

LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS: COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

If I have heard it once, I have heard it a thousand times: An executive bemoans the fact that people don't understand her vision or strategy – are fearful of challenging up – or the field doesn't see her as credible when she is speaking with the regions. The frustration is often palpable ... and the causes of her frustration are often predictable.

To be perceived as an extraordinary executive, many competencies are required ... and communication skills are among the most important. Communication skills include obvious things like speaking in public ... and some not so obvious ... like knowing when to engage in face-to-face conversation rather than sending an email.

In addition to having an impact on leadership credibility, executive communication skills affect team effectiveness within senior management teams. Executives with effective communication skills help others better understand one another, resolve differences more quickly, and establish trust and respect ... thereby creating a feeling of an engaged work environment.

One of the most beneficial ways an executive can communicate is by talking to another individual or group, rather than sending email. This may seem embarrassingly obvious, and yet, it is one of the easiest missed solutions in our e-connected world. Two-way communication allows people to see your authenticity and engage you in a real dialogue where you can listen as well as demonstrate a curiosity about them, rather than talking about yourself or your agenda.

The best executives spend time with people in the field, learning and understanding their issues, demonstrating respect for their work, and listening to their needs. They avoid dictating commands from above or sending "a vision from the ivory tower," which is how employees tend to view mahogany row.

Excellent executive leaders listen more than they talk. They pay attention to what others are saying and engage them in candid conversation. If they have an opinion, they make it known, but they allow for and encourage free dialogue.

Great communicators tell others more by being what they are saying rather than simply telling others what to do. Think of the great business leader and investor, Warren Buffett, who is known for creating a lofty vision ... setting very high standards ... living the vision and standards himself ... and communicating the vision and standards both to his employees and to the public at large. Then he gets out of the way to let his very able team run their businesses.

Do you consciously select the most effective communication for every situation? Do you consider whether the medium and words used will be received in the way you intend? Do you lead by living the vision, listening to your subordinates and letting them act?