

Communication and feedback

Communication is vital in building any team. A manager's job is to string lines of communication for both positive and negative feedback.

by Rudd McGary and Ed Wandtke

Communication is the keystone of team management.

Poor communication leads to fragmented, disjointed efforts. Good communication skills build teams.

It's a manager's job—his primary job—to build efficient teams. This determines a manager's effectiveness, ultimately the limits of his or her career.

There are no secrets, and it takes some work because developing communication skills looks easier on paper than when you use them in a team setting. Take heart. They can be learned.

Mastering those skills involves learning just a few basic techniques. But first let's look at some problems you'll encounter.

Directional communication

Most communication systems focus on upward and downward communication. Downward communication is when a manager communicates with subordinates. Upward is the reverse.

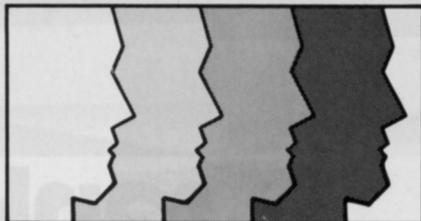
The key to downward communication within a team is how well the information is amplified at each new level.



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PART 3

TEAM MANAGEMENT



IN BUSINESS

For example, when you instruct your maintenance crew chief to "make the greens look good for the weekend," he will probably do everything he can to accomplish this. A problem arises when he doesn't have enough information to amplify your instructions to his workers (perhaps the greens are cut when you want them watered). You know what you want to pass to your crew, but the crew chief doesn't get the exact message to his workers. This is common in American business. It frustrates and slows team building.

Be specific in passing information down the chain of command. Allow room in instructions for amplification so exact tasks are performed.

Equally harmful is the "good news syndrome" in upward communication.

Subordinates, particularly new employees, often filter bad news as they pass it to the manager. For instance, you ask one of your men about the condition of a green. He says, "we've got it under control." He might be meaning "we cut it too short,

burned the grass with a hot application, and the mowing tractor dug up all the greens."

The employee may have the situation under control, but what he's telling you isn't what you need to know.

The "good news syndrome" occurs in almost all forms of business. Be aware of this with new employees. They don't want to look bad. That's human. They may not know what you expect from a communication standpoint. That's your fault.

Take time to establish communication procedures so everyone—from the manager to the grounds workers—speaks the same language.

A feedback system

Many communication problems can be solved with a feedback system. Managers who don't have the time to give feedback to their employees deserve whatever they get.

Here are some general thoughts on

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feedback that might help in putting a real team together:

- Feedback isn't good or bad—it's simply a process. Some managers make the mistake of thinking feedback is given only when something

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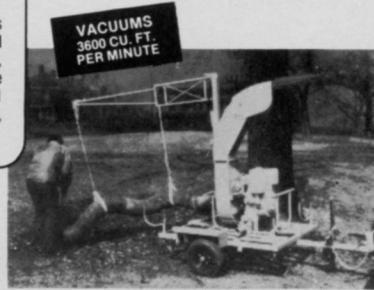
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good is done. Feedback needs to be given no matter what.

- The more often you give feedback to your employees, the better team you'll be building. You don't have to do this every five minutes, but in a real team feedback is a constant process.

- If you aren't getting feedback from your employees, ask for it. It's the manager's job to make the feedback system happen. If you aren't getting and giving it, you aren't managing properly.

- Feedback must be given on a timely basis. If you are giving positive or negative feedback, it should be given as close to the actual event as possible. Don't wait three weeks to tell someone they did a good or bad job.

- Lateral feedback is important. Within a solid team, members will give each other feedback. They don't wait for the manager to be the only one. This is lateral feedback and it means more, in many cases, than a manager's feedback.

- You have to manage your team so that they give lateral feedback. The manager is responsible for making it happen.

- You have to be aware of the key times for feedback. If your team is doing a particularly tough job, if they're doing a job that needs constant monitoring, or if you see that their energy level is low, communicate with your team.

- Remember that you, as team manager, will probably get less positive feedback from your team members than you'll give them. You have to be strong enough to go without positive feedback and still motivate your team. Team managers make the team work up to its potential without expecting a lot of praise from others.

Making it happen

Teams are special entities. They require hard work and commitment on the part of the managers. A lot of managers decide to call their group a team until they find out how hard it is to correctly manage a team.

Your choice is simple. If you're willing to work hard to build a team, have enough energy and confidence to lead a team, and are willing to pay the price to make the team work, you can have a team atmosphere in your organization.

While a lot of people talk about having a team, very few actually are good enough managers to make it happen. How about you?

WT&T