

A Communication Plan is Crucial

By Susan Schilke; July 18, 2018

I've been working with business leaders for 25 years, to help keep the main thing the main thing in their small- to mid-sized companies. We focus on strategy, growth, challenges, performance, goals and plans. And sometimes we neglect the most critical component of success in every endeavor ever.

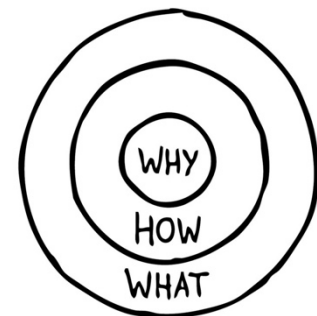
It's all about COMMUNICATION. You have a strategic plan, an operational plan, a financial plan, a marketing plan, a sales plan, an overall business plan. You have to have a communication plan or none of these strategies matter. And I'm talking about internal communication – because if your leaders and team members don't hear it, understand it, live it and breathe it – how can your company achieve it?

A Poppulo study says, "Effective internal communication leads to a 40% increase in customer satisfaction, a 30% increase in profitability, and a 36% increase in the overall performance of the company." The Towers-Watson group has been studying ROI on effective internal communication for years, and report that companies who are the best at this one thing provide a 47% higher return to shareholders. It's clear that this needs to be a priority. So, why doesn't every middle market company have the right focus on communication?

My CEO and Key Exec members are gifted communicators and can effectively communicate and inspire in a 1-1, group setting, or company-wide meeting; and I've watched as their companies have outgrown this. The communication transition sneaks up as you focus on adding customers and team members and achieving goals... and leaders get spread really thin. What used to be fluid – everyone communicating with each other all the time – becomes departments and branches and divisions and the information starts to scatter and fall through the cracks.

TeamStrength members are good at collaborating to make decisions and getting the input they need. But they invest so much time into making the right decisions that they don't invest enough time in communicating the whys and the reasons and the plan.

Simon Sinek, author of Start with Why, calls it the Golden Circle... everyone knows what, but they don't connect unless they know why. You make carefully thought out decisions, then you skimp on communicating the why and even the how – just fire off a lot of whats. You might get hands and feet moving, but you need hearts and minds engaged as well.



We surveyed your team members on what information they believe is important to know and understand about your company. Their top five answers:

1. Company Goals
2. Core Values
3. Company Performance
4. Mission & Vision
5. Policies, Procedures & Standards

Why and How... not what. Over 73% of our 500+ respondents think it's extremely important to understand these things. Individual goals and performance ranked seventh in scoring and less than 51% put Career Opportunities in this category. Your team members want connection to **why** it's important – what is the company trying to achieve and how are we doing as an organization? Why do we exist? How do we behave? These matter to your team members. You need to have a plan for integrating these messages into regular communication.

Your team members get information from managers and leaders in regular email, meetings and 1-1s. And according to our survey, they want more. More time with managers and leaders, more meetings, more systems and clarity, more responsiveness, more cross-departmental communication.

Rich Kneece – founder of Vocoli said, “To create change, executives, directors, and managers must be the champions of knowledge-sharing, transparency, and worker engagement.”

It all starts with a plan. You need a communication plan to ensure your team members get the information they need, and just as important, that you get their input consistently. Here are three steps I'd like every TeamStrength member company to take:

1. **First, make internal communication a focus in every leadership team meeting** – not as an afterthought, but as an overall strategic approach to the business. How are we getting the critical information to and from our team? Start this off with a Leadership Team meeting exclusively dedicated to communication and make that at least an annual event.
2. **Craft a simple, clean communication plan.** What methods do we use to share and reinforce the critical information our team members need? How do we get more effective at this? What are our strategies for taking messages all the way through the organization? How do we create simple, clear messaging and repeat it again and again? Start with redesigning the regular meeting structures – create a calendar of meetings and 1-1s, then improve the structure and effectiveness of each of these meetings through agendas and planning.
3. **Finally, most importantly, shift your mindset.** Mastering effective communication isn't just one aspect of what it takes to be a strong leader and manager, it's the most crucial part of the role. It's not tagged on to the end of your responsibilities, it's the first requirement. Don't end your meetings with communication, start them that way. Don't promote leaders and managers who are technically capable and good at their jobs and teach them to be communicators. Promote people who ask great questions, listen and hear others, and know how to motivate and inspire a team.

Make sure every manager and leader knows that communication is their first job.

Starting today, make a commitment to make effective communication your priority, not something you'll try to get a little better at. It's not a project, or a department, or a committee, or a task force - it's the first job of leaders, and a key focus of decision-making and strategic planning. Your team is amazing. Don't ask them to can't hit targets they can't see and don't motivate them with what, inspire them with why.