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LEADERSHIP

The Top Complaints from Employees About Their Leaders

by Lou Solomon

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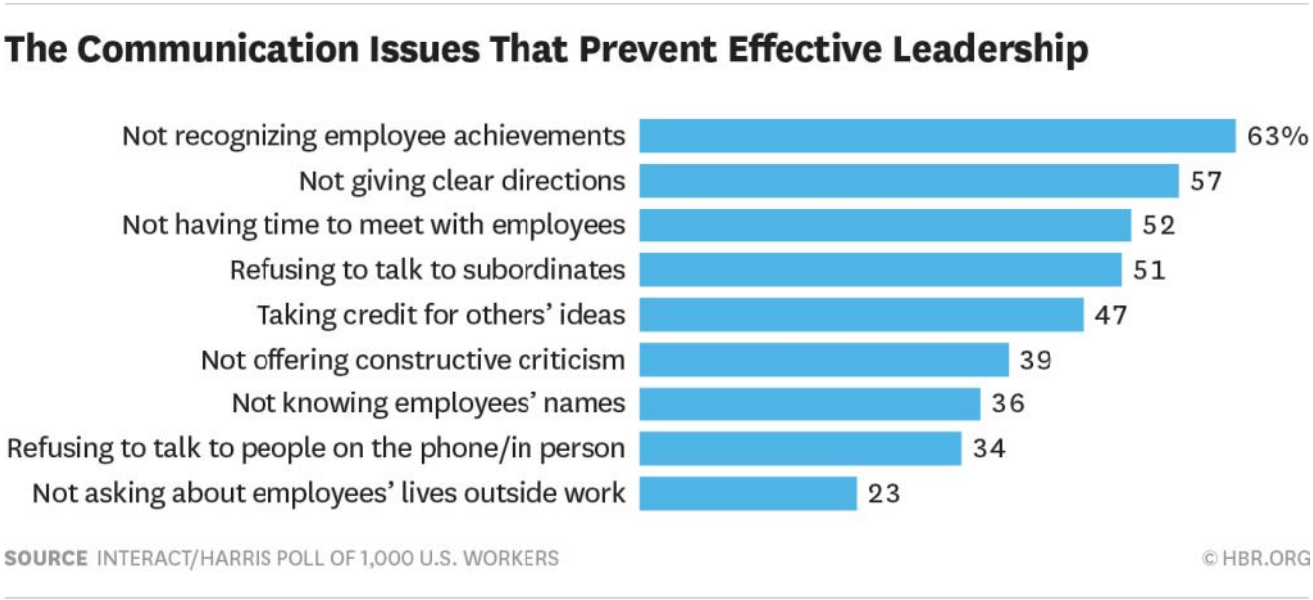
If you're the kind of boss who fails to make genuine connections with your direct reports, take heed: 91% of employees say communication issues can drag executives down, according to results from our new Interact/Harris Poll, which was conducted online with roughly 1,000 U.S. workers.

In the survey, employees called out the kind of management offenses that point to a striking lack of emotional intelligence among business leaders, including micromanaging, bullying, narcissism, indecisiveness, and more. In rank order, the following were the top communication issues people said were preventing business leaders from being effective:



The data shows that the vast majority of leaders are not engaging in crucial moments that could help employees see them as trustworthy. This is startling, considering how much money organizations spend conducting employee surveys and reorganizations, engaging consultants and implementing change initiatives.

Effective leaders know that healthy communication requires the energy of connection – with inclusion, recognition, clear directions, meaningful interaction and feedback as the nerve center of the company.

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Leading Teams

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They know productivity is tied to communication. They are intentional about building a sense of connectedness with their teams and appreciation of their employees by saying and asking things such as:

1. **Here's what I appreciate about you and your contribution...** A basic "atta-boy" or "atta-girl" doesn't satisfy people who put their heart and soul into their work. Instead, say something specific to your employees like, "I appreciate the way you pull in people from other departments to reach your team goals – you're a connector." Leaders need to notice employees' unique, specific contributions, and let them know that you notice.

2. **Thank you (personal and public).** Daily interactions - from the elevator to the parking lot – represent opportunities for leaders to engage in dynamic interactions and show appreciation for their employees' efforts. Public recognition at a staff meeting, or a thoughtful "thank you" in a newsletter or e-mail, are also meaningful. For example, Duke Energy CEO Lynn Good leaves "thank you" notes on yellow sticky notes in employees' offices.

3. **What do you think?** Employees will withhold their best ideas from leaders who always have the "right" answer, or take credit for others' ideas. Leaders need to proactively ask their employees: "How do you think we could improve?" "What is keeping us stuck?" and "What do you love about the work that we're doing here?" Establish a safe environment in which people have the opportunity to express themselves and be recognized for their ideas.

4. **Here's what's happening and what you can expect...** Companies operate in a constant state of change and all too often, information is withheld from team

members until the last minute. This is a huge distraction for employees, who need "real speak" about their futures to be present in their work. Leaders often underestimate employees' ability to accept "why" if it is shared in an honest way. Leaders will gain deep respect when they share as much as they know as soon as they can share it. Real explanations are always better than no explanations.

5. **I have some feedback for you...** Don't wait for a performance review to tell people how they're doing. A culture of continual feedback is healthy and nimble. In particular, Millennials want more coaching and feedback than previous generations.

6. **Let me tell you about something I learned the hard way...** Smart, capable leaders who know their stuff are well respected, but employees like and trust leaders who are not only smart, but can occasionally lean back and laugh at their own mistakes, and who are generous with what life has taught them. Don't be afraid to show that you're human, too.

7. **Hello, Susan**...Dale Carnegie said, "A person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language." Get to know your employees by name. If the company is too big to know everyone's name, start with the people in close proximity. There's no excuse for saying "I'm not good with names." The best among us work at it. Learn the art of association.

Vision that is too heavily weighted toward achievement at the expense of employee experience can exact a toll. Dr. Edward Hallowell, M.D., author and former faculty member at Harvard Medical School, asserts that for most people, the two most powerful experiences in life are achieving and connecting. But if we focus only on achieving, we're not doing well at connecting. Connection is a mindset and an energy exchange between people who are paying attention to one another. I often ask my MBA students this question: Who will influence you more and motivate you toward

you best — the brilliant and well-published professor who has no time to connect, or the brilliant but less-well published professor who makes a connection with you as a human being? Hands down, it is always the latter.

What is all boils down to is that business is about people — it always has been, and always will be. Too often, businesses fall short not because leaders don't understand the business, but because they don't understand what the people who work for them need in order to bring their best effort to work.

Much of a team's success lies in the pattern of connection a leader has with direct reports, and the way he or she empowers them to extend that pattern to his or her direct reports, and so on. In a business environment that is woefully lacking in employee commitment, leaders who aren't actively connecting with people are themselves a liability.

Lou Solomon is CEO of Interact, a communications consultancy that helps Fortune 500 CEOs, business leaders, managers, entrepreneurs and their teams to develop authenticity, make connections, earn trust and build influence. She's the author of "Say Something Real", and an adjunct faculty member at the McColl School of Business at Queens University of Charlotte. Connect with her on Twitter and LinkedIn.

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yvonnelevine Levine an hour ago

Great article to remind business professionals about the true definition of success. Thoughtful and frequent communication will always garner a higher rate of employee engagement. Unfortunately, many leaders were never taught about the importance of displaying emotional intelligence. I advocate for all businesses to consider providing EI training as part of their initiative when grooming leaders.

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