



connections

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Communication: Being heard and being valued

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I'm a bit of a people- and process- observer. I love to look at what's going on at an event, in a meeting, at an organisation; what's being said, the way it's being said, what's **not** being said; see who's talking to whom openly or whispering to the sides. I check out all the non-verbal communication; watch positions and postures; you name it; I love to soak in all that communication that goes on.

It gives me a real buzz.

So often when I observe this communication I'm reminded of the importance of people wanting to feel heard, and from that, feel validated and valued. I think the good old traditional staff meeting or the board/committee meeting are two situations where this can be observed as being either skilfully and honourably present or disappointingly – and maybe devastatingly – absent.

The below list seems obvious but stop and think for a moment, have you been in a meeting or group discussion and noticed any of the listed aspects? Was it good or could it have been better?

How would an observer describe your meetings? Would they see:

Sometimes the sense of not feeling heard or valued can be quite subtle or come about quite unintentionally:

Case Study:

A service underwent a lengthy consultative processes relating to changes that were not long coming. At the end of the process, decisions were made and the required changes were communicated to the staff for implementation. Sarah became just short of irate because the director didn't make their decision in favour of what Sarah was wanting and what she'd expressed through the consultative process.

What was missing?

Being consulted does not equal being agreed with; this needed to be explained to Sarah. What the director missed out doing was explaining that decisions would be made based on the overall view and recommendations that emerged from the service-wide consultation. The director could have done more to help Sarah, and others who felt similarly, to feel heard and valued. Not the least being, communicating a broader explanation of the process, including **how** the decisions will be made.

Positive Communication: People feeling heard and valued

- ✓ Everyone listening
- ✓ One person speaking at a time
- ✓ Asking questions for information
- ✓ Asking questions for clarification
- ✓ Asking one question at a time and listening to the answer
- ✓ Encouraging discussions
- ✓ Asking / Encouraging the more quiet participants for their input
- ✓ Open body language

Poor Communication: People feeling disrespected, ignored and not valued

- ✗ Power plays based on ego
- ✗ Opinion battles
- ✗ Emotional over-attachment
- ✗ Emotional detachment
- ✗ Talking over each other
- ✗ 'My way or the highway' attitude
- ✗ Defensive / Blocking body language
- ✗ Aggression / Bullying

When we take the time to listen, ask questions, explain processes fully, and encourage discussion we open the doors wide for so much productivity, efficiency and opportunity. For some that may take a whole new approach to communicating but it's worth it. The benefits will outweigh the effort. Some of those benefits include:

- ✓ **Ideas generation**
→ saving time, resources and money
- ✓ **Cost effective solutions to ongoing problems** → saving money
- ✓ **Increased levels of mutual respect**
→ less costly staff turnover
- ✓ **Stronger team bonding**
→ less costly staff turnover
- ✓ **Improved general understanding of each team member** → saving time, resources and money and less costly staff turnover
- ✓ **Decreased error rates**
→ saving money

These are real benefits.

It takes effort and time. Yes, there's no getting around it, it takes your time.

Setting clear agendas and sticking to them, and having mutually agreed meeting ground rules will contribute to managing some of the time constraints. Face to face group meetings may not suit all people all the time: try online or paper surveys, one-on-one 5 minute catch ups, post ideas sheets on staff room noticeboards, just to name a few. You could start by asking the team what is the best way for the team to communicate.

As cliché as it sounds, employees really are a service's best asset. I hate the idea of calling people assets like they are the same as the tables and chairs but it's the intent that's important. When time is invested in the people, when communication is positive and people are being heard and hence feel valued, the return on the investment is untold in terms of benefits.

Sally fast tracks productivity! She empowers people to be conscious of their thinking and actions: to be strong, authentic and confident in their roles. Sally is the skill-builder who gets people ready to build their own management and leadership legacy from day one.

She's worked with people at all levels, across a range of industries, and she brings diverse experiences to her training, coaching and speaking influenced by having lived in Germany, outback Queensland, the United Arab Emirates and now living in Sydney, Australia. ■



Take the time to listen,
ask questions,
explain, and
encourage discussion.