

Checklists for Upward and Downward Communications

By Myron Curry, President of *BusinessTrainingMedia.com*
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The importance of free-flowing forthright communications, both downward from management to employees and upward from employees to management, can hardly be overemphasized. Whether it's to support morale and productivity among the workforce or to assure that management takes advantage of employee input, good communications are essential. Where downward communication is poor, rumors and misinformation will fill the vacuum. Where upward communication is poor, employee grievances will fester driving down morale and productivity and increasing vulnerability to union organizing.

The following checklists of suggested vehicles for upward and downward communication can help you gauge whether your organization is performing as well as it might with respect to internal communication.

Upward Communications

- General manager's routine staff meeting with supervisors: In addition to production issues, these staff meetings should also include topics of interest to employees with respect to business developments, company affairs, and any other topics that should be communicated by supervisors to rank and file.
- General manager's routine meeting with non-supervisory employees: In addition to production issues, these meetings should emphasize issues that involve pay and benefits, problems, complaints, rumors, and questions.
- Supervisor's routine meeting with employees: Upper management should ensure that supervisors have routine meetings that cover topics beyond production that are of interest to employees. In many environments, there is a tendency for supervisors to overlook these important communications vehicles while under pressure to produce.
- Employee newsletter for home delivery: The spouse should become involved in events and conditions to give the entire family a stake in and appreciation of the employee's job.
- Newsletters for supervisors: Subscriptions to appropriate newsletters that provide supervisors with information on how to do their jobs better and how to handling employees and job problems. Or create a regular supervisor newsletter internally.
- Bulletin board program: Every attempt should be made to make the bulletin board a viable source of information—in most cases bulletin boards fall into disuse.
- Employee handbook: Handbooks should be published in an attractive, easy-to-use format so that they are readily usable by employees as a source of information.
- Supervisor's handbook: This document can serve as a training aid as well as communication tool.

Downward Communications

- Routine discussion meetings between employees and their supervisors: Supervisors should be trained in techniques for generating discussion among employees and in how to feed the information "up the line" on a routine basis. (Supervisors also need to be trained to feed information back down to employees.)
- Supervisor's appraisal of individual employees: Periodic appraisal by each supervisor on each employee under his or her supervision, including specific and focused questions

- which the supervisor must answer about each employee with a method for passing this information “up the line” in order to fix a “status appraisal” on each employee.
- Manager’s appraisal of individual supervisors: Again, use focused, specific questions, recognizing that weak, arbitrary, unfair, or excessively harsh supervisors are a prime cause of employee discontent and acting out; be sure this information goes “up the line” in order to correct supervisory problems.
 - Attitude surveys: Annual, anonymous questionnaires given to employees; use customized, specific questions that will alert management to trouble spots.
 - Employee suggestion program: For employees and family members, give monetary awards or other forms of recognition for accepted suggestions.
 - Grievance procedure: Have a nonadversary system where employees feel uninhibited in bringing their complaints and grievances past their immediate supervisors.
 - Open door policy: Encourage employees to ask questions and take their concerns to anyone in the company.
 - Exit interviews: Every employee who leaves the company should be interviewed and their comments on working conditions and morale recorded.

Conclusion

All the above vehicles are effective. But more important than any specific vehicle for upward or downward communication is the commitment by top management—and the supervisory staff—to the ongoing importance of communication to the success of the business mission. This must be implemented through regular, consistent effort by management at all levels.

About the Author

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