

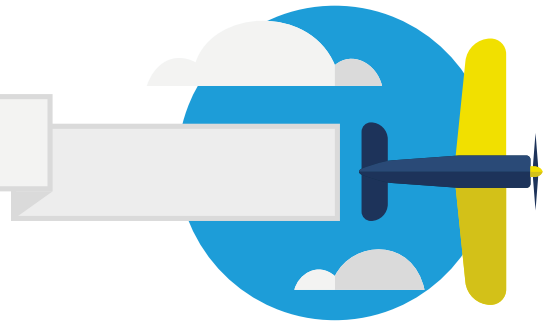
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10 tips for effective line manager communication

Gatehouse's Chris Atkinson doesn't pull any punches with this call to action for line managers.

When it comes to communication most line managers are quite lazy!

Most line managers simply reply on e-mails, meetings or notice boards to ensure their team have the information they need. Worse still, others assume if their team have any concerns or questions they will ask for the information they need. Ultimately most organisations have little or no awareness of just how costly this issue is.

I'm always reminded of:

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

- George Bernard Shaw

We know engagement is a critical topic for organisational performance.



Aon Hewitt publishes an annual report called **Trends in Global Engagement**. It includes a massive 6.7 million employees and represents more than 2,900 organisations. They found organisations with high levels of engagement “outperform the

average company on revenue growth (6 percentage points), operating margin (4 percentage points) and total shareholder return (6 percentage points).” Conversely, “bottom quartile engagement companies perform worse than average on all financial indicators”.

“Line manager communication is much more than a ‘soft’ issue. It has a direct and profound impact on the productivity, engagement and performance of your workforce.”

So what drives employee engagement?

Factors such as opportunities for growth, freedom, organisational culture and organisational reputation all play a part, but one factor is more influential than the others – the relationship the employee has with their line manager.

This is why line manager communication is much more than a ‘soft’ issue. It has a direct and profound impact on the productivity, engagement and performance of your workforce.

Here are my top 10 tips for line manager communication:

1. Make time – In a fast-paced world, communication often gets prioritised a long way below other commercial

issues. This is a huge mistake, you must start to put employee communications above other seemingly more pressing demands. Blocking time in your diary is for many managers the only way this happens.

2. Take time – It’s not enough to make the time in our diaries if we feel rushed or hurried when we speak with people. Communication isn’t like a manufacturing process where you look to constantly speed up performance and efficiency. Good communication isn’t always efficient because it has such a strong emotional component. Have the patience to take the time it needs.

3. Face-to-face wins, every time – There is no debate or contest when it comes to line manager communication.

Every time you send an e-mail instead of talking to someone, you are choosing to diminish your relationship in order to feel like you are being efficient. In the long run, you are being far from efficient.

4. Communicate more than metrics – Look at most of the communications you deliver. This includes e-mails, meeting agendas, phone calls etc. I would almost guarantee that 80% or more is exclusively about targets, reports, KPIs or organisational measures. Of course these things are important, but actually they aren’t what really matters to people. Start focusing more of your communications on the experience of work that the team are having and the reasons why the work is important.

5. Have unusual meetings – All teams get meeting fatigue from having the same meeting with the same topics over and over again. Start to shake things up, run meetings in different locations, perhaps run meetings without slides or run a meeting with a totally radical agenda which is far from the norm.

6. Show (positive) emotions – We are seemingly sanitising organisational communications such that content is delivered through technology with no evidence of feeling. You may see occasional outbursts of anger or frustration in your organisation but when was the last time you saw a line manager speak with genuine passion or enthusiasm? When was the last time you felt inspired listening to a colleague?

7. Know their vision – Your people are working every day for you and for the organisation. They have a destination or dream in mind. Unless you know what that dream is, you will stand little or no chance of motivating the person. So spend significant time listening to their vision for their future, ask questions,

show interest, and encourage them to describe what they hope for in the future. This is not a five minute chat; this is a deep, personal and powerful conversation that will build trust.

8. Communicate the roadmap – Most likely, their aspirations extend beyond their current role or even your team. Once you've found out their vision, make sure you communicate how the work they are doing can be a vehicle to take them towards their ambition. The closer the link between their activities and their future, the stronger their motivation will be!

9. Play to strengths – Here is a simple observation: people enjoy spending time doing things they are good at. We often see people volunteering for tasks or roles that give no additional financial reward, why? Because it's fun, they enjoy it and that's satisfying for people. If a person isn't naturally picking up a particular skill, stop giving them that task, find alternatives for them until you see them flourish.

10. Give personal recognition – In this context, the word 'personal' doesn't just mean giving it personally (i.e. face-to-face) it also means giving recognition about the person as an individual. You need to understand that saying 'thank you' isn't giving recognition, it's just common courtesy. The power of recognition is telling someone that you recognise a personal quality or talent that they have, something that is uniquely them which you value.



Biography:
Chris Atkinson

Chris Atkinson leads Gatehouse's Elements of Engagement development programme for line managers and leaders. He travels extensively worldwide specialising in engagement, organisational culture and inspiring leadership. Over the last 14 years, Chris has worked in more than 20 countries with 43 different nationalities.

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