

The 7 Deadly Sins of Organizational Leadership Communication

By Skip Weisman



Upon completing a recent project I took my client to lunch to thank him for his business. We reminisced about how we first met at my End Procrastination NOW! Workshop and how he realized at that time he was tired of tolerating things in his business.

Among the problems with which he was becoming increasingly frustrated were senior team members and frontline employees who...

- *Were not taking responsibility for their jobs*
- *Needed constant prodding to get things done*
- *Were not responsive to client requests*
- *Did not return phone messages*
- *Were throwing their fellow employees "under the bus"*
- *Were having shouting matches in the office and on project sites*
- *Using profanity when communicating with co-workers, clients and vendors*
- *Procrastinated on following through on business opportunities*
- *Were showing up late or leaving early with no explanation*
- *Had negative attitudes*
- *Complained about customers and co-workers*
- *Were "disappearing" during the day*

I began my project searching for the real underlying cause of these issues by:

- *Interviewing the entire staff of 25*
- *Holding a series of focus groups*
- *Observing interactions and conversations between the business owner and his people.*

What I learned in just two weeks could fill a book.

My new client was violating virtually every leadership communication mistake. To simplify the project I categorized them into what I now call "The 7 Deadly Sins of Organizational Leadership Communication:"

- **Communication Sin #1: Lack of Specificity**

This causes people on the receiving end of a communication to have to mind-read or guess as to what is being requested of them. Details are left out or are at best, vague. The recipients for many reasons fail to ask follow up questions to get specifics and have to figure it out on their own.

- **Communication Sin #2: Lack of Focus on Desirable Behaviors**
People are great at saying what they don't want or what they don't want others to do, but have challenges identifying the behaviors they want instead. Where your focus goes, grows. As such, people are getting more of what they don't want because they continue to focus on it.
- **Communication Sin #3: Lack of Directness**
This is where people in organizations go behind the backs of their co-workers, peers, bosses and subordinates with water cooler gossip. Another example is the leader who tries to fix a problem that should be addressed to one person but calls a team meeting to offer a blanket directive. A third is when co-workers tell managers the mistakes co-workers make hoping to make themselves look good at the expense of someone else.
- **Communication Sin #4: Lack of Immediacy**
This is procrastination. This is when communication is avoided because the conversations are difficult and leaders don't know how to approach the offending party, so they choose not to.
- **Communication Sin #5: Lack of Appropriate Tone**
Ever had someone in a professional setting raise his or her voice at you in a condescending or threatening manner? How about responding in a sarcastic manner? These are just two of the ways inappropriate tone can ruin relationships and trust in company cultures.
- **Communication Sin #6: Lack of Focused Attention**
In this day of technology and multi-tasking too many office conversations occur passing in the hallway, while one person is checking/responding to e-mails on their smart phone, or talking to us while on hold waiting for someone they will likely deem more important once they come on the phone. This fosters disrespect and low trust in organizations.
- **Communication Sin #7: Lack of Respectful Rebuttals**
This may be the most common, yet subconscious of all seven leadership communication sins. It's the conversations when someone agrees or provides positive feedback in the first part of their sentence, only to be followed by "but." After the "but" comes the other shoe and you end up feeling misled and unfulfilled.

These behaviors had caused significant damage to my client's 25-year-old, \$15 million business with 25 employees over the past ten years. My client actually estimated that allowing these communication issues to build up over ten years had cost him about \$5 million.

That's real money for some people.

About the author:

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