

WELLBEING CONSULTING

Communicating Clearly to Build High-Trust, High-Performing Teams

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Communication can be a challenging aspect of life, impacting us at work and at home. Many personal relationships end due to poor communication. While the workplace is a different environment, the complexities of humans are still at play. The challenges people face with communication in their personal lives often surface in different but related ways at work. It takes intentional effort, and every individual brings different needs, preferences, and approaches to how they navigate conversations, express themselves, and interpret others.

At an organizational level, communication is a complex challenge. For teams, effective communication is often one of the biggest hurdles to productivity, alignment, and long-term success. Research shows that 86% of workplace failures are attributed to poor communication, highlighting just how central it is to organizational performance¹. Further, ineffective communication carries an economic cost: U.S. companies lose up to \$1.2 trillion annually due to productivity declines linked to communication breakdowns².

Employees acknowledge this gap, too. In our work with clients, communication and transparency consistently emerge as top areas of opportunity. Based on results from PartnerWell's Workforce Culture Survey, we often see employees give feedback that organizations could improve in their communication approaches. They want clearer information, more open dialogue, and leaders who communicate with intention and consistency. Lacking or poor communication can result in employees feeling stressed, disengaged, undervalued and confused. When communication is done well, employees feel connected and engaged. Communication is an important aspect of employee wellbeing, satisfaction, and engagement.

What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think about communication at work? Are you thinking of marketing materials and how topics are communicated throughout the organization? Or are you thinking about the ways teams communicate, build trust, understand each other's strengths and struggles, and navigate hard conversations? While both are very important, this article focuses more on the latter.

Where breakdowns exist.

According to Psychology Today, communication breakdowns at work typically fall into three categories: "the message, the relationship, or the process"³.

The message is really about the why.

If you cannot clearly articulate the why behind a message, it becomes extremely difficult to bring people along, no matter how important, well-planned, or beneficial that change or communication might be.

Even with the best intentions, messages can get twisted, misinterpreted, or filtered through people's own fears or assumptions ³. You may think you are being perfectly clear, but that does not mean employees are hearing what you intend.

Strong organizational communication means being clear about the why, being consistent, and staying focused on the core point. When these elements fall apart, that is when teams start to feel confused, resistant, or disconnected. Remember, it might take a few times to get the messaging right. It is okay to revisit the conversation, hear people's concerns, and keep talking about the message directly to make sure everyone is on the same page. We are human after all, and making mistakes while communicating is inevitable. The power of circling back is essential to acknowledge and ask questions to better understand where your listener is at, and to make sure you are aligned.

The relationship is really about trust.

Trust is the foundation of effective communication ³. Read more in our article on [psychological safety and transparency here](#).

If there is not a strong foundation of trust or a solid relationship in place, truly hearing a message becomes significantly harder. Even the most well-intentioned words may fall flat if people distrust the person delivering them. When communicating, it is important to consider: Who is the right person to convey this message? How well do you know the person you are speaking to? What do you understand about their communication style?

There are many types of communicators in the world. Developing a deep understanding of how you show up and how others prefer to receive information is critical to building trust and strengthening relationships. This self-awareness improves conversations and increases the likelihood that your message truly lands. A variety of communication training programs can support this growth. Courses like Fierce Conversations and tools such as DiSC help teams better understand individual styles and collaborate more effectively ^(4,5). Additionally, upskilling leaders on effective communication, delivering feedback, [meaningful recognition](#), and even [navigating change](#) can all play a critical role in enhancing overall communication skills.

The process is really about clarity ³.

The process needs to be clear, easy to follow, and designed in a way that creates space for questions and feedback, so everyone gains clarity as they move through it. Breaking the process into digestible steps helps people understand where they are headed and what to expect next. It also opens opportunities for individuals to ask questions along the way, ensuring that everyone stays aligned and on the same page. Another critical aspect to consider when thinking through the process is who you are bringing in to help make decisions along the way. Involving the team, having collaboration, and digging into a comprehensive dialogue with key stakeholders will make the process stronger and improve overall communication and adoption ¹.

Where to start?

We will never reach perfection with communication, but the goal is to start with intentionality.

One of the most effective ways to begin improving communication is with self-reflection. Gaining awareness and a deep understanding of how you show up sets a strong foundation. From there, bring this insight to your leadership team, explore how each of you communicates, identify strengths, and work to uncover any potential gaps. Then, extend this practice across the organization.

Interested in learning how to communicate clearly to build high-trust, high-performing teams? [Reach out to Hayley and Katie](#).

Citations:

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