

# The Communication Myth

Written by: Coach David R Meyer & Laurie Valaer  
ECI Learning Systems, LLC.

Living in the 21st Century is truly marvelous, isn't it? We live in a world of instant communication where everything we need to know is right at our fingertips. The moment anything of significance occurs it is instantly transferred around the globe making us the most well informed generation in the history of the world.

You can pick up a phone in your car, on a plane, at the beach, in the movie theater (but please don't do that) and talk to anyone in the world, instantly. So it's good to know that we have solved the communication problem....or have we.

In reality, many people confuse messaging with communication. That means we may not be communicating nearly as effectively as we think we are. And this can cause significant problems, especially in the workplace. In fact, a recent Towers-Perrin study shows that only 38% of employees believe that senior management communicates openly and honestly. (*"2007-2008 Towers Perrin Global Workforce Study"*)

Don't believe us? Go out and ask the rank and file in your company about the company's direction; the department's goals and objectives; the company's newest marketing campaign; or the reason behind the recent decision to implement new systems.

Most employees don't know these answers because the communication is just not reaching them.

Why is communication such a problem in the modern workplace? Why do so many employees believe that the key decisions being made by upper management, or even their immediate supervisor, are not being communicated to them?

The reality is that communication comes in two parts. First, there is what the speaker or author sends, and then there is the message that is received. If what was sent is not the same as what was received, there is a communication error. Even worse is when the sender believes something is being sent, but nothing is received. Without a feedback loop the sender often assumes that the message has been received and understood when it truly has not.

The assumption that because a message has been sent that it must have been received is the source of a lot of frustration in the workplace. In an effort to ensure that their communication is received, companies are sending out communications at an ever increasing pace. Company directives, employee newsletters, status reports on dozens of pending projects, letters from the CEO that are sent and then forwarded and re-forwarded by various levels of management, departmental bulletins, company news flashes and so on lead to the illusion of communication.

However, it really doesn't matter what is sent out if the employees don't read, understand, and acknowledge then the message is not being received. And while the effort to transmit information throughout the company is admirable, but no one should ever confuse the quantity of information transmitted with the quality of information received.

In the fast paced work environment of today, employees are overwhelmed with deadlines, projects, and an ever-growing pile of unread email. Employees are not ignoring these communications intentionally, but rather they are suffering from information overload. In addition, they believe that the value of these communications is limited due to the absence of any reasonable way to direct their questions and concerns back to the sender. Written communications, whether they are emails, printed newsletters, posters, or even personalized letters can never be a substitute for the depth of understanding and commitment that comes with interactive, face to face discussions.

Clearly it is not possible for the CEO, the Vice Presidents, or even the Directors to meet each person one at a time to discuss issues with them. But in this age of communication, there is no excuse for not using interactive video or audio to communicate on a regular basis.

If you want to reach your employees and make sure that your message is being received, then don't rely on contrived communication vehicles like newsletters, or mass communication like email. Instead, invest in your employees by direct communication. And do it at all levels of the company. Remember, sending a message that is not being received is of no more value than a message never sent in the first place.

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An engaged and energized workforce leads to higher productivity, reduced costs, improved customer service, and increased profitability. Employee engagement happens when your Corporate Culture, Leadership Style, and Employee Expectations are in synch.

The Fusion Program from ECI Learning Systems is designed to align these 3 concepts in your organization – engaging your employees and creating positive energy that will propel your company to new heights.

For more information contact:

Coach David R Meyer  
ECI Learning Systems, LLC  
<http://www.ECILearning.com>  
[Dave@ECILearning.com](mailto:Dave@ECILearning.com)  
303-681-8982

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