

What Do Employees Expect from Their Leaders? *The Leader's Voice*

Leaders must demonstrate their abilities to communicate, develop employees, manage change, offer strategic leadership and vision, and the most important of these is communication. It is also the skill where often the widest gap exists between the leader's perception of success and the constituent's perception. In fact, according to the Tompeters! company, a prominent business consulting firm, the biggest problem with leadership communication is the illusion that it has actually occurred. Boyd Clarke and Ron Crossland of Tompeters! conducted the February 20, 2003, CTN broadcast entitled, "What Do Employees Expect from Their Leaders? The Leader's Voice," which examined the leadership communication process and offered concrete tips for greater effectiveness.

Clarke and Crossland point out that 71% of people who quit their jobs do so because of the relationship with their manager or their manager's manager, and the majority of those people pinpoint poor communication as the chief issue. After more than 12 years of research in leadership communication, Clarke and Crossland have identified three channels of communication that leaders must employ to most effectively get their message across honestly, passionately and professionally. The three channels are: factual, emotional, and symbolic communication. The leader's voice cannot, and must not, separate the logical, rational message from the emotional message and delivery.

Factual Communication Channel

Clarke and Crossland say that while facts and data may be critical to the message they need not be delivered in a boring fashion. They say audiences want logic and organization – rather than facts alone, they want an interpretation of the data. They suggest leaders make data come alive by connecting the data to images or stories that give the listener points of reference with which to relate the information.

Emotional Communication Channel

According to Clarke and Crossland, we follow leaders because of the way they make us feel. Constituents want to know that the leader understands their feelings, and they also want to know how the leader truly feels. There are a variety of emotions to draw from, and it is this visceral emotion – or passion – that gives power to communication.

Symbolic Communication Channel

Stories help us digest information and create mental images that help us remember. Today, business executives and platform speakers know the value of story telling, metaphors, analogies and other literary imagery to make messages stick in the minds of their audiences. Clarke and Crossland say that stories inherently connect the three communication channels – facts, emotions and symbols or detail, dialogue and drama – to create memorable mental pictures.

When a leader successfully employs these three communication channels, it creates "the leader's voice" and it becomes the voice of the organization – a voice that gives meaning and direction and builds relationships with its employees.