usually not remembered.

The real problem is that the communication being delivered is not the same as, or connected with, the message being received. In other words, managers’ communication is often filled with so much “static” that the message is not understood, supported, or accepted by employees. The static preventing connected communication could be many things including ambiguity, confusion, inconsistency, conflict, or distrust.

What causes this communication static? One factor is the proliferation of communication methods in recent years – e-mail, voice mail, meetings, conference calls, cell phones, pagers, memos, video, intranets, newsletters, etc. With so many options, we tend to pay more attention to *how* we’re going to communicate than *what* we’re going to communicate. In other words, it’s more about the method than the message.

As a result, most managers think of communication as an activity as opposed to an outcome. The focus is on producing slick graphics, writing a clever memo, or delivering a great presentation, instead of creating commitment, passion, and enthusiasm among employees.

Another reason for the communication static is we've forgotten that true communication is a two-way process. Some of the technological advances that have made communication easier have also de-personalized it. It's not enough to just put out a message and hope employees "get it." We have to follow up to be certain we connected – to make sure the message received was the same one we intended to give.

To effectively eliminate communication static and build understanding, support, and acceptance, we need to make a shift and think of *communication as an outcome*. To do that, we want to look at communication from the receiver's perspective. We should ask the question, "What is my desired outcome with this communication? What do I want employees to think, feel, and do after receiving my message?"

At a minimum, our objective should be for others to understand our communication. But employees can clearly understand the message and still not agree with it or be willing to follow our direction. The ultimate goal is to build support and acceptance – to have receivers internalize your message, to move them to action. Understanding is intellectual; support and acceptance are emotional. It's like the difference between compliance and commitment – which one would you rather have from your co-workers?

*The Manager's Communication Handbook* will help you move from activity-focused communication to outcome-focused communication. This will allow you to connect with employees and create the understanding, support, and acceptance critical to your success. It will introduce you to the four key dimensions of communication and teach you how to eliminate communication static. As a bonus, we've included 44 tactical and practical tips that address the most common forms of static found in phone and voice mails, e-mails, memos, meetings, presentations and feedback.

So read on, enjoy, and begin communicating more effectively!