

6

MUST-HAVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR MANAGERS



DAVID GROSSMAN
ABC, APR, FELLOW PRSA, CSP

A man with glasses and a beard, wearing a grey sweater over a collared shirt and tie, stands in the center of a meeting room. He is gesturing with his hands as if presenting. Behind him is a large whiteboard with a hand-drawn diagram. The diagram includes terms like 'Product', 'Marketing', 'Design', 'Brands', 'SEO', 'concept', 'strong strategy!', 'customers communication', and 'content'. Several people are seated around a white table in the foreground, looking towards the presenter. The room has a brick wall on the left and a large window on the right. The overall lighting is warm and professional.

Most managers today

want to be better communicators but just don't know how to get there. We've narrowed it down to six essential skills that have been game-changers for thousands of leaders we've worked with. While there are many nuances to the skills we explore here, they are all underpinned by a leadership philosophy we refer to as "Heart First." In a nutshell, this is simply about being more human as a leader, understanding that nothing important gets done without genuine relationships, buy-in, trust, and support from your full team.



Why

DO MANAGERS NEED GOOD COMMUNICATION SKILLS?

The most compelling argument for getting better at communication is that great communication leads to great leadership. Leaders who can't authentically connect or inspire their teams won't take their organizations far. Consider the following as evidence of how important better communication is:



Employees are extremely disengaged

60% of people are emotionally detached at work and 19% are miserable¹. Jon Clifton, CEO of Gallup, wrote in the report's introduction that employee burnout can be attributed to several key factors: unfair treatment, unmanageable workload, unclear communication from managers, lack of manager support, and unreasonable time pressure.

"Those five causes have one thing in common," Clifton wrote. "Your boss." Better trained and skilled managers have been shown to make a major impact. In the Gallup Global Workplace report, Clifton also noted that building the capabilities of managers is one of the key ways to build better workplaces.

A growing number of managers report that they need more support to do their jobs better, and communication-related skills are often looked to as a top need.

In a 2022 Harvard Business Review article entitled "Managers Can't Do It All," Diane Gherson, the recently retired chief human resources officer for IBM, and Lynda Gratton, a London Business School professor, reported that most managers are struggling to keep up. The challenges they confront are wide-ranging, including digitization, agile initiatives, and the move to remote work, just to name a few.

¹Gallup State of the Global Workplace Report, 2022



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6 MUST-HAVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS FOR MANAGERS

**LISTEN AND CHECK
FOR UNDERSTANDING**

1



**CREATE A SHARED
VISION AND MAKE
INFORMATION RELEVANT**

2



**REPEAT IMPORTANT
MESSAGES**

3



**CREATE DIALOGUE
AND CHECK FOR
UNDERSTANDING**

4



**CREATE REGULAR
OPPORTUNITIES
FOR PERSONAL
CONNECTIONS**

5



**USE CALLS
TO ACTION**

6



1 LISTEN AND CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

This gets to the core of Heart First Leadership. To make communication effective, leaders need to learn what's working well, what's not, and most importantly, how things can be better. That involves listening—and listening some more. Here's how to do it:



Ask broad, probing, open-ended questions, which allow the listener to take

the conversation in a direction they choose, such as: “Help me understand...” “How do you envision...” “What other strategic alternative did you consider?”



Consistently ask employees for feedback— Follow up on employee ideas

so team members know their voice matters. What leaders do with feedback speaks volumes to employees.



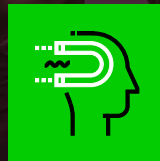


2

CREATE A SHARED VISION AND MAKE INFORMATION RELEVANT



Every employee comes into the workplace with his or her own context, a mixture of culture, memories, upbringing, and **experiences**. Part of the role of a manager is to create a shared vision for the entire team. Managers can do that by ensuring employees understand the big picture and how they fit in.



Leaders should constantly communicate the “why” behind the business plan:

Why the plan is important, the role the team plays, and the critical contribution that each employee can make to the team’s success.





Top questions ON EMPLOYEE MINDS



Every time a manager communicates with an employee, they should answer these questions that **all** employees naturally have:

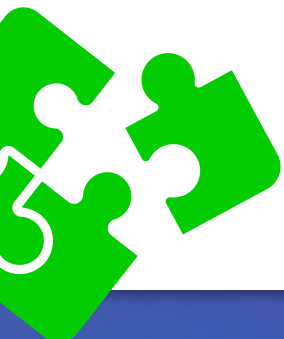
- ✓ *What's my job?*
- ✓ *What's in it for me?*
- ✓ *Why should I care?*

A HELPFUL EXERCISE FOR CONNECTING THE DOTS

Managers have an essential role in helping answer the employees' main questions because they know best how their team contributes to the organization's overall vision. Here's one exercise that can help managers connect the dots for their teams:

- 1 Challenge your employees** to think about what they do and how they contribute in the context of your team's goals and organizational strategy
 - 2 Tell them why** this exercise is important
 - 3 Role model** by sharing your answer first
-
- 4 Ask your employees** to write down their answers. Tell them there are no right or wrong answers
 - 5 Have everyone share** one at a time what they came up with
 - 6 Ask for feedback** after everyone's turn on what works and what can be better about how a peer articulates how he or she fits in

Chances are, many employees just see their tasks and not the bigger picture of how they contribute. Based on answers to this kind of exercise, managers might also learn if there are gaps in understanding. In some cases, managers may need to spend more time going over the company vision and strategy so their teams can see exactly where the organization is headed and why.



3 REPEAT IMPORTANT MESSAGES



One common communication mistake managers make is the “check-off-the-

box” mentality. People see communication as a one-time event. Research shows that many of us need to hear a message multiple times before we get it. Communication isn’t something you can check off a to-do list.



4

CREATE DIALOGUE AND CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING

Every time managers communicate, there's an opportunity to find out if their employees get what they're saying.



Some key questions for leaders to ask include:

"What challenges and opportunities do you see with what I've just explained?"

"What are your key takeaways from the information I just shared?"

"What other questions or concerns do you have about this direction?"



Heart First

LEADERSHIP AT A GLANCE

The secret behind motivating employees—through all forms of communication and action—is **Heart First Leadership**.

Heart First Leadership is about championing empathy, humanity, and authenticity to build stronger relationships and a thriving organization. By working in a new way to connect with their teams, leaders can enable remarkable things for their company's culture, growth, and overall success. Heart First leaders:

- 1 Understand** the importance of self-care, so they can bring their best selves to work
- 2 Listen** intently to employees and others in all kinds of ways, and help employees prioritize what matters most
- 3 Demonstrate** humanity and vulnerability and have a genuine desire to build connections
- 4 Create** a psychologically safe culture where people feel invited to take risks and speak their truths
- 5 Increase** leader communication effectiveness, knowing how important good communication skills are for engagement and positive business results
- 6 Communicate** authentically and with their heart, not just their heads
- 7 Work** on being expert storytellers, using narratives to provide rich context, illustrate what they're hoping to achieve, and engage and inspire others

To learn more about Heart First leadership, check out David Grossman's book, *Heart First: Lasting Leader Lessons from a Year that Changed Everything*.

PREVIEW >



5 CREATE REGULAR OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

With teams spread out across regions and countries, and so many people working remotely or on a hybrid home/office schedule, managers find it even harder to build critical connections and moments of dialogue.



This is one of the biggest pain points we hear from our clients in their work to build

better communication skills in management. It's also a big reason why many employees report feeling disconnected from their leaders. And when people feel disconnected, it's hard for them to trust and want to follow their leaders.



To help address this, set time aside to connect personally with employees —

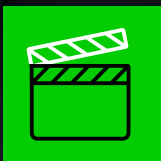
ideally with a brief meeting once or twice a month whenever possible. In fact, Gallup finds the best new habit for managers is having one meaningful conversation per week with each team member, anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes in length.





6 USE CALLS TO ACTION

As leaders communicate, it's important to think about what actions they're trying to drive. Communications should help move the audience to action. What do leaders want employees to do as a result of the communication?

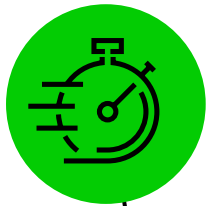


Leaders should clearly communicate the actions wanted and be specific and give examples. Without a call to action, the leader's message is just information.

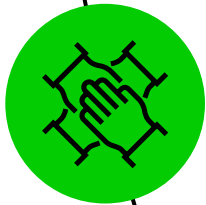


Effective calls to action

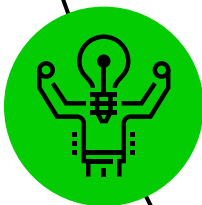
FOUR KEY ACTIONS WE CAN ALL
TAKE TO BE BETTER COLLEAGUES:



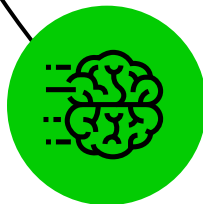
Respond to customer or colleague emails and/or calls within 24 hours



Ask your teammates how you can help *(especially during busy periods)*



Always meet or exceed customer or colleague deadlines *(or let them know early when you're facing a roadblock)*



Propose creative solutions to challenges and show positive leadership skills, no matter your role

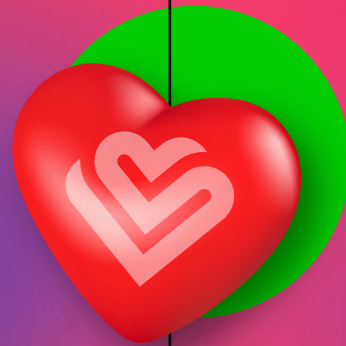




A final note

ON HOW TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS AS A MANAGER

The six skills we've outlined are excellent core manager communication skills that will undoubtedly help any leader become a far more effective communicator. Still, the most important lesson about leadership truly comes down to being human and unafraid to share your personality, motivations, and heart as you lead. Leaders who take this approach inevitably build trust and the kind of lasting relationships and buy-in that are hallmarks of the most successful organizations.





Take a deep dive

INTO MANAGER COMMUNICATION SKILL BUILDING...

Check out our robust guide:
6 Communication Skills Every Manager Should Master on the blog.



Get support

FROM EXPERTS
WHO HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE

WE WORK WITH CLIENTS OFTEN TO:

- Train managers in top-notch employee communication skills and storytelling
- Better engage and motivate employees through stronger leader communication
- Develop leader platforms to communicate more effectively—and in far more engaging ways—with employee teams
- Help leaders develop a more effective and efficient employee listening strategy
- Navigate and communicate through periods of change—from layoffs and changes in leadership to broader transformation
- Develop and launch organizational or functional strategies in a way that brings leaders, managers, and employees along on the journey and engages them in the success of the organization
- Think bold and creatively about how they solve leaders' unique business and communication challenges in a way that excites and inspires the organization
- And more

OUR GOAL IS TO MAKE YOU AND YOUR TEAM SHINE.

To learn more about our approach, explore what's possible for your organization or to get started, visit the resources below, or contact us today.



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GROUP



For over three decades, David has been helping 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, Grubhub, 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.

 NIGHTLY NEWS

 TODAY

Chicago Tribune

FAST COMPANY

Los Angeles Times

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