



*Communication takes place in the
mind of the listener, not the speaker.*

COMMUNICATION TIP | Stress and Communication

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Often, when under stress, it is more difficult to communicate. Even though most leaders would rather be concentrating on getting things done, during stressful times we need to devote serious attention to face-to-face communication. It has been said that people make decisions based on emotions just as much as they do on reason.

Face-to-face communication is complex and often the leader must first find common ground shared by his or her audience so messages can be adapted accordingly. Listening and immediately responding can best be handled face-to-face.

When under stress, what we say and how people perceive what we are saying is often distorted and may complicate simple situations. Therefore watching body language, asking probing questions and being able to react immediately can often clear up confusion.

Staff under stress, becomes very defensive and neutral comments are often interpreted as criticism resulting in unnecessary disagreements and arguments. People may become more emotional. Leaders, when face-to-face with staff, can often clear up such miscommunication immediately.

Communication styles too, may change under stress, and someone who is a linear, logical thinker may suddenly move to becoming a micro-manager, fixated on small details. These changes can confuse and upset other members of a team.

What can you do? Keep your messages short and clear. Offer only one or two points and then ask the listener to paraphrase what has just been said. If you are the listener, paraphrase what you hear to ensure you are sharing the same message.

When stressed, email is one of the worst ways to communicate because people can not hear the verbal cues or ask questions. Face-to-face or phone is recommended. Employees are then more likely to share their ideas, ask questions and you can pick up verbal cues.

If you focus on relationships, rather than results, and you are visible and accessible to employees, water cooler or parking lot conversations that can potentially sabotage great initiatives are less likely to occur.

Good communication takes time and planning. Leaders, who want to build trust, must spend a good portion of their day, talking to their employees. Showing that you want to hear their concerns, and that you will give answers, and you will not penalize or think them irritating is key to opening communication channels. Communication can never be left to chance.

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