

Compass

Good communication is key to good management

A leader often has to be the best listener in the room. Keeping communication flowing between members of a work team should be a priority for a manager or supervisor.

If communication starts to break down among team members, they may lose valuable time sorting through misunderstandings and conflicts. This of course leads to reduced overall productivity. It's the manager's job to actively listen to all perspectives and get the group to agree on solutions that can move the unit toward its goals.

This month's *Compass* edition examines:

- How the techniques of active listening can help a manager validate team members' ideas and build trust.
- Ways to start getting team communication back on track if it has deteriorated.
- Ideas on improving teamwork so that the group works well together and obtains positive results.

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Active listening enhances collaboration

Although we all think we listen well to others, that is not always the case. Leaders can always improve their listening skills, which in turn help work teams collaborate on solutions and move forward. Here are some tips.

- Listen actively by putting aside your views, and really listen to team members. Even if you disagree, give your full attention and listen to their views.
- Allow team members to complete their statements. Wait until they finish their points before you respond.
- Validate team members' input. Show speakers that you're listening to their points. Validating helps people feel confident in contributing their ideas.
- Act on the input you've received. You'll earn the trust of your team members if they can count on you to follow through with implementing the solutions they've recommended.

Getting communication back on track

A work team performs at its best when everyone is on the same page, working toward common goals, and communicating openly. But what do you do when communication within the team has deteriorated? Here are some ideas on repairing the flow of communication.

Promote an open forum

Let your employees know that you value their opinions. Maintain an open-door policy so that team members know they come to you with their concerns at any time. Avoid being critical when someone has a brainstorm; encourage team members to share ideas.

Be clear with expectations

Make sure all team members have clear job descriptions and evaluation criteria so they know what is expected of them. In team meetings, review the goals for the year and provide status reports on the team's progress.

Provide individual encouragement

If an individual on the team seems to have become isolated or disengaged, reach out and provide positive support. Solicit that person's ideas in meetings, set up a one-on-one meeting with him or her, and restate your understanding of their views to show that you value their input.

Repair a conflict

If a personality conflict or disagreement has damaged your relations with a team member, step back and seek a solution. Approach him or her and strike up an informal dialogue on topics that are likely to resonate with the person. By taking the first step—as a leader—you can pave the way toward improved collaboration.

Keep Things Positive

Encourage a supportive, constructive environment among team members. Discourage gossip and negative talk about any individual. When necessary, remind everyone that they're on the same team.

Promoting better teamwork

Keep the dialogue open—Always work on building relationships with the individuals on your staff. Get to know them well and show interest in their accomplishments.

Steer toward the positive—A positive work environment greatly enhances productivity. Encourage more positive comments than negative comments in team meetings.

Seek mutually satisfying solutions—Whenever possible, seek unanimous agreement on decisions.

Recognize accomplishments—If team members go the extra mile to contribute, be sure to praise them.

Build team spirit—Take some time to engage your group in team building activities.

