

## Leadership Communication During Uncertain Times

**By Debra Hamilton**

Change is all around us. Effective leadership communication during times of change creates stability and trust. Leaders at all levels must communicate change and share information as soon as possible. Here are tips for a communication-rich culture.

- 1. Communicate change as soon as possible.** People do not want to hear about a merger or acquisition through the grapevine. Communicate even when you don't have anything substantial to say. This lets people know you are aware of their need for information and you will provide it as soon as possible. Provide frequent updates to keep their need for information satisfied. People who do not have useful information in a timely manner feel confused, stressed, scared, and insecure.
- 2. Explain what is changing, how, and why.** Let people know the business reasons behind the change and how it impacts them. Anticipate any questions they may have and give them detailed, valuable answers.
- 3. Let people know what they can do.** Empower people to make a difference during volatile times. Inspire and motivate people to own the change and to be innovative in helping to resolve issues. Provide them with a specific call to action to make them feel included and important to the process.
- 4. Be visible during times of change.** Be accessible and allow people to ask questions and offer ideas. Schedule meetings to communicate up, down, and across the organization. Follow through with your commitments to follow up with people.
- 5. Be a role model for change.** Demonstrate high levels of emotional intelligence during uncertain times. No one wants to see a leader have an emotional meltdown. Your actions and leadership presence will speak volumes about what is really going on and help others deal with their fear and resistance.
- 6. Use a variety of methods to communicate.** Select the most useful and effective channels to communicate. These methods can range from town hall meetings, to small group meetings, to newsletters and e-mail updates. Create a trustworthy, communication-rich environment that is reliable.
- 7. Communicating bad news is often uncomfortable for both the sender and receiver.** However, direct talk is often the best choice. But always deliver your message with tact and diplomacy. Demonstrate empathy when delivering bad news. Understand the emotion, resistance, and discomfort toward change.

There's no perfect way to communicate during uncertain times. Transition makes most people uneasy, and behaviors and long-held habits are not easy to change. Communicate clearly, openly, frequently, and most important, honestly.

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