



How Successful Leaders Communicate

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What do Mahatma Gandhi, Winston Churchill and Martin Luther King Jr. have in common?

Apart from being great leaders they also have great communication skills. And by good communication we don't mean only good oratory skills, though it's hard to imagine leaders who don't speak well, but a leader's communication skills are not just their public speaking skills.

All inspirational leaders use communication as a means to an end – to inspire, invoke trust, motivate, sell ideas and promote discipline, accountability and strategic alignment. Here are some of the important elements that successful leaders use for their communication to be successful.

They Invoke Trust

Rather than using fancy presentations or huge buzzwords leaders understand that they need to concentrate on connecting with the audience in a way that will appeal to their emotions and aspirations. It's only when leaders can ignite some underlying emotions that the employees will be willing to take risks and make the cause their own. Leaders also understand the need to be truthful in their communication irrespective of whether there is positive news or negative. The earnestness will be felt and appreciated by their teams.

They Adjust Their Style

Since leaders need to communicate with different stakeholders – employees, vendors, investors and clients among others, they need to adapt their style accordingly. A flamboyant presentation that works at a client meeting may not have the intended effect for an internal meeting with the employees. Meeting employees in smaller groups or even one-on-one could have a more desirable effect considering the situation on hand at that time. To meet the communication requirements of different groups an effective leader will use many means to communicate the same message so as to reach to all levels in the organisation.

They Focus On The Culture & Values Of The Audience

Good leaders make an effort to understand the culture and the value systems of the audience. To make sure their message reaches the audience as intended, this is a very important aspect. For example: the tone is extremely hard to judge across cultures. A leader who is appreciated for his slightly self-deprecating style of communication in one country may be considered highly offensive in another.

They Avoid The 'Say-Do' Gap

Once a leader 'walks the talk' his sincerity and truthfulness automatically comes across to the audience. Not only does this make him more trustworthy, but also endears him towards the employees. Imagine a situation where the organisation has not given salary increments to the employees due to budget constraints, but the senior leadership team continues to go to exotic locations for offsite meetings that can very well be done in office itself. Situations like these send across very conflicting messages to the team and can completely disillusion them.

They Are Aware Of Their Body Language

Our words account for only ten percent of the message that is finally conveyed to the audience. Now that is a very powerful statistic especially for leaders whose every action is constantly being scrutinized by the audience. Especially in this day and age of social media where often there are pictures of various heads of state catching a nap going viral by the minute. A leader's sincerity and passion for the cause he/she is talking about is conveyed from the stance, tone, body language that is projected.

They Keep It Simple

Leaders understand the beauty of simplicity while communicating. They understand that the audience is being bombarded with information and buzzwords, jargon or complicated language may lead to the main message being overlooked. Also while communicating with large groups the leaders are aware of the diversity amongst the employees or audience where each member has their own opinion and understanding of the issue at hand.

They Engage In A Conversation

Leaders know that to truly engage the audience they need to have a conversation rather than engage in a monologue. Once they probe, listen and ask questions they are able to establish a connection with the audience. It helps in getting buy-in for the future that others may not see. It also helps the leaders get diverse perspectives and helps reduce risk or any pitfalls in their vision. Connecting with the stakeholders has become easier today. With social media, blogs, video-messaging leaders can engage in meaningful conversation with the employees as well as the external world.

We can conclude by saying that the effective leaders are successful because they are able to get through to their teams.

They understand that communication of the purpose is one of the most essential foundations for success. Today leader have many more means to communicate with other stakeholders.

Be it via social media or face-to-face, it's important for the leader to use these various channels appropriately. Of course adapting to new technology for communication does come with some pitfalls as well – as every word, sentence or apostrophe gets analysed due to the mass media available.

Finally this quote sums up the importance of communication for leaders:

"The art of communication is the language of leadership." ~ James Humes

About MTD



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