

Communication Skills Model For Leaders



*Answering these 6 Core Questions that Your
Employees are Thinking About Will Help You
Create a More Successful and Better
Performing Team*

By Shannon M. McCaffery

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Communicating with employees is a lot like measuring customer satisfaction. The first step is identifying your employee's needs. Employees at all levels have the same fundamental questions about their jobs. These six questions are from the employee's perspective. They usually occur in this order, as people go about trying to understand their work and their role. The questions also represent a cycle that begins again whenever people change assignments, jobs or supervisors, or as products, customers, markets and business change. People ask the last question, "How can I help?" only when they know the answers to the first five questions. As a leader, it is your responsibility to work with your team and ensure they know the answers to all of these questions. .

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Phone 201-294-5765 • Fax (815) 550-2431 • shannon@mccafferycoms.com
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1.) What is My job?

- Providing clear directions on what is expected
- Informing people of changes in job priorities
- Discussing the objectives and problems of assignments
- Involving people in decisions that affect them
- Seeking people's suggestions and advice
- This is clearly not an exhaustive list of behaviors, but it is a good list of hints any supervisor or leader could use to improve his or her behavior in this regard.

One of the most difficult questions for any person new to any position is to determine expectations of them. The question "what's my job?" is a critical one. It is a fundamental supervisory task to answer that question on an ongoing basis and to ensure that employees are involved in defining the job as it changes and evolves.

2.) How am I doing?

Good performance feedback and effective coaching are key communication tasks. Here are some ways to communicate with your employee/team on who they are doing:

- Providing timely feedback – positive and negative – on people's performance
- Discussing mutual actions for performance improvement
- Coaching people, making performance reviews non-events
- Recognizing people when they do a good job; offering praise

3.) Does Anyone Care?

What kinds of behaviors would you say best indicate to an employee that the supervisor cares about him or her? How important is that sense that someone cares to a typical worker in today's workplace?

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What does “caring” in the workplace mean?

- Listening to ideas and concerns
- Encouraging employees to speak views frankly
- Establishing a climate of trust and openness
- Making employees feel that your job is important
- Practicing common courtesy and civility

Once people get the answers to the “I” questions, they begin to identify with issues broader than their own. One of the first of those identifications is with the work unit or team. Then they get to the place where they ask the next question--how are “we” doing.

4.) How are we doing?

It’s not enough that employees know how their job fits into the company. They also need to know what they do day-to-day helps the company and the needs of the marketplace. And they need to know HOW the company is doing as a whole. So they can understand their impact within the organization.

- Assembling the team regularly to explain work unit objectives and results
- Discussing how work unit objectives connect with company priorities
- Listening to how the team can work for continuous improvement
- Recognizing team accomplishments

5.) Where are we headed? (What’s our Vision/Mission/Values?)

It’s hard to perform in your job when you don’t know or understand the destination and objectives of the company. Employees need a clear vision, communicated with passion and simplicity that will give them that direction which will enable them to

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better perform. Knowing the bigger picture is key. Once people begin the process of identifying with larger organizational issues, they are ready to hear about more abstract issues like vision, mission and the values of the organization. This is the important process of integrating employee interests with those of the organization. It is a vital task for the supervisor to help move that process along and to serve as the person who translates the larger issues to what they mean at the working level. That, perhaps more than any other communication task, is the one that the supervisor must play if the organization is to communicate its needs and priorities to all of its members. What supervisory behaviors can facilitate the task?

- Internalizing the company vision, mission and values and acting accordingly
- Keeping people focused by translating corporate objectives to the work unit
- Encouraging cooperation with other work groups; discouraging silos
- Communicating on a regular basis how the company is doing and sharing goals and objective of where the company will be headed in the coming years

6.) How Can I help?

Here is the payoff for effective leadership communication. When the first five of these basic questions are answered, people are inclined to ask the most important question we can hear at work – namely, “How can I help?” This is the beginning of customer service, quality or any other important initiative we can identify in the workplace. It occurs when employees feel a sense of ownership, and it is clearly a gift that can be given freely or withheld quietly.

Here’s how you can help your employees/team get to this place:

- Building a climate of trust
- Understanding that commitment is a gift given freely or withheld quietly
- Encouraging and permitting involvement
- Supporting the risk-takers
- Knowing that quality and customer service come only from committed people

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Summary

Two way communication is key within any company/organization. It's the responsibility of the manager and leaders of the company to initiate this communication.

Communication tips to keep in mind:

- Tell them what you know
- Tell them what you don't know
- Tell them when you think you'll more and then follow-through on that

Key Questions to ask:

- What do you think?
- What does it mean to you?
- What do you think we should do next?
- Does this make sense?
- Are you following me?
- Do I need to go over it one more time?
- Is this clear enough or do you need more direction?

Overall One Key Strategy to ALWAYS Keep In Mind:

- LISTEN!

Always encourage communication and don't just talk all the time. You need to listen too! Even when your employee is having an issue. It may not be something you can fix right away or at all, but most of the time, they need to say it because they just want to be heard.

NOTE: This document was adapted from IABC (International Association of Business Communicators) Karen Horn, and Roger D'Aprix, and Towers-Perrin (Now Towers-Watson)

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