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10 Principles for Leadership Communication

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1. **Everything communicates.** The way programs, policies, tools, and initiatives are designed and delivered communicates more strongly than the marketing and information about them. As a leader, how you act and what you do, communicates more clearly than the words coming out of your mouth.
2. **The Golden Rule works.** Communicate with your employees the way you would like to be communicated with--openly, with respect and trust. If you set the example, employees will treat you and your customers the same way.
3. **Stand for something.** It's much easier to have consistent communication when you have a brand or an employee value proposition, or core values--whatever you want to call it. Just be sure it is clear, easy to remember, makes sense, has an element of inspiration, differentiates you as an employer, will hold up for at least 10 years, and is everyone's job to live it--and that means you!
4. **Everyone wants to be heard.** Communication is a two-way process. Have a number of upward channels and do something with what you hear (and tell people about it!).
5. **One size does not fit all.** Understand your audience and communicate in the best way to reach it. Take a lesson from the marketers--know the demographics and psychographics of your various audiences and tailor communication messages, content, style, and channels to them.
6. **They both end in 'tion' but there's a big difference between 'information' and 'communication'.** Communication influences thoughts, feelings, and actions. Information simply informs. When it comes to pushing it out to your employees, the 80/20 rule applies--80% communication and 20% information.

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7. **Communicate courageously.** If you communicate openly and honestly, you will make some mistakes and there will be times when you don't have the answer. Admit it. Your employees will understand and will respect your courage. Occasionally, you can't communicate because of regulations or laws. Explain why you can't communicate now and when you expect the situation to change.
8. **Remember the competition.** Every employee receives hundreds of messages every day. Your message competes with all of them. Each person 'selects' what to pay attention to and what to ignore. Why should employees pay attention to messages from your organization? From you? How can you help employees focus on what's important?
9. **If it looks important, it must be important.** How you package the communication about programs has a big impact on perceptions of the program itself. Match the packaging to the level of importance.
10. **Good communication is a good investment.** In the absence of good communication, the grapevine thrives. And the grapevine will leech the resources from your business--productivity, commitment, and reputation. "Whine" is made from the fruit of the grapevine.

And if you do just one thing, do this: Choose front line managers for their communication skills. Front line managers have the greatest influence over an employee's engagement. Managers who are good communicators get more from their direct reports than managers whose strong skills lie elsewhere. Managers who are good communicators are the insurance policy for keeping the best workers happy.

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