

CEO TIPS FOR GETTING STAFF TO UNDERSTAND YOU

by Pamela A. Scott

This article is directed to the CEO, but it can help anyone in a management position communicate more clearly with staff.

Glenn, owner of a midsize professional services firm, describes his situation: “Every January I give a state of the company address to the troops. The usual stuff: how we did last year, where we’re going this year, how excited/optimistic/cautious I am about the future, and so on. And for the next 12 months, every year, managers and staff ask me where we’re going, how we’re doing, etc.

“What am I doing wrong? I keep telling them what they want to know, but nobody seems to get it.”

What’s Going On

This example demonstrates why communicating effectively is so tough. Think about these points.

Nobody—and I mean nobody—has the same perspective as the CEO. The CEO sees how myriad pieces come together. He or she is really alone in this position.

Managers have been told what’s going on, but they are human beings—they have their own concerns. They each have their own turf or silo to take care of and be held accountable for.

The general staff know what they do on a daily basis—get in by 8 a.m., out by 5:30 with luck, make calls, take care of the project, do good work. But they lose sight of the company’s strategic goals and plans for the future.

What To Do So They Get It

Start with asking yourself some critical audience analysis questions.

What do they (your managers, staff, and/or stockholders) . . .

- *Already know?*
- *Want to know?*
- *Not want to know?*
- *Need to know?*
- *Not need to know?*

When the CEO speaks, it’s like hearing the booming voice of the wizard in “The Wizard of Oz.” Everyone is wary. So the CEO has to think through the perspectives of everyone in the audience and figure out to deliver the message. This applies whether it is a small firm or a multistate firm with hundreds of employees.

No one can read minds. Clear communication from the CEO is absolutely essential for a firm to be successful.

The Challenges

When addressing a large, diverse group of people, you have multiple needs to meet.

1. Some listeners/readers want a history of how we got to where we are. This is a favored approach for many left-brained types. So, you tell your story from a chronological standpoint. “In 2012, we were here... In 2013, we...”

2. Upon hearing that, other folks will think, “Here we go again. Same old, same old.” And they will stop listening. These are likely the folks who want the big picture: “Where are we going in 2016? 2017? What new markets are we looking at? What new and exciting opportunities do we expect to find?” They are looking to the future and new possibilities.

3. You also have the group that wants to hear the logic behind these plans. This group can come across as challenging the CEO and his or her thinking. Their challenges can come across as micro-

managing or as if they think the CEO isn’t thorough in his or her thinking. For this group, the CEO needs to enlighten them on the thinking behind his or her decisions.

4. Then there are the folks who always want to know about the impact on the people.

What’s A CEO To Do?

Sit back and think about your audience and your message. Start with what you want the outcomes to be from your speech or presentation. Some call this reverse engineering; I think of it as starting from the end and working backwards.

To begin your message, set the framework for what you are going to talk about. For example, “I want to take the next 20 minutes to recap where we’ve been, where we are going this year, and what we expect a couple of years down the road.” I’m being very loose in my wording. You would be more specific in terms of “couple of years.”

Set the tone of the message. “Last year was a mediocre year. We’re expecting similar outcomes this year. However, we are putting things in place to ensure the firm grows in the next couple of years.” Keep it simple. Be specific. But this is not the place to quote your P&L.

Then tell them the story.

A. Since you have given a framework for your comments, which makes the folks in No. 2 above happy, you can go to No. 1 and give the history and financials.

B. Tell more now about the future and expectations. Remember to convey the logic behind your decisions to keep the folks in No. 3 above at bay.

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CLIENT ORGANIZATIONS: MAKING YOUR PROSPECTS WANT TO MEET YOU

An Excerpt from *Reputation Design+Build*

by Scott D. Butcher, FSMPS, CPSM

Business developers view client organizations as the holy grail of networking. Whereas participation in community groups may help foster relationships with a few key local decision-makers, and involvement in professional associations may lead to new teaming partners (or sub-consulting and sub-contracting commissions), active membership in client organizations can put you in regular direct contact with decision-makers in the industries you target.

That's why a lot of A/E/C firms are involved with the International Facilities Management Association (IFMA), Association of Facilities Engineers (AFE), Construction Owners Association of America (COAA), and APPA (formerly known as the Association of Physical Plant Administrators), among others. However, there is a fine line to walk in these organizations—you still need to provide value to the other members, and cannot ever come across as a leech that is only there to sell, sell, sell. Doing so is a sure-fire way to cause major damage to your reputation.

Don't join a client organization simply because you want to promote your company to the members. Join a client organization because you want to gain knowledge about the issues facing your clients, because you believe in the mission of the organization and will work to advance it, and because you are genuinely interested in developing relationships with other members of the organization.

Sometimes membership in these organizations falls under a category known as "affiliate," and there may be restrictions on how you can participate.

From the company level, it is important to exhibit at the organization's shows, advertise in the organization's newsletter, and sponsor the organization's meetings and events. These opportunities offer high visibility for your firm; however, the rubber really meets the road in the form of relationships. You can't rely on your company spending money but not personally getting involved.

If you want to build your reputation as an expert in a certain industry, active involvement in the related client organization is one way to elevate your credentials. As with other associations and societies, these organizations typically have local or regional chapters run entirely by volunteers. The chapter may have a board as well as several committees. Once you join an organization, find out where their needs are and volunteer to get involved.

Participation on the membership committee offers a great way to meet new people and get your name in front of the chapter's members through renewal letters, building your name recognition. Involvement on the program committee allows you to have some input, and even control, into the content and speakers at meetings. Serving on the sponsorship committee helps raise your visibility because you'll be out there, representing the client organization, and trying to raise funds for it. In the process of committee service, you'll also find that you are developing relationships with other committee members, and soon you'll be in regular contact with them between organizational meetings.

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C. Focus on the impact on your people, point No. 4 above. What opportunities do you expect? What new education or training can they take advantage of?

D. You've heard it before: Tell them what you told them. Recap, highlighting the points you most want them to remember. Listeners and readers always remember the last point they heard before they remember anything else you said. If you want to downplay information, put it in the middle of your speech.

The CEO as Storyteller

The CEO needs to be the Chief Storyteller. Take time to craft a story that conveys your message in a way that your staff can understand.

Remember: Numbers may drive the business, but people drive the numbers. ●

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i 59%...

the percentage of employees who are engaged in their work as a result of their managers also being engaged in their work, according to a Gallup Report entitled *State of the American Manager*.