



Focus

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Tips for Dealing with a Boss Who is a Poor Communicator

Some leaders are poor communicators, even when they are effective in other leadership areas. Setting aside personal animus or other conscious reasons to mis-communicate, poor communicators may just be disorganized. Or, they may assume they have communicated when they (themselves) just think about a subject. *I thought, therefore I did.* Strange, but true!

Work life gets particularly frustrating when your direct supervisor does not keep you advised of information necessary to carry out your job. Effectively dealing with this situation requires a mix of tact and skillful manipulation of people and the work environment.

You have two basic means of correction if your boss falls short in communicating with you and/or your team.

The first is a direct approach: address the issue head-on (but respectfully and in a solution mode) and suggest possible ideas that you think would be agreeable to your boss.

If you think your boss is unlikely to change behavior based on your efforts at verbal persuasion, a second choice is to tweak the working environment in a way that naturally encourages better communication.

Since this is the more challenging situation, the balance of this article involves this second option.

Make it Easy.

Recall the “stamped self-addressed envelope” technique to encourage snail mail replies and apply that principle to your work environment.

Set up an email distribution list or create a group email address for the team. That way, communication with one will get to everyone. *Normally, superfluous/unnecessary email (cc overload) is a bad idea, but we’re addressing a different issue here.*

Notify everyone on your team of critical information. Don’t assume that your boss will tell people what they need to know. This can be a simple matter of summarizing what your boss

people what they need to know. This can be a simple matter of summarizing what your boss has told you and emailing it to the entire team, including your boss. Your boss then has an opportunity to clarify things if you misunderstood something, or he/she changed their mind.

Tweak the Environment

Carry out weekly meetings with your team/co-workers and email your boss meeting notes that highlight key decisions, needs, or plans. In addition to any specific requests – which are probably being made anyway – end the email with an invitation to respond or ask something like, “These are our plans for the week. Is there anything you’re aware of that might affect them?” or “Is there anything you know that we need to consider?” *The assumption here is that your boss is **not** meeting regularly with his or her direct reports; otherwise, you can ask these questions during the weekly meetings.*

Get your boss to commit to an easy-to-do task that offers the chance for conversation. This might be a 5-minute standing team huddle or dropping by a celebration or regular recognition ceremony. Make this something your boss *enjoys*; otherwise, it won’t work.

For example, carry out in person or by group email a recap of non-work events, like opinions on sporting events (“Can you believe the Saints traded Bubba Leroy for Jim Bob!?”) or hunting or fishing or some other topic of general interest to your boss and the team.

Make the Invisible Visible

Look for striking ways to illustrate the consequences of poor communications, but without criticizing your boss, directly or by implication. Just show consequences.

Contrasting can be helpful here. Use examples of what is working well to highlight, by implication, undesirable communication behaviors. For example, “We discovered that on-time delivery improved 20% when a copy of a customer purchase order was sent to operations as soon as the accounting group received it.”

Finally, if any Bosses reading this suspect you might have some communication misfires in your organization, do yourself and your followers a favor by working on yourself first.

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