

How to Avoid Organizational Miscommunication

By Jennifer Privitera

There are many resources available today regarding the importance of business communication – what it is, what it means and how to do it properly. I am certain all casino executives would agree that effective internal communication is one of the most important factors in maintaining a sustainable competitive advantage.

EmailLabs.com agrees. It reports that a recent Watson Wyatt study found that “companies with highly effective internal communications capabilities posted shareholder returns over a five-year period that were 57 percent higher than those of companies that communicated less effectively” with their employees. Watson Wyatt is a global human resources and financial consultant.

While there is no shortage of information telling you how to achieve and maintain effective communication, often the best lessons are learned from knowing what not to do.

Do Not Say “Yes” to E-Mail

The invention of e-mail met with loud cheers and the tippity tap of fingers on billions of keyboards around the world. E-mail communication has increased to a rate of approximately 304 business and 274 personal e-mails per person weekly, according to David Daniels, vice president and research director at JupiterResearch, a firm that studies the impact of the Internet. This means we spend a LOT of time writing, reading and responding to e-mail.

E-mail is often perceived as a productive and convenient form of communication, although it may take five e-mails to complete the task of one five-minute phone call. Casino employees often send an e-mail in lieu of “live” communication. It’s an incredibly safe way for the sender to bring up issues that may be challenging or

difficult. E-mail may be more comfortable for you to use, but it often clouds the waters and creates confusion.

How many times have you read an e-mail and felt the sender was angry or snippy? How often do you exchange e-mails without any questions or need for clarification? E-mail communication lacks the auditory and visual cues that help the recipient understand the message's context. E-mail also eliminates opportunities for feedback and idea sharing. When you have a question, concern or comment, pick up the phone! It will save you a lot of time and energy and create a feeling of camaraderie that brightens your day.

Your Mouth Says “Yes” But Your Eyes Say “No”

Do not rely on words alone in your communication. A hand on your hip may indicate irritation. Standing with arms crossed before you may mean you are “closed off” and not willing to listen. Your body language must be consistent with your message or you will undoubtedly give the wrong impression.

Body language, including facial expressions, helps clarify and create effective communication. From infancy, humans gain a high level of understanding through basic body language. You knew when your mother was mad because of her facial expression and the tense way she held her body. Your mother knew when you were happy by your smile and the movements of your arms and legs. Body language creates a clear understanding before words are spoken.

When you are discussing an issue with a colleague, meeting with your executive team or presenting at NIGA, relax, speak carefully and slowly and make eye

contact to assure your message is understood. The use of consistent body language will help you get the message across accurately.

But I Thought We Were On the Same Page

We all know the undesirable outcomes of assuming. Movie plot lines are carried by the assumptions of the hilarious and entertaining characters. Never assume that communication has happened. It is vital that the speaker and listener ask questions and gain feedback to confirm mutual understanding.

Also, do not rely on jargon to highlight your communications. I attended a business seminar and the speaker was exceptionally fond of common, overused jargon. I cannot recall the topic of the seminar, but I do know that he said “at the end of the day,” “fire away” and “out of the box” at least 50 times combined. I ended up counting his use of these terms rather than absorbing information. The seminar was memorable, but not effective. It was certainly a clear message of what not to do.

The National Department of Redundancy Department

Redundant communication fails to produce desirable results. It is not productive to state your message over and over. Your listener will most assuredly become confused and have no idea what you’re trying to say.

Once it is said, put it to bed. Listeners will thank you. This will be the best time to absorb the information, ask questions and provide you with valuable feedback. If you are not sharing ideas clearly, seeking input and receiving feedback, you are not communicating.

“Blamestorming”

A meeting is called and everyone knows it won't be pretty. Your casino's guest feedback is negative and revenues are down. During this meeting, no ideas will be shared and no strategies will be formed. It is simply a gathering to discuss shortfalls. "Blamestorming" is a common occurrence that is completely ineffective. It creates hard feelings, discourages communication and damages employee morale. Maintaining an environment of open communication, acceptance and active participation will lead your casino to greater success and give employees the motivation to excel.

Miscommunication is an unfortunate byproduct of common business practices that are inappropriate, overused or completely ineffective. "If you communicate what you intended to communicate, you earn the access to the discretionary energy of employees," says Francie Dalton, president of Dalton Alliances, a consultant in the communication, management and behavioral sciences. "Discretionary effort includes what employees don't have to give you but could: initiative, working late ... creativity and more." The discretionary effort of your employees is what will place your casino ahead of the competition. The outcome of effective communication will be seen in your casino's reduced employee turnover, increased guest and employee advocacy and increased profit.

Whether it's excessive use of e-mail, failure to gain feedback or perpetual use of meetings to spread negative energy, there are a remarkable number of lessons to be learned in observing communication strategies and learning what not to do.

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