



A leadership learning series from in-FUSION Group

V2: We Need To Talk

## Communication: The secret ingredient

We are occasionally approached by clients to help them define their company culture, refine their organization's core values, or develop a set of service expectations. It's some of our favorite work but we're going to give away one of the biggest secrets. Each and every one of these exercises begins and ends with communication. Yes, communication, it's the secret ingredient - but it's not as simple as it sounds. Perhaps that is why the business lexicon has so much jargon that attempts to work around it. We have a theory that sometimes the "culture conversation" might just be disguising our real challenge as leaders: talking to our teams.

**Before we lose you - we aren't suggesting that a well-defined organizational culture isn't a good thing - but we are telling you it isn't going to work if communication doesn't.**

After all, a company's culture, brand, and values, are largely created by the words and subsequent actions of its leaders. And, your employees' ability to facilitate your desired experience, and share a consistent message with customers, is also predicated on communication. Clever catch phrases and culture materials like books, notecards and screensavers are great, but the spoken and written words of senior leaders will ultimately shape the definition of your culture in the minds of your team.

Perusing Glassdoor you may be surprised at the employer reviews for well-regarded, even Fortune 100, companies. You feel like you know their brand and their culture - you can see it on the "Who We Are" page of their website or on clever displays in their storefronts. Their employees; however, may not feel the magic. Poor reviews often feature common challenges like communication in silos, mixed messages, lack of contact with senior level leaders and other concerns that all come back to communication.

**Ready for another secret? You may know this one already. Communication is hard.**

...and so is golf, but we think communication just may become the new official sport of executive leadership. If we were running a practice session, here are the drills we would run:

### 1. Start with who

We checked, Simon Sinek hasn't yet used that line. We aren't denying the importance of setting a vision or explaining why, but when crafting those critical messages, it is equally important to consider your who.

- ⇒ **Be relevant:** Consider the size and demographics of your team, just as your marketers consider their prospects. What channels of communication work best to share information with them? What motivates them to listen, learn or modify behavior? How does your message impact their day, their week, or their role?
- ⇒ **Be timely:** Consider the cadence of your team's work and how frequently they use shared communication channels and be timely with your delivery. This is easier to do when you establish consistent opportunities to talk to your whole team.

- ⇒ **Be real:** Use an authentic voice. Even when using a more formal communication channel, approach it conversationally. An email from the CEO is not likely to get lost in the inbox and feels more personal and genuine than a memo from their assistant.

## 2. Speak, write, repeat

Our most powerful tool doesn't always work on the first try. Communications must be delivered consistently, repetitively and deliberately to maximize effectiveness.

- ⇒ **Rule of 7:** The average person must hear a message 7 times before committing it to memory. If you are using communication to change behavior, create significant meaning, or reinforce your culture, a one and done communication plan will not serve you well. If the Rule of 7 is overwhelming, start with the power of 3. For example, a senior leader communicates to the whole staff, the supervisor reinforces with individual conversations, a written note comes shortly after to reinforce the message.
- ⇒ **It's called a "brief":** The number of times a person needs to hear a message shouldn't be confused for the need of an abundance of detail. In fact, the more you can simplify your message, the more likely it is to resonate and be memorable. Consider this, if a person were only going to read the first 3 sentences of your email or memo, would they get the essential message? If a person only tuned in for your introductory slide or closing remarks, would they understand the essence of your communication?
- ⇒ **Get your FAQs straight:** Communication is not a one-way process, it requires a loop of feedback and questions. To prepare for feedback on your coming communication, brainstorm a list of questions you anticipate your staff will have and prepare your answers. Depending on the scale of your communication and the size of your audience, you could even publish a list of Frequently Asked Questions and Answers following your formal communication.

## 3. Special sauce

It's not just what you say, it's how you say it

- ⇒ **Be humbly incorrect:** Committing to communication makes us vulnerable as leaders - especially when we commit our words to writing or answer challenging questions in a live meeting. Don't stifle the conversation out of a fear of not having all the answers. It is okay to say you don't know or to follow up and correct a misstep. See exercise 1 - be real.
- ⇒ **Explain a change in heart:** Leaders often make the mistake of holding on to a communication too long for fear something may change after they share it. While we don't suggest making and breaking promises, we encourage timely communication coupled with a willingness to explain when you had to pivot.
- ⇒ **Do as you said:** We saved one of the most important points for last. We are talking about talk here, but with talking the talk should always come walking the walk. Follow up and follow through will establish trust and ensure your audience wants to hear what you have to say the next time around.

## Get in-FUSED

We created in-FUSION Group 10 years ago with the vision to be more than a consultancy. We dig in and work with our partners, becoming a part of your team and your organization. So often, we help our partners build a new competency, write a strategic plan, or implement a significant organizational change, then we pass the torch on to the leadership team. We know that the missing link between vision and execution is strong leadership. The senior team at in-FUSION Group has more than 70 years of leadership experience and we want to use our experience to teach you the un-Googleable. We've partnered with the best local leadership coaches, including two former Navy Seals, to create a new leadership development academy. This is not for the faint of heart. We will challenge you to look inward, be brutally honest and committed to growth. Ready to leave your comfort zone? Give us a call.