

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS IS KEY TO EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Effective internal communication programs are the life blood of successful companies. They connect the employees to the company and give them the reasons for why things have or will happen. When the mystery is gone, suspicions disappear. There are several forms of internal communications, including:

- ~ Global Communications – Broadcast to the entire company (i.e. newsletters, mass meetings),
- ~ Small Group Communications – Day to day operational communications to work groups or teams,
- ~ Personal Communications – One on one communications usually between supervisors and employees.

Most companies spend money and effort on their external communications plan but fail to expand any energy toward creating an organized plan for internal communications. How well information is communicated both externally to customers and vendors and internally to employees is vital to long term business success. Communications occurs whether planned or not. Without an internal communication strategy the message received is left to chance. Often internal communications occurs reactively in response to a crisis or a major event deemed important to communicate to employees by management. This ad hoc approach to providing information is uncoordinated and inconsistent. In comparison, a consistent and open internal communication strategy is a proactive approach to developing better directed, more committed, and highly efficient employees. The goal is to filter the messages coming from upper management to all employees to provide them with a better understanding of the purpose, goals, and directions of the business.

There may be no other position in your workforce that will more directly impact the effectiveness of an internal communication program than the front line supervisor. Supervisors must translate often difficult messages to employees and report back to senior management what is going on in their areas. Supervisors must be able to effectively communicate with employees and employees should be comfortable raising concerns without fear of retaliation. Supervisors oversee the work of a group of people and manage the achievement of organizational goals. This is accomplished through leadership, the process of getting the job done through other people. An effective leader is the one who is able to do the job daily, week after week, month after month, regardless of the project.

Few successful leaders are poor communicators. A successful leader who is a supervisor will understand employees and integrate the employee's goals into the project and company goals. A construction project is a human endeavor. Humans make it succeed, humans make it fail. The secret of a successful project and business is excellence of leadership and effective communications. Technical skills become less important as supervisors become more responsible for motivating employees and communicating company goals. Human relation skills become more essential because of the need for quality communications on the jobsite, in the office and among the designer/engineer, other contractors and the owner. A successful supervisor will realize that his/her job is to lead and influence people through effective communications. To do that, he/she must understand why people act the way they do. All people are unique,

with varying personalities, talents, and motivations. No two people are exactly alike. We all want, need, require, and strive for different things. We react to different stimuli and for different reasons. Communicating a message or motivating employees can be difficult because we are not all the same. However, there are some fundamental guidelines.

To understand, effectively communicate and motivate employees you must genuinely care about him/her. You do not need to pry into the employee's private life, but you do need to exhibit a genuine concern for his/her welfare. Occasionally talking to employees about things other than the job is a good way to begin understanding them. Recognize the difference between positive and negative motivation and the impact it has on your relationship with employees and your ability to promote performance or a company message. Positive motivation assumes the employee wants to do a good job and encourages him/her to work well. This is done by making the employee, whenever possible, a part of the planning and decision making process. Negative motivation assumes the employee must be driven to do a good job and is used to force or demand him/her to work as required. This is done through the use of threats, reprisals, and fear. It does not invite the employee to be a member of the team, nor does it allow for his/her concerns and ideas. Negative motivation is sort lived. It often results in sabotage and intentional lost time. Its use is rarely effective. Ultimately one of the best tools to establish positive relations with employees and to motivate them is to lead by example. Demonstrate the same traits and behaviors you expect from others. The moment you begin saying one thing and doing another is the moment you begin to lose your effectiveness as a communicator and a leader. Every action a supervisor takes during the work day is observed by employees. Supervisor must be the example they want employees to become.

Why does a company have to have effective internal communications? Why do supervisors need have good communications skills? Why motivate at all? People are being paid to do the job. Why should you be required to motivate them, it is their job to be productive and support the companies goals. Obviously it is not that simple. Everyone wants to feel they belong, that they are part of a team. This is especially true in construction work where employees from different employers work side by side and communicate all day long. Your employees need to feel valued, respected and important and the message that they hear and trust the most needs to come from you.