THE GROSSMAN GROUP

TOP 11
ATTRIBUTES OF
EXCEPTIONAL
LEADERS AND
COMMUNICATORS

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WHAT DOES IT TRULY TAKE

to be a great leader? The definition of an exceptional leader in today's business environment has changed quite a bit over the past few years. One of the biggest changes is that the pandemic has caused many people to **{reexamine}** their life priorities, including what they want from work—and from their leaders.

That means leaders need to focus more than ever on truly listening to what their employees want and need, and build a far more genuine and authentic connection than they might have aspired to in the past.

Through our quantitative research of more than 750,000 leaders and employees inside some of the world's leading organizations, and in the many focus groups we conduct every year, we've identified 11 attributes of great leaders that matter most to employees today...

1

THEY EARN TRUST

Research continues to show that trust is a fragile commodity and the pandemic has further eroded levels of trust. However, employees still turn to their employers as potentially trustworthy figures. Particularly significant is the finding that:

65% of respondents cite "my employer" as the most believable source of information they receive. And more than 8 in 10 respondents want CEOs to be the face of change on important public policy issues.[1]

At the same time, employees have *little* tolerance for untrustworthy leaders. 22% of employees have cited leaving a company because of trust issues. Overall, people are looking to business to lead the way.[2]

Leader behavior and communication that's seen as inconsistent can negatively impact perceptions of trustworthiness, as can negative and inconsistent non-verbal communication.

[1]Edelman Trust Barometer, 2022   [2]PwC's Trust in US Business Survey, 2021

2

THEY COMMUNICATE IN WAYS THAT ARE RELEVANT TO EMPLOYEES

For employees to be engaged and motivated, they need to understand just how the strategy, procedure or change actually connects to them and their jobs. Leaders need to communicate in plain language that is meaningful to the audience and answer the proverbial question: what's in it for me?
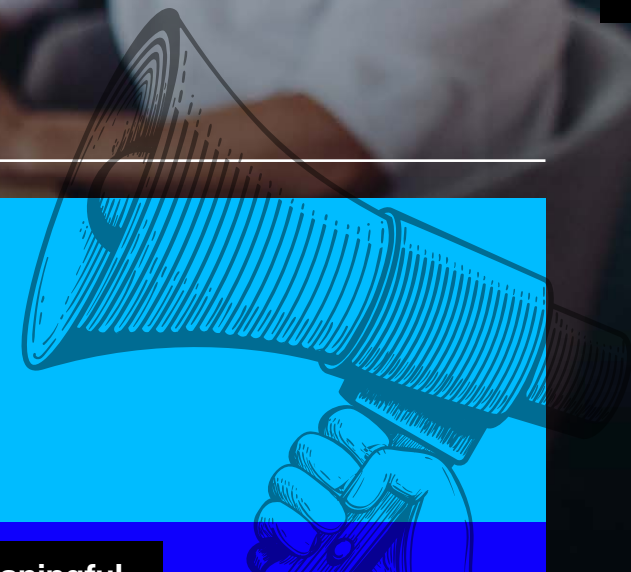
Employees are _ESPECIALLY_ turned off by:

| INCOMPLETE COMMUNICATION | OBFUSCATION | CORPORATE-SPEAK | "SPIN" | OVERUSE OF ACRONYMS |

They all signal communication that is less relevant, authentic and meaningful.

3

THEY COMMUNICATE FREQUENTLY ENOUGH

How do you know if you're communicating enough? You ask your employees for feedback regularly to ensure they feel satisfied with the flow of information. Even in a small organization, it is unusual to find much more than half of the employees state that their CEO and other senior leaders communicate frequently enough. Often, leaders tend to delay communication when they feel they don't have all the answers, yet employees consistently say they'd rather hear from their leaders early and often.

Furthermore, the hybrid of virtual environments that many employees are working under today has left employees feeling more left out of critical communication, and employees are consistently asking for more transparency, detail and more frequent new forms of communication.

4

THEY ARE RESPONSIVE

Effective leaders are genuinely open to suggestions and appeals from their employees because they recognize a healthy employee culture is dependent on it. Being responsive is more than just taking action on employee feedback; it's also about sending a signal that you respect and value what others have to say and that you don't believe you have all the answers.

Employees can easily tell in face-to-face interactions if their employer is being responsive. In virtual environments, leaders now need to consider how to demonstrate this responsiveness in new ways and be consistent about seeking feedback and discussion among employees.

5

THEY ARE OPEN TO FEEDBACK FROM EMPLOYEES

Employees often feel that their jobs give them insights that will help leaders run the business more effectively, and they appreciate leaders who maintain an environment where honest feedback can be provided without fear of repercussions. Leaders can help encourage this type of feedback by publicly showing support and appreciation for an employee who raises a challenging question. A simple response such as:

"

Thank you for raising this tough issue because I think it's really important

helps set the tone that the leader is open to being challenged and wants to hear different points of view.

Employees who feel they can't safely provide honest feedback often have negative views of their leaders and the enterprise as a whole.

6

THEY TAKE ACTION BASED ON FEEDBACK FROM EMPLOYEES

ACTION

FEEDBACK

It's important to follow up with an employee who provides a specific suggestion to close the communication loop. Even when a leader is not able to act on the suggestion, it's important for leaders to explain why. Otherwise, employees can easily feel their feedback isn't truly valued.

This is why it's especially important to follow up on engagement survey results so employees see that the time they take to respond to the surveys is worthwhile and that employers are paying attention to feedback and acting on it in any way they can.

7

THEY ARE APPROACHABLE

Leaders who are perceived as approachable are often also described by employees as open, personable and likable—someone who talks straight and listens to what's on the minds of employees.

Again, "approachable" takes on new meaning in environments where chances for face-to-face interactions are less frequent; think about new ways to let employees know you are always available to them.

8

THEY MAKE SURE EMPLOYEES ARE INFORMED ABOUT CHANGE

Employees believe they have a right to be informed about changes in key personnel and processes that may impact their jobs and their careers, and they look to the people in charge to make sure they get that information. When leaders ask employees:

"

Are you getting the company news and information you need?

they're underscoring their respect for employees and commitment to information sharing.

OF COURSE, THEY ALSO NEED TO RESPOND IF THE ANSWER _ISN'T_ YES

BREAKING NEWS
?

9

THEY SHARE INFORMATION WITH EMPLOYEES

Employees expect their leaders to care enough about communication to personally participate in making it happen. Senior leaders by definition are the most authoritative voices of their organizations, and straightforward information shared by leadership is highly valued by employees.

Leaders who demonstrate authenticity, humanity and heart—particularly by listening first and foremost, and then candidly sharing their own experiences—generally create higher levels of employee engagement.

10

THEY EXPLAIN THE REASONS BEHIND DECISIONS TO EMPLOYEES

Employees understand that there are good reasons some information can't be provided to them as soon as it's known, but they also expect that leaders will share what they can when they can. If change is happening and their leaders aren't telling them why, the rumor mill will fill in the blanks.

This is never good for morale or helpful at keeping the organization focused. For instance, if employees aren't well informed about a major restructuring— _what_ is happening and _why_—a level of fear, confusion and distrust can build over time that will hamstring the organization for years.

#!&%!

This is Bob. He's frustrated and confused due to a lack of information and clarity around his job. Don't create a Bob.

11

THEY EXPLAIN THE COMPANY'S VISION AND STRATEGIES

An organization's strategic framework provides the roadmap to success, and employees expect senior leaders to be its chief proponents. Senior leaders who consistently discuss the strategic framework in plain language and relate the organization's activities and progress against it help employees stay grounded and working together toward a successful future.

Given that many employees are taking time to reflect on how work fits into their lives, and with so many changing jobs, it's incumbent on leaders to help show employees how their work directly links to the company's purpose—including:

MISSION VISION VALUES

IMPLICATIONS FOR LEADERS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Developing these 11 attributes can take time and a renewed focus, but it's clearly worth the effort. Given all the change underway in business, employees are searching for *new* inspiration. These attributes are your roadmap for leveraging great communication to deliver on what employees truly want and need from leadership today.

WHICH 2-3 ATTRIBUTES {IF YOU FOCUS ON} WOULD HAVE THE GREATEST, POSITIVE IMPACT ON HOW YOU LEAD AND COMMUNICATE?

- [ ] **1.** Earn trust
- [ ] **2.** Communicate in ways that are relevant to employees
- [ ] **3.** Communicate frequently enough
- [ ] **4.** Be responsive
- [ ] **5.** Be open to feedback from employees
- [ ] **6.** Take action based on feedback from employees
- [ ] **7.** Be approachable
- [ ] **8.** Make sure employees are informed about change
- [ ] **9.** Share information with employees
- [ ] **10.** Explain the reasons behind decisions to employees
- [ ] **11.** Explain the company's vision and strategies

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DAVID GROSSMAN

David helps leaders drive productivity and get the results they want through authentic and courageous leadership and communication. He's a sought-after speaker and advisor to Fortune 500 leaders. A four-time author, his latest award-winning book, "Heart First: Lasting Leader Lessons from a Year that Changed Everything," features interviews with 30+ leaders inside a variety of organizations, each of whom share extraordinarily candid insights and unique leadership lessons. His leader**communicator**™ blog is ranked the #1 blog on communication by Feedspot seven years in a row. David is Founder & CEO of The Grossman Group, an award-winning Chicago-based strategic leadership development and internal communications consultancy. The Grossman Group's clients include DHL, Emergent BioSolutions, General Mills, Kaiser Permanente, Lockheed Martin, Molex, Stanley Black & Decker, and more. David is a member of the Arthur W. Page Society, the Forbes Communication Council, and a Trustee to the Board of the Institute for Public Relations. In addition, he is a Certified Speaking Professional (CSP), an MBTI® Certified Practitioner, a Prosci Certified Change Practitioner and taught graduate-level internal communications at Columbia University in NYC.

David has been featured in:

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.   NBC NIGHTLY NEWS   TODAY

Chicago Tribune   FAST COMPANY   Los Angeles Times

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HEART F1RST LEADERSHIP