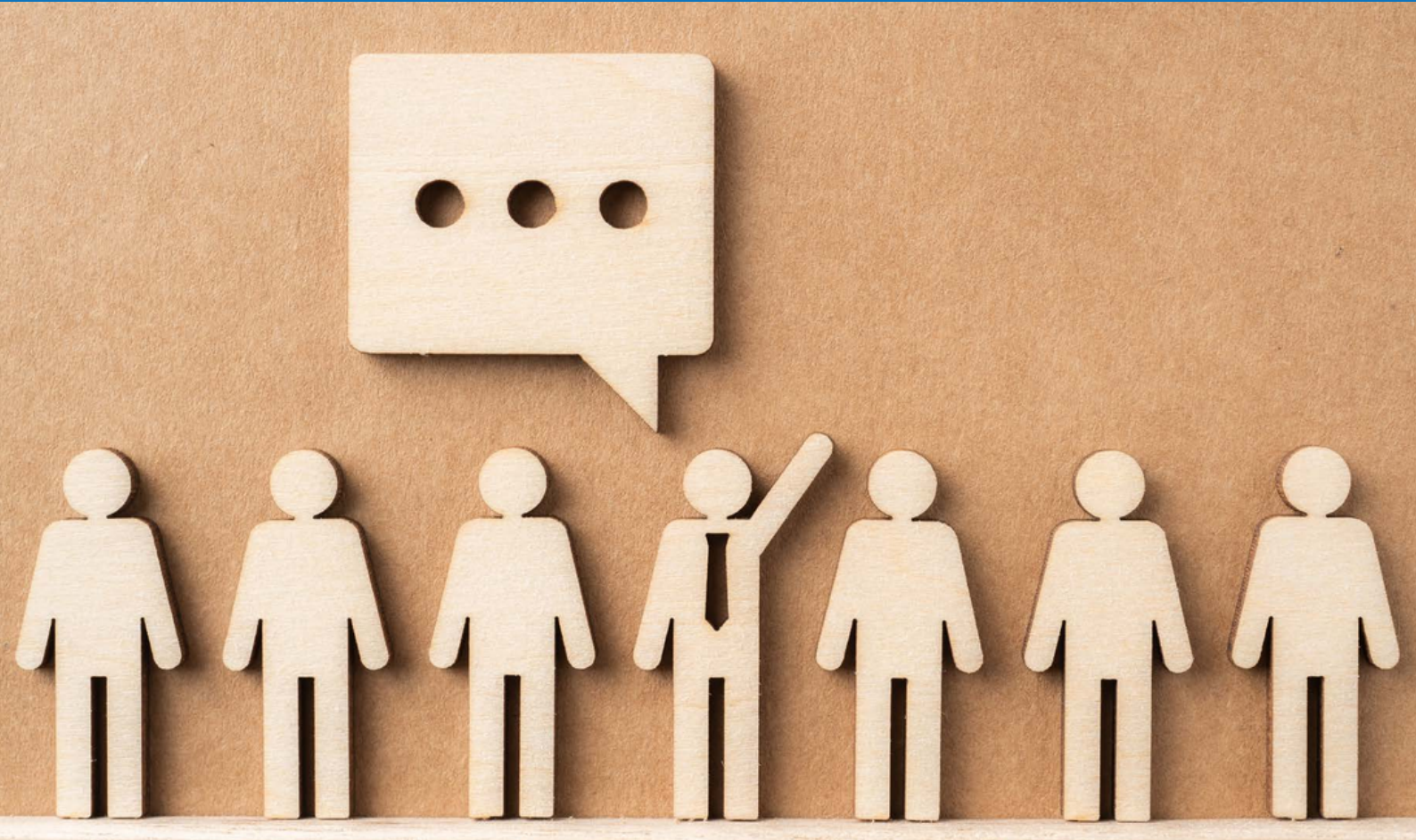




THE ALTERNATIVE BOARD



WHITEPAPER

# Say What You Mean:

## How To Enhance Your Communication Skills As a Business Leader



# A Whitepaper on Communication Challenges You May Face As a Business Owner and How To Overcome Them.

Being a business leader demands effective communication skills that go beyond mere technical expertise or managerial abilities. Effective communication is the lifeblood of leadership, as it encompasses the ability to convey ideas, inspire others, and foster collaboration. It is essential that business leaders today are able to clearly articulate their vision, motivate their teams, and build strong relationships based on trust and transparency.

Devoid of effective communication skills, business owners struggle to successfully align their employees, resolve conflicts, make informed decisions, and navigate change. The demands of business leadership are best navigated by implementing clarity, empathy, and persuasion in the way they interact with employees, customers, and other key stakeholders in the organisation.

Beyond a business owner's ability to connect with the people that matter most to their success, strong communication skills from leadership fosters innovation and adaptability within themselves and throughout many facets of the organisation.

Leaders who actively listen and encourage open dialogue as a foundational business principle are better equipped to identify emerging trends, respond to market changes, and drive innovation within their companies.

Effective communication skills are crucial to the success of every business leader and the companies they run. It is not just what you say, but how you say it. Are your communication skills as strong as they could be?



## The Importance of Effective Communication

1

**Building Trust and Relationships:** Effective communication is vital for building trust among your team, stakeholders, and clients. When leaders communicate clearly, honestly, and transparently, it instills confidence and credibility. Without trust, collaboration and productivity suffer.

2

**Alignment and Vision:** It is your responsibility as the leader of your business to articulate and infuse your company's vision, mission, and goals throughout the organisation. Being an impactful communicator helps align your team with the concepts and objectives that are key to success.

3

**Motivating and Inspiring:** Business leaders who communicate with enthusiasm, passion, and clarity tend to create a more positive and productive work environment. By speaking in tones and terms that energise and inspire your team, you drive them to perform at their best.

4

**Resolving Conflicts:** Conflict resolution is challenging even for strong communicators, but is a key component of effective leadership. Peace making is facilitated by open dialogue, active listening, and empathy to best understand and mediate differing perspectives.

5

**Enhancing Decision Making:** Timely and effective communication is essential for informed decision making. Leaders must communicate relevant information, data, and insights to ensure that decisions are based on accurate and comprehensive information.

6

**Improving Productivity and Efficiency:** Strong communication by business leadership helps streamline workflows and reduce inefficiencies by providing concise instructions, clear expectations, and a lack of ambiguity surrounding both personal goals and team objectives.

7

**Managing Change:** Change is a constant in the business world, and effective communication is essential during periods of change. Transparent and empathetic communication helps employees understand and embrace change, reducing resistance and facilitating smoother transitions.

8

**External Communication and Reputation:** Effective communication extends beyond your internal environment. Business leaders must communicate effectively with external stakeholders including clients, partners, and investors in a clear, consistent, and persuasive manner.

## The 5 Biggest Leadership Communication Mistakes

Effective communication is a crucial skill for any business leader. It serves as the foundation for building strong relationships, aligning teams, fostering collaboration, and achieving organisational goals.

But business owners often face various challenges when it comes to communication within their organisations.

Here are the most common barriers to effective leadership communication. See if you can visualise yourself in these situations and consider how others may interpret the same scenarios.



***“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.” - George Bernard Shaw***

### Mistake 1: Lack of Clarity

Business owners may struggle to articulate their ideas clearly, leading to misunderstandings among employees. A lack of clarity in business communications poses significant challenges within an organisation. When messages are unclear, employees may misinterpret instructions, objectives, or expectations, leading to confusion and errors. This can result in wasted time and resources as tasks are performed incorrectly or need to be redone. Moreover, a lack of clarity hampers effective decision making, inhibits collaboration, and diminishes productivity. It erodes trust, as employees may question the credibility and reliability of information received. Clear communication is essential for aligning teams, fostering understanding, and driving success, making lack of clarity a significant hindrance to organisational efficiency and growth.



75%

of employees see effective communication as the most important leadership attribute.

1 in 3

employees report that their leaders communicate well and efficiently.

80%

of workplace issues are related to poor communication from business leadership.

## Mistake 2: Ineffective Meetings

Ineffective meetings due to poor communication skills can be a drain on productivity and engagement within an organisation. Miscommunication, rambling discussions, and a lack of clear direction often lead to confusion and frustration among participants. Important information may not be effectively conveyed or understood, resulting in missed opportunities or inefficient decision making. Without strong communication skills within formal and informal meetings, leaders may struggle to engage participants, facilitate meaningful discussions, and efficiently manage time. Ineffective meetings can be a waste of valuable resources and hinder progress.

## Mistake 3: Poor Feedback Loop

Poor communication skills by business leadership can disrupt the feedback loop throughout an organisation. When leaders are poor at conveying their operational expectations and are absent in requesting input from the team, employees can misunderstand their roles, continue to underperform unchecked, and feel undervalued. When a feedback loop breaks down, it silences open dialogue and discourages employees from sharing their thoughts. Consequently, issues and inefficiencies go unaddressed, and the organisation misses opportunities for improvement. Without a robust feedback loop, the company becomes less adaptable and less responsive to changing circumstances, hindering growth and overall success.

## Mistake 4: Information Overload

An overabundance of information in business meetings can be detrimental, as it overwhelms participants and hampers action and decision making. When too much information is presented without proper organisation or prioritisation, it becomes difficult for attendees to absorb and process the key points. This information overload can lead to confusion, decreased attention, and an inability to focus on the most relevant details. It is essential to streamline information, present it in a concise and structured manner, and ensure that participants have the necessary information to make informed decisions without being overwhelmed by excessive data.



## Mistake 5: Communication Barriers

Communication barriers can arise when departments or teams operate independently, with information staying within individual areas rather than being shared across the organisation. This can make effective leadership communication more difficult by limiting collaboration, transparency and the flow of important information.

When teams are disconnected, leaders may struggle to gain a complete picture of what is happening across the business, make well-informed decisions and communicate their vision or strategy consistently. It can also lead to misunderstandings, duplicated effort and teams working towards different priorities, ultimately limiting organisational effectiveness and growth.

# Five Ways To Be a More Effective Communicator

## 1. Improve Clarity

To speak to your team with more clarity, it's important to focus on a few key elements. Enunciation is important, so speak your words clearly and articulately, using standard pronunciation. Speak at a moderate pace, so your audience is able to process your words and your underlying meaning. To ensure comprehension, use an active ear so you can adjust your communication based on the feedback, understanding and personal needs of your team.

## 2. Be an Active Listener

Active listening skills are arguably the most important element of being a strong communicator and a successful business leader. Being an active listener demonstrates respect. When you actively listen to understand rather than passively listen to respond, you exponentially increase the insight you garner from an exchange. As the leader of your business, be conscious of your time and ability to give a conversation the focus being asked of you. If you are unable to be mentally present or are constrained by time when a conversation is presented to you, respectfully request to schedule a meeting in which you can give the person's thoughts or concerns your full attention. Then honour that commitment.

## 3. Encourage Feedback

Establish a feedback culture that encourages constructive input. Provide timely and specific responses to your team, focusing on behaviour and outcomes rather than personal criticism. Implement regular performance reviews or check-ins to ensure ongoing communication and development. Allow your audience to process and respond to your words without feeling rushed.



## 4.Optimise Meetings

Have clear objectives when leading meetings. Don't wing it. Instead, prepare meeting content, objectives and structure in advance. Encourage participation from all attendees and use active listening skills to foster engagement. While it is important to mostly stay on topic, be flexible when relevant issues arise. Follow up every meeting with either formal meeting notes or key takeaways that you provide every attendee and any others who may find value.

## 5.Use Storytelling To Connect

Share stories and real life examples when discussing a topic, issue, or challenge. Don't just tell cautionary tales, but also provide examples of what success looks like, how an employee overcame adversity, or the time a customer fell through the cracks. Stories create a memorable and emotional connection with the listener and humanise concepts that are otherwise sometimes hard to grasp. If you do not feel that you are a natural storyteller, don't be afraid to read from a book or a script. If you prefer to share the story by heart, make sure to practice ahead of time. Do not let the story devolve; by staying on point you better relay the message you want to convey and the emotion you want to instill. Remember, people recall stories much more easily than they retain statistics, bullet points, and lectures. Keep your stories interesting, engaging, and purposeful.



# 10 Questions To Rate Your Communication Skills

Rate these statements then add up your total communications score.

|    |                                                                     | Never | Seldom | Often | Always |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| 1  | I attempt to guess what someone is about to say to me.              | 1     | 2      | 3     | 4      |
| 2  | I would rather offer too much information than too little.          | 1     | 2      | 3     | 4      |
| 3  | I don't understand how my team misinterprets what I am saying.      | 1     | 2      | 3     | 4      |
| 4  | I think that I over share and my employees tune me out.             | 1     | 2      | 3     | 4      |
| 5  | I don't worry about grammar; my team still understands what I mean. | 1     | 2      | 3     | 4      |
| 6  | I am not really aware of people's body language.                    | 1     | 2      | 3     | 4      |
| 7  | I don't think too much ahead about what I want to communicate.      | 1     | 2      | 3     | 4      |
| 8  | I have trouble listening when I am not interested in the topic.     | 1     | 2      | 3     | 4      |
| 9  | I tend to raise my voice when I get upset or excited.               | 1     | 2      | 3     | 4      |
| 10 | I am asked to repeat and clarify my communications.                 | 1     | 2      | 3     | 4      |

*If you scored 22 or below, you are likely a strong communicator most of the time. Any score 23 or above means there is likely room for improvement in how you communicate with your team.*