



WORKINGSMARTER

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You are what you communicate

Companies that are working smarter know the importance of sharing information in positive and productive ways. As soon as you finish this article, I suggest you take a walk around your company. Go ahead — it's just an investment of a couple of minutes, but it might give you some insights that could save you hours.

As you walk, ask yourself "What are we communicating to the rest of the team?" Your answer might fall into one of these categories:

1. "Nothing, unless old dusty workers' compensation certificates and a 2005 vendor calendar count." Actually, you are communicating *something*; you are telling your team that they are not important enough to share information with, and that you are not organized enough to have anything to share.

2. "We tell them just what we think they should know." You might be putting up a schedule board that tells them where they are going today and for whom they are working. You might also be putting up some signs that have phrases that begin "Anyone caught . . ."; "Stop doing . . ."; "Don't park on the . . ." and "You can no longer . . ." The negative messages and marching orders for the day seem to say "Welcome to San Quentin."

3. "We are having some success." If you are in this category, you are beginning to share some of the obvious and fundamental things. These include time without accidents, customer compliments and possibly even sales goals. You also might be posting budgeted hours, and letting the crews post their actual hours next to them. There also might be some reminders of equipment maintenance schedules or uniform deliveries taped up in the production area, and everyone knows when the next company outing is taking place.

4. "There is a commitment to clarity." There is a common area that everyone knows to go to get the information they need to make decisions and do

their jobs effectively. Charts and measurements are capturing the attention of people like a scoreboard at an NBA game. The pictures of this month's projects are securely placed, with some sense of order, on the team bulletin board. There are process maps and written instructions that allow people to clearly understand things that need explanation. Just by glancing around, you might see a commitment to continuous improvement by the learning opportunities listed somewhere, or explanations of new ideas that are being implemented. Another thing to look for is explanations of processes and the opportunity to improve them. Process maps and big white boards with plenty of markers generally are great indicators of innovative companies looking for new ideas.

Talking back

Now that the categories are presented, consider what the attitude of the employees might be like for each one:

1. "This is just a job until something better comes along."
2. "I'll do just enough to keep my job, but will do a little less whenever I can."
3. "I'll do the best I know how to do." (They realize there is a connection between their performance and the results being measured and communicated.)
4. "I have the information I need to be successful and have a positive impact on the company."

This last category is where every company wants to position themselves. There is an energy that comes from innovation and creativity. And when information is shared, people feel confident in their ideas and abilities.

You might already know what you will see in your journey around the company, but I challenge you to take the stroll anyway. If you feel a little discouraged by what you see (or don't see), just take some simple steps to change it. If you are excited with what you see, take some simple steps to keep improving upon it.

MONTHLY CHALLENGE

Create a communication board that will share some positive information with your team.