

LEADERSHIP TR@CKS

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Can We Talk?

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This is not an idle question—it's the plaintive cry of the badly-managed worker in today's high-stress workplace. *Can we talk?* That's another way of asking: Can we share our ideas? Can we tell you what we think? Can we say what we're really feeling? *Will you listen to us?*

Getting the Right Message

Communication, it turns out, isn't just about leaders getting accurate information out to the troops—it's also about leaders getting accurate information *back*. So... how are *you* doing in this area? Are you confident that your people are telling you what you need to know? Are you sure you are getting all the information you need, to lead and manage well?

How's the Weather?

It all depends on what social scientists call the *communication climate* in your organization. *Climate* is a term we associate with weather, but I think it's a good word to use to describe the subtle *atmosphere* of your corporate and team culture.

Warm and Friendly...

Like the weather, a corporate culture permeates the environment in subtle, but strong and identifiable ways. Your people can quickly assess if they are working in a "communication-friendly" place, where their ideas and input are valued and given serious consideration.

Or Cold and Frosty?

They also know when they are following an authoritarian leader who isn't interested in their opinions. Their response will be pretty predictable—they will "bundle up" in a cold communication climate and close down the flow of information back to the top. Back to *you*.

YOU Decide!

As a leader, you have a major impact on the communication climate in your group; your team; your organization.

There are specific things you can do to either open the channels of communication or shut them down. Researchers have identified six main behaviors that affect communication climate. And you can use them to guide better communication with your people.

Judge or Describe?

Statements that offer blanket judgments don't help your people. "This report sucks" is the kind of talk that will shut them down. Statements that avoid judgment but offer descriptive details help your people respond positively and constructively: "This report doesn't have last year's production figures—we need them for comparison."

Control or Collaborate?

Do your statements communicate control? *Fire that person or I will!* Or do you send messages of collaboration? *You have a team member who is not performing well—what seems to be the problem?* As team members grow in their skill and effectiveness, they are less responsive to a controlling leadership style and more desirous of a collaborative approach.

Subterfuge or Honesty?

What are you doing next Saturday morning? That's a famous loaded question—a prelude to the assumption of availability for a 6:00 a.m. ride to the airport! Leaders with hidden motives teach their followers to weigh every word, and to keep silent unless absolutely necessary. In contrast, open, honest motives generate open, honest communication.

Indifference or Caring?

People today are looking for a "human connection" in the workplace. We all want to support leaders who really care about us as people. Managers who communicate empathy to their team members are much more likely to get complete and honest communication in return.

Prince or Peon?

We all understand the caste system in modern organizations, but nobody wants that reality rubbed in their face! Any message that implies *I'm better than you* shuts down constructive communication and collaboration. That leads us to number six...

Dogma or Theory?

My mind is made up—don't confuse me with the facts. Ever work for one of these? Did their know-it-all close-mindedness encourage you to share your ideas and opinions? I rest my case. Leaders who use provisional language appropriately—like *maybe, possibly, might, or perhaps*—encourage creative thinking, constructive criticism, and open debate.

Let the Sunshine In

Use these 6 behavior patterns to encourage a climate for open and honest communication—a setting where your team members are confident that you will listen with an open mind, a warm heart, and an encouraging word. And download the companion issue of *The Personal Trainer* for more details and practical helps.

Leadership Tracks is a resource for growing leaders edited by Dr. Jim Dyke, the Founder and Director of **Corporate Leadership Initiatives, Inc.**—an organization dedicated to equipping men and women with skills and principles pertinent to the role and life of a transformational leader of the 21st century. For more information, you can log on to the website at: www.CLionline.com and connect with additional practical and creative resources, including **The Personal Trainer**—a specially-designed tool for personal reflection and discussion that will help you and your team apply the ideas and principles presented in this newsletter. Copyright James R. Dyke 2020—all rights reserved.