# Plain Talk® about Business Performance

## Hearing Your Message?

I received this photo from a client who wanted to know if I thought he should distribute these to his managers and employees. It would be nice to think that the photo was sent with tongue firmly in cheek, but after speaking to him, it was clear that his situation was quite serious.



His question referred to the fact that he had been doing everything he could think of when communicating with his direct reports, and yet, some of them were continuing to exhibit behaviours that didn't match up with where his group was going or with the organisational values that they all professed to believe in. The situation was complicated even further as he, or more appropriately, his leadership had been recognised over and over again for being someone that his people and peers admired and thought was worth emulating. And yet, his message wasn't getting through to some of his direct reports.

The real question is, *'are they not hearing you or choosing not to listen to you?'*

This is not an uncommon problem. And even though it plagues senior managers often, there are things that can be done to shift the organisational dynamics.

1. Get feedback on your own communications skills. All senior managers would like to believe that they are genuinely great at communicating, and for an equally unknown reason, would like to believe that everyone understands what is being communicated. Find out how good you really are. Asking for direct communications feedback probably won't give you what you need to know, so have some people do a blind left-hand column analysis of your presentations. You may not like what you hear, but at least you will know where your weak spots are. The key to ensuring effective communications isn't what is being said, but it is what is being heard. Make sure your people are hearing what you need them to hear, and if you aren't sure, find out.

2. Find out how you are doing as a manager. This can be far simpler than most 360-degree processes, and in reality, is only an 'upward' evaluation and should be completed by all your direct reports. There really are only three questions that need to be asked: *A) Does your manager give you the information you need to do your job? B) Does your manager demonstrate the leadership you need to know where (the company) is going and why? C) Does your manager clearly demonstrate the values and behaviours he or she expects from you?* You don't need to have a multi-question complex form with some rated numerical scale; these answers are either yes or no. If the answers are 'yes,' well done. If the answers are 'no,' get some coaching.

3. Reward good behaviours. When you see evidence that your people are doing what is needed, and doing so within the organisational values you should be supporting, reward them. Rewards need not be financial, but can simply be recognition for the exhibition of the behaviours you are looking for. In most cases, the behaviours you want to see (that show they do understand what is needed) include; demonstrations of clear innovative thinking, solid influencing skills, and individual and/or collective achievement of goals and targets. When your people do what is needed and expected, let them know you appreciate their efforts.

4. Make consequences of non-value driven behaviours clear. Assuming you are receiving positive feedback, and your upward evaluations are good, and you do reward good behaviours; if people in your team have chosen to not listen or understand what is needed, then they need to know that these behaviours will have a serious detrimental impact on their chances of a bonus or company advancement, or for repeated negative patterns of behaviour, termination. Managers need to clearly understand that all actions have consequences. Companies cannot afford to have managers who choose not to exhibit behaviours that match with values or choose not to support initiatives.

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