



by Brad Worthley

Five Powerful Leadership Communication Tips

Eighty-five percent of your success as a leader will be because of your ability to properly communicate your message to your supervisor, peers, team members, vendors and guests. The following are five powerful communication tips that could influence others to follow your lead and respect you in the process.

Tip #1: Collaborative Communication

Being a great communicator takes time, and sometimes, we fool ourselves into thinking that we save time by avoiding communication opportunities. If you have a great idea for your casino or department, and you want to give it a try, consider investing 30 minutes into collaborating with your team before launching it. You may be thinking that you don't need anyone's input, because you know exactly what you need to do. You might try to convince yourself that you don't have the time to get your team's input, because the need for change is urgent. What are the benefits to gathering your team together and bouncing your ideas off them?

- Buy-in
- Team building opportunity
- They feel you value their opinion
- They may build on your ideas and make them better
- As "devil's advocates" they may discover holes in your plan
- Opportunity to offer your team praise and recognition for their input (#1 motivator of people)

Tip #2: Conversational Leadership

Being listened to, is one of the top motivators of people, so how do we utilize that knowledge to be a better communicator? Instead of telling team members what to do, which is what is referred to as monologue (one-way communication), have open dialogue (two-way communication) with them and create a conversation. You can do that by simply asking questions, but being a great questions asker is not as easy as it sounds. If you observed a team member interacting with a guest and you thought it should have gone better than it did, you might consider asking the team member a question such as, "Bob, on a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being poor and 10 being outstanding, how well do you think that interaction went?" If the team member responds with "Maybe a 6 or 7," you might say "OK, but I need you at a 10 with every single guest, so what could you do differently next time, in order to end up with better results?"

Great leaders utilize dialogue, which is intrinsic motivation, and unleashes the power within people. Team members who discover their own answers are far more likely to follow through with the actions. Using monologue (one-way communication) and telling team members what to do, is considered extrinsic motivation, which is exerting control over them. It can make them feel like they are being dictated to, which creates resentment in them. Getting team members involved in the process of personal change, will minimize the perceptions of them feeling like victims of change.

Tip #3: Options for Responding

A great leader will never use the words "It is my way or the highway!" Instead, when they have a need, they will encourage their team to provide an honest response (instead of one out of obligation). It would be a horrible disservice to ask a team member to achieve a task in a time-frame that is unreasonable or impossible. Never put a team into a situation that sets them up for failure. A great leader wants and encourages thoughtful and meaningful responses that are reasonable and allow team members to feel respected. If you ask a team member to perform a task for you, or to commit to some action, here are the four options that should be available to them:

- Yes, I would be glad to do it.
- No, I won't be able to and here are the reasons why.
- Counter offer: I won't be able to complete it by noon, but I could get it done by 4:00, would that be acceptable?
- Time to consider request: May I have 30 minutes to review my calendar and priority list, to ensure I can do it?

Tip #4: Constructive Feedback

Giving constructive feedback is a critical component to helping your team develop. Yes, praise is a wonderful tool and should be in your toolbox as well, but withholding important information from your team because it is uncomfortable for you to deliver is a disservice. The goal of constructive feedback should be to modify behavior and help people grow. The tricky part is to deliver the message so that it does not feel like a personal attack. If someone feels like they are being personally attacked, their listening shuts down and they will go into self-preservation mode. They will not hear you because, in their mind, they are trying to defend themselves, which means they are no longer listening to you (they may "hear" you,

but they are probably not “listening” to you).

Here are a few key steps to giving constructive feedback:

- Be respectful of their time: “Bob, do you have five minutes for me?”
- Provide a compliment to reduce anxiety: “Bob, you have been here five years and are very good at your job.”
- Talk about the issue you want resolved and not them: “May we talk about the importance of timeliness?”
- Avoid exaggeration words like “always” and “never”: “You are always late for work” or “You are never on time”
- Avoid gang-up language like: “We all think...” or “Many people believe...”
- Don’t belabor the point – make it short and sweet – right to the point.
- Use words like “I” and “We” to stress that you want to work the issue out together.
- Offer to help the person correct the issue such as: “Is there anything I can do to assist you in being timely?”
- At the end, reaffirm your support and confidence in the person (never leave anyone feeling wounded or beat up).

Tip #5: Silence is Not Always Golden

Some people are prone to sending indiscreet messages with their words, voice inflection, facial expressions or body language. It is critical that you seek clarity for these messages to determine their intent. By doing so, you also let them know that it is unacceptable and you will call them on it each time. The goal of your questions is not to make them wrong, but to get them to stop the drama and learn to communicate effectively. You want to teach them that is acceptable to respectfully question directives or ask questions if they do not understand your intent. Your inquiries should be emotion free and done in a professional manner.

- “Please help me understand your reaction.”
- “Could you explain to me what the deep sigh means?”
- “I perceived that comment as an insult; was that your intent?”
- “Could you explain to me what the rolling of your eyes means?”
- “Could you explain to me what the folding of your arms means?”

- “I sense frustration by your body language; would you like to share your thoughts?”

Learning to be a great communicator is a journey and not a destination – it is never ending. Being a great communicator is a wonderful skill, that if not shared, becomes useless. Great communication skills need to become pervasive throughout the entire casino and as long as you have a few departments or key people who lack the skills, it impacts the entire culture. Increase communication = increased success in your casino!

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