

# **SIGMA**

## **Leadership Series**



**Great Leaders  
Communicate**



## GREAT LEADERS COMMUNICATE

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

— George Bernard Shaw

The ability to communicate effectively is essential for successful leaders. These individuals keep direct reports and fellow leaders up to date on important organizational information. Information is often filtered down by leaders to the general employees, starting at the top of the organization with strategic planning. That's why leaders need strong communication skills. In addition, the way information is shared shapes whether employees see those changes as fair. Effective communicators know how to frame messages so they're received positively.

**Communication** involves the exchange of information. As a workplace-relevant trait, communication is the process of keeping direct reports and leaders informed about the decisions, events, and developments that affect them. Effective communicators do not share all information with all employees, but rather, are skilled at directing information to the individuals who need it.

### Are You a Good Communicator?

In assessing your ability to communicate effectively, ask yourself the following questions:

- Am I effective at sharing information with the right people?
- Do I tell my employees about relevant decisions or events before they take effect?
- Am I honest and understanding when communicating with my employees?
- Do I update employees during times of change or uncertainty?
- Do I provide my employees with information as I receive it?
- Have I explained the rationale for decisions?

### Improve Your Communication Skills

**Understand the importance.** It's easy to overlook how much communication matters, but not all communication is equal. Effective leader communication has been related to high employee commitment during times of change, low rates of employees wishing to leave the organization, and high performance.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> Communication can also be related to a number of other leader characteristics, including conflict resolution and persuasiveness.

**Remember that communication is a two-way street.** Although it is often up to a leader to relay news to their colleagues and direct reports, good communicators should also be good listeners. By listening carefully to employees, leaders can develop a better understanding of who they are working with and can use this knowledge later when communicating tough decisions or changes. People generally like good listeners, so employees may be more receptive to hearing from leaders if they have had positive interactions with them in the past.

**It's not just what you say, it's how you say it.** There is no shortage of suggestions for how leaders should behave when communicating with employees. Overusing tips can actually backfire. The most important thing to remember is that good communicators appear honest and sincere. Attempting to apply too many tips can come across as rigid or awkward, which may affect how your message is interpreted.

## Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Communicate More Effectively

The following steps can help you become better at communication:

1. **Be calm while communicating.** Research has shown that when attempting to get an employee to accept a decision, the most effective tactics include presenting a logical argument and providing factual evidence. This does not mean being emotionless; leader enthusiasm can increase positive reactions. Just remember, the least effective methods of communication include appearing demanding or menacing, and using authority as the reason why employees should accept your decisions.<sup>4</sup>
2. **Actively share information.** For leaders looking to implement difficult decisions or changes, early communication is key. Leaders should make employees aware of potential issues that will affect their unit. A good policy to remember is to share early and often. Updates are as important as the initial communication of information. Employees will lose trust if they perceive their leader as withholding or concealing.
3. **Ensure the accuracy of information shared.** This can be a fine line. While leaders should try to update their employees often, they should also ensure they share information that is validated. Leaders who begin rumors will be seen as unreliable, while those who withhold information for too long will be seen as secretive. Either situation could result in employees losing trust in their leaders. Updating employees often will reduce this problem, especially when leaders clarify when a situation is still ongoing or uncertain. By keeping employees informed along the way, they will trust that their leader shares what they know, when they know it.

## Assess Communication With the LSP-R®

The [Leadership Skills Profile – Revised® \(LSP-R\)](#) is a personality-based leadership assessment that measures 50 core competencies, including Communication. The assessment can be administered online in 25 minutes, and comes with an automatically generated Focus Report, including scores, personalized feedback, and templates for creating competency-based leadership development plans (view a [sample Focus Report](#)).

### LSP-R® Free Trial

*See how you score on COMMUNICATION.*

Experience the LSP-R for yourself and see how you score on Communication. Receive customized feedback and templates for creating a personalized action plan. Take 25 minutes and experience the impact that data-driven personality insights can have.

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## Learn More



[What is Organizational Communication?](#)



[Why Communication is Today's Most Important Skill](#)



Develop leadership competencies with SIGMA's one-hour, high-impact [Leadership Development Workshops](#), led by our experienced coaches.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Luo, W., Song, L. J., Gebert, D. R., Zhang, K., & Feng, Y. (2016). How does leader communication style promote employees' commitment at times of change? *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 29, 242-262.
- <sup>2</sup> Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (2007). The effects of leader communication on a worker's intent to stay: An investigation using structural equation modeling. *Human Performance*, 20, 85-102.
- <sup>3</sup> Sagie, A. (1996). Effects of leader's communication style and participative goal setting on performance and attitudes. *Human Performance*, 9, 51-64.
- <sup>4</sup> Yamaguchi, I. (2009). Influences of organizational communication tactics on trust with procedural justice: A cross-cultural study between Japanese and American workers. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 33, 21-31.