



# Entrepreneur Incubator

## Reference Article

---

### Get The Message?

*These tips will help you touch base with your employees consistently and effectively, and improve the way your entire business works.*

Of all the obstacles business owners hurdle every day, one of the most problematic is communicating with employees. The way a message should be delivered, whom it should be delivered to, what it says and the best time to deliver it all factor into whether the message will be understood or adhered to. Being in charge of an organization doesn't automatically keep you from being concerned about sending a message, especially if it's negative. But if sending negative messages causes you anxiety, take comfort in this: Most employees say they would rather receive bad news from their boss than no news at all. That's because not knowing what the boss thinks causes an employee a great deal of anxiety. This uncertainty can lead to errors, decreased morale, low productivity, absenteeism and turnover.

To immediately improve the quality of employee communication, follow these ten steps:

#### 1) **Be negative privately and positive publicly.**

Praising employees around others, especially in a meeting, shows you are kind and smart enough to recognize achievements in others. They will work hard to gain positive feedback from you. People thrive on feedback, especially when it's positive. Negative feedback, however, should be given privately. Many communicators, especially bosses, erroneously believe that if they embarrass or criticize someone publicly, they will be seen as powerful and astute. Unfortunately, these communicators are usually seen negatively by the audience, while the recipient of the criticism becomes a martyr, unnecessarily embarrassed in front of peers.

#### 2) **Don't yell**

Raising your voice simply communicates that you're unable to maintain self-control. The recipient usually becomes defensive, doesn't hear the message and often walks away upset. The thrust of the message, identifying an incorrect or unacceptable action, for example, doesn't get through to the recipient.

#### 3) **Be specific, not general**

Too often, bosses advise employees with generalities like "Do a good job or better job," or "Make fewer mistakes". But these statements are so vague they're meaningless. To be effective, each message needs to be concrete. There's nothing wrong with saying, "Do a better job", if you follow up with a concrete explanation of what can be improved and what you'd like to see instead. Be genuine when giving feedback, especially when it's positive. If you can't bring yourself around to verbally praising someone, then send them a note or an email.

#### 5) **Communicate often**

It only takes a moment to touch base. Some messages are brief by nature – others take more time. The key here is to make the effort to communicate as



## Entrepreneur Incubator Reference Article

---

often as possible so that your employees know what's on your mind and they can see you as approachable.

### 6) **Be positive first**

Especially when you need to deliver negative feedback, start your message with a positive statement. Because everyone seeks reinforcement, this will open their ears. Then make the necessary negative statement, ensuring that it is specific and clear.

### 7) **Talk about change if it is needed**

Conclude with an explanation of how you'd like the situation to be different. This can be an idea you come up with, an idea the recipient is challenged to create or something you will both work on.

### 8) **Find something good to say to everyone**

A simple positive statement – short or long – can tell someone he or she is doing a good job. It only takes a few seconds to do this, but the effect can last a long time. Morale, productivity and employee satisfaction improve when the boss provides positive feedback.

### 9) **Listen first, then comment**

Before providing feedback, especially if it's negative, ask the individual involved for his or her version of the story. This input may change your view and your comments. In any case this gives the individual the opportunity to make a statement and be heard by you. This goes a long way to ensuring that the recipient will listen to what you will say and act on it.

### 10) **Do it early**

Don't wait for the annual review or 'when you get around to it' to provide feedback. People need to know how you evaluate their performance. Whether someone succeeds or fails in their duties, let that person know it as soon as possible. Giving feedback doesn't need to be a long, drawn-out process.

*By Dr. David Javitch, an organizational psychologist, author, keynote speaker and consultant on key management and leadership issues.*

Taken from *Entrepreneur* magazine, July 2008