



# Communicate Meaning

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The First Critical Behavior is Communicating Meaning—what's that mean?

# Communicate Meaning

- Make the important things clear
- Make the meaning of the organization clear through the mission and vision that they communicate
- Clear on achieving the mission

Great Leaders make the important things crystal clear

Great Leaders make the meaning of the organization clear through the mission and vision that they communicate – they focus on the WHY of the mission

Great Leaders are clear and targeted on achieving the mission

In other words, Great Leaders don't just issue mandates and expect their employees to just follow along blindly. Great Leaders understand that it helps to know what is most important for a company to achieve and why that is so important.

This actually applies in almost every aspect of our lives, not JUST in the business world. I mean, think about it...when your mom told you it was time to clean up for company, didn't you always ask "why?" LOL

There are many things in business that are not always clear to us. As a leader it's your job to make things as clear as possible to your team. How do you do that? Let's take a quick look at vision statements for a few companies to see what this means.

# Communicate Meaning

**Walt Disney Company:** *To be the happiest place in the world*



## **A Company's Mission Statement and Vision Provide the Foundation for An Effective Business**

Here's our first example: The Walt Disney Company: their vision is To make people happy – to be the happiest place in the world. Do you think they've achieved this in the minds of millions of their customers? Yes, they have and it began at the top with the leaders. The leaders make sure that this vision is kept in mind for every decision that is made, every process that is put in place, every job that is created.

As a former Disney employee I can tell you they know how to do this to the 9<sup>th</sup> degree and it starts with who and how they hire employees. They call them "cast members" to create the feeling of being a part of the community of entertainers that provide the "guests" with an experience that is top quality and "HAPPY"

But do you think everyone just started calling employees "cast members" and customers "guests" out of the blue? No—it's not an accident, it's a deliberate technique used by the leaders of the company to explain and drive the vision of becoming "the happiest place in the world." It came out of the need to rally the troops, get the employees all on the same page, give them a deep understanding of how to make that vision come true in

everything they do every day.

All leaders within the company clearly communicate to every employee that this is the top goal of their job. It's very clear to every employee that this is the top goal of their job—to contribute, in whatever way they are able, to achieving that vision.

How do the leaders instill this in the employees? How do they **communicate and clarify the meaning** of the important things? It starts at the top and it is part of every decision that is made on behalf of the customer and on behalf of the employee.

So, the Walt Disney Company example showed why its so important to communicate the meaning of the important things, such as company vision, for the customer's sake.

# Communicate Meaning

**Starbucks:** *to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time*



Here's an example from Starbucks of how communicating the meaning of important things can affect employees:

Now, in case you didn't know, Starbucks was one of the first U.S. companies to offer affordable and comprehensive health coverage to both full- and part-time employees and their families.

It's a pricey commitment that goes above and beyond the requirements of the Affordable Care Act. But by 2010 public opinion was turning against the federal healthcare reform initiatives.

One day, the CEO got a call from an important shareholder. Cut the benefits to part time employees, the shareholder said.

And the CEO considered that for a few minutes and then he said, "I could cut \$300 million out of a lot of things, but do you want to kill the company, and kill the trust in what this company stands for? There is no way I will do it, and if that is what you want us to do, you should sell your stock."

So what does this have to do with vision statements.

*Well, Starbucks vision is "To inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person,*

*one cup and one neighborhood at a time."*

Is there anything inspiring or nurturing about saving a little money by cutting health benefits? No, and the CEO makes the meaning of their vision statement clear in a way that the employees trust and understand.

He explained it this way: What I stand for is not just to make money; it's to preserve the integrity of what we have built for 39 years—to look in the mirror and feel like I've done something that has meaning and relevancy and is something people are going to respect. You have to be willing to fight for what you believe in."

This is true. These leadership behaviors are behaviors you have to commit to. There is no way around it. There is no short cut.



When your BOSS tells you she wants a weekly report from you about what you've accomplished, don't you want to know why she needs it? What she's going to do with it or use it for?

Even for something as simple as that, a great leader is going to make sure you understand what she is trying to achieve, how you help with that.

So keep that in mind when you're communicating with your team—when you set a goal or task for them, make sure they understand the importance of it and how it fits within the company's overall mission.

It will make a tremendous difference in how they respond and perform.

# Exercise

1. List 2-3 tasks that must be achieved daily, weekly, monthly or annually in your area
  - Why are they important
  - Have you communicated this to your team?
2. What is the last set of instructions/rule you handed out?
  - Did you explain importance and communicate the meaning behind it clearly?
  - How could you have improved your message?

Here are two exercises for you to complete that will help you establish clarity so you can communicate meaning to your team:

## Exercise 1:

- List out the top 2-3 things that must be achieved daily, weekly, monthly or annually in your area.
- Do you know WHY those things are important? – do they improve performance, reduce cost, increase profits, boost morale? If you aren't sure, check with YOUR leader.
- Have you clearly communicated these things to your staff? If not, how do you plan on communicating it?

## Exercise 2:

- Take a few minutes and think about the last set of instructions or rule that you handed out.
- Did you take the time to explain the importance of it and ensure that your employees understood how it affected the company and their work? Did you communicate the meaning behind it clearly?
- How could you have improved your message? What impact do you think doing so would have had on your team? Are they still struggling to follow through on those instructions you handed out? If so, when and how will you go back to your team and clarify your message?



# Common Mistakes

- No Clarity Around The Company's WHY
- No Clear Goals To Achieve The Mission

Let's look at some common mistakes that are made by weak leaders and think about how to avoid them.

**NO CLARITY** there are some people in leadership roles who really don't have a clue as to what is going on within their organization or their own department. They don't understand how to communicate meaning. They don't ask the right questions of their leaders to gain insight into why their company exists, why their department exists or why their role exists.

So, How are you supposed to communicate meaning and direction if you don't have that clarity? When YOU don't have that clarity, your employees don't have it either and they also don't have clear goals.

**NO CLEAR GOALS** When your employees don't have clear goals, they muddle through their day – they don't have any idea what they're working for, or what their work, progress, successes or mistakes mean. This is a huge hole that many companies and Leaders have in their performance management process.

Failing to set achievable, but challenging goals with your team leaves people scrambling to understand how they're measured about their performance and how they can be more effective. And so they don't

understand WHY or HOW the work they do has an impact on the company.

If you have fallen into this rut shake it off! It's never too late to put things on track and begin to Communicate Meaning to your team.

# Exercise

1. Consider the information/directions you receive from your management.
  - Are you consistent about sharing with your direct reports in a way that keeps them in the loop and helps them understand their role?
  - Do you take ownership of the message? Or do you lay blame for decisions to others?
2. Script/plan your message the next time you have information to share.

Exercise 1: Consider the information/directions you receive from your management.

- Are you consistent about taking that information and sharing it with your direct reports in a way that keeps them in the loop and helps them understand their role?
- When the message is difficult or involves some type of change, do you take ownership of the message? Or do you lay blame for decisions to others?

Exercise 2: Make it a point to carefully script/plan your message the next time you have information to share keeping these concepts in mind. Work with your manager if you need assistance to confirm that you're not breaking confidentiality or misstating anything. Remember, the objective is to communicate meaning clearly.

Remember, these exercises are important to developing Great Leadership behavior of Communicating Meaning. Take your time to do some deep dive work and solicit the help of your leader and your team. Everyone will benefit from your work on this behavior.