

## **Fostering Information Sharing: Tips on Communicating Effectively**

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Communicating effectively and sharing information is vital to any successful team, partnership, or collaborative effort. We should not assume that because something has been said, it's been understood. To ensure that you are communicating effectively both internally within your organization as well as within the context of a collaborative team, utilizing the following tips will not only ensure more effective communication, but will have the added result of increasing information sharing:

**Be redundant.** When information is important and we want to make sure that our message is clearly communicated and shared where appropriate, use multiple channels to get the message out. Sending several messages using different channels can increase this possibility of a message being heard as well as provides focus and clarity to the message. Communications can be print, electronic, or in-person and may include memos, letters, newsletters, emails, press releases, posting the information on the company Intranet, Internet or an electronic bulletin board.

**Be clear and consistent.** When communicating in writing, tell people why you are writing, what you need, and what you want them to do up front. To put people on the same page, put it in front of them clearly, conveniently, and often. Write for the reader, not you. Short and concise communication is usually best.

**Use email effectively.** People don't automatically read all their emails. They first read the subject line to see if they should open the email. Make sure your subject line is descriptive and if you need an immediate response, state it. A succinct email subject line will increase your chances greatly that the email will be opened, read, and responded to.

**Don't forget the power of in-person communication.** Nothing can replace a good conversation to get input and feedback. It sends the message that you care about what they think. Seek dialog and discussion if you really want your message to stick or your idea to gain support. A follow-up phone call to an email and then reinforcing the message in a meeting will ensure that your message has been received. It is also helpful to communicate that you are available for additional conversations.

**Develop a communication strategy** early on. Having a communication strategy within an organization or within a collaborative team effort sets forth guidelines and protocols for communicating. The how, what, and when will need to be determined. How should the information be received, what type of information is needed, when and how frequent should you communicate. To gauge the effectiveness of your communication strategy, gather feedback and use it to continuously improve.

**Create a healthy information sharing culture.** To get information flowing freely, there must first and foremost be trust. Trust is developed over time as individuals share information and then see that it is being used as agreed. Feedback should also be encouraged and taken seriously. Reward and recognition systems help to reinforce an information sharing culture.

**Continue to network in order to build and maintain relationships.** Networking can be an important tool to start or sustain relationships. The most common mistake people make in networking is waiting until they need something in order to make contact. In networking, it is important to pay attention to the golden rule—treat people how you want to be treated. This helps in building trust and fosters information sharing with the ultimate goal of forming strong relationships with the potential to partner or collaborate in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> All views expressed are those of the authors alone.