

Some final remarks

The Baldrige system is a mechanism for determining quality excellence. The criteria provide a credible tool, developed by national quality experts to evaluate your quality system. The assessment process gives objective feedback which can be used to generate a strategy for continual improvement. The scoring system allows you to measure progress over time.

Interplant competitive quality assessment using the Baldrige criteria should be an annual event. The quality

improvement cycle takes time. Changing systems and attitudes and instilling new values takes time. This requires patience. But how else is a company to achieve world-class performance?

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How to succeed in any large organization: maintaining individuality while remaining part of the management team

Jasper Mardon

This is the third of a series of articles by Jasper Mardon offering down-to-earth advice on career management. Among topics he deals with in future columns are choosing friends and mentors, ethics, efficient office organization, making contacts, and changing jobs.

Approximately 26 of Mardon's immediate colleagues and subordinates have received—among them—44 gold medals, fellowships, and other awards, including the 1992 Gunnar Nicholson Gold Medal awarded to Per Borje Wahlstrom.

Part 3: Communication principles and practice

Communication—which involves a “transmitter” and a “receiver”—is an important element of the business world, but all too often it fails and the message goes astray or is misunderstood. As a manager, your view of how well you communicate is likely to be very different from the view of your subordinates and colleagues. Constant vigilance and effort is the only way to satisfactorily communicate with your subordinates.

Effective communication is related to employee morale and psychology. If your subordinates are not fully informed, to the extent that is appropriate, then they cannot cooperate and work to the common good in a truly productive fashion. Employees who are not informed tend to feel lost, bewildered, resentful, and demotivated.

Everyone has two levels of job performance. The first is performing what he or she has to do to retain the job. The second involves adding discretionary output, an extra amount he or she might wish to put in. That extra amount makes the difference between a reasonable performance

and an outstanding performance. An outstanding team will result only if everyone is exerting his or her discretionary effort. Communication is absolutely vital to obtaining this level of performance.

This article outlines some important principles of communication and suggests some approaches to foster effective communication.

The essential principles of communication are to:

- Know what you are trying to communicate
- Ensure that an effective communication channel has been built up
- Be certain that there are receivers to receive messages
- Make sure that the message is acknowledged as having been received
- Build into the system provisions for returned messages that indicate that the message has not only been received, but it has been understood.

Understanding what you wish to communicate is an essential first step in the process, but failure to do so is the most common communication error. Three types of messages are commonly communicated in an organization. First are so-called repetitive items or events that occur frequently, such as management changes in the organization, that are routinely communicated within the organization. The second type are major events that are discrete, such as a major expansion, and it is appropriate for everyone to know what is happening. The third type is ongoing communication between the various management levels and the people doing the work.

On Management

Communication channels

Written channels

There are several options for communicating your message, once it is clear what you wish to communicate. The most straightforward communication channel is the written word, ranging from information memoranda posted on bulletin boards to company newsletters or newspapers. These publications, however, almost always ignore the basic principles of communication.

Remember, you are trying to communicate with the company's employees, and you must clearly understand what you are trying to communicate. Because it is necessary to ensure that the message has been received and to obtain some acknowledgement, you should establish a flow of information and comment from the employees to the newsletter. An example is to publish photographs of participants in a course, along with interviews in which they were asked what they got out of the course. Absolute honesty in running a company newsletter is essential; there should be no editing to keep the management happy.

Videos

A videotape is an effective way to communicate company goals and strategies to the lowest levels. Again, this video should incorporate some comments from employees in response to the message. The message should be carefully thought out, should avoid misrepresenting the facts in any way, and should center around a small number of recognizable themes.

Meetings

Meetings are a popular and traditional communication method, but they are usually inefficient. To run an effective meeting, observe some key recommendations:

- Always have an agenda, which is a reflection of the plan
- Always have someone take minutes, which will be circulated for confirmation
- Make sure the minutes define clearly what is to be done and who is to do it
- Make sure the meeting has a chairperson, whose job is to keep the meeting moving and obtain from the meeting the answers to the questions on the agenda
- Allow dissent to be voiced during the meeting.

Face-to-face communication

Face-to-face communication with employees and subordinates is the greatest communication tool and the least used. It is commonplace for employees in a large organization to express the feeling that they do not see enough of management. The motto of all management at all levels should be "Let the troops see the general," which was coined by an

English general, Marlborough, and subsequently used by Napoleon and in World War II by Field Marshall Montgomery.

In quantitative tests I conducted, it was rare to find that such face-to-face communication, intended as a communication vehicle and distinct from communication on the day-to-day work evaluation, amounted to more than 5% of the manager's time. That is not enough. Any manager is only as good as the concentrated effort of the people who work for him or her. A subordinate cannot work to capacity unless a manager communicates two things. The first is to communicate what the objectives are and what is to be done: What is the purpose of the organization as the manager sees it? The second is to communicate to subordinates that the manager is truly interested in their welfare.

Downward communication

A common belief in the business world is that individuals communicate well to individuals below them, but receive poor communication from individuals above them. But it's closer to the truth that individuals spend a large part of their time trying to communicate upward but neglect communicating downward.

At the top of any organization, *upward* communication is automatically (but not necessarily properly) looked after. Everyone wants his or her boss to believe that he or she is doing a worthwhile and first-class job. The problems start the other way. If *downward* communication is inadequate, then those lower down do not feel that they are being well led, they lose confidence, their enthusiasm is affected, and they become less productive.

A number of questions can help you to verify the adequacy or identify the inadequacy of the downward communication process.

- Do I have some form of organizational chart readily available to me, preferably in the form of a board?
- If so, how many of the people on the board have I spoken to in the past three months? Six months? Year?
- Do I hold regular meetings of my immediate subordinates? Are they clear on my objectives? Do they have major tasks rated in order of priority? Is this list periodically updated and discussed with me?
- Do I have personal data on all those subordinates that I should know?
- Do I have training plans for all key employees that I should know?
- When I visit divisions, plants, areas of a plant, subareas of an area, do I have knowledge of whom I will meet there and what they have been doing recently?
- Do I regularly read the reports of my subordinates? If I am in too high a position to read all reports, do I have

- Do I regularly read the reports of my subordinates? If I am in too high a position to read all reports, do I have some selection system whereby I see a sample?
- Are important reports read and annotated for me by a staff person?
- Once a good report has been drawn to my attention, do I write or better still, talk to the author?
- Are dinner meetings held at which subordinates are encouraged to speak freely?
- Do I consciously spend a percentage of my time talking with my subordinates?
- What important items have I learned from subordinates in the past month? Three months? Six months? Year?
- Do my subordinates tell me the truth or do they tell me what I want to hear?
- Among my subordinates, is there or was there an honest, forthright character whose uncompromising attitude annoys or did annoy me so that I am thinking of how to, or in fact did, get rid of him or her? **II**

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