

Moving from platforms to people



By [Andrew McIlwaine](#)

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A lot of discussion has surrounded the business imperative of internal communications, and how its strategic impact is what drives the attainment of business objectives, and ultimately keeps the CEO happy. The impact thereof lies in the longevity of internal communication initiatives, and their effect on the bottom line.

Companies can dazzle their internal audiences with shiny branding and expensive communication exercises, but without the backing of employees, and their full commitment to the message, the issue could become tiresome and costly, or be completely forgotten once the exercise is complete. This is where we begin to rely on our leaders.

Committed leaders

Those in management positions have always had responsibilities that go beyond the tangibles, and often these responsibilities entail keeping their subordinates happy and productive. When it comes to communication, it is important that managers know what they're getting themselves in for. Often we deal with issues such as change and culture when it comes to internal communications, and communication around these issues is complex and time consuming. Ensuring that leaders are committed to such matters is essential.

This can be assured by establishing a partnership approach with various important functions in the business. By spreading your wings widely (and by 'your wings', I mean 'communications'), you will be able to obtain leadership buy-in and ensure effective cascading of information. The partnership approach means engaging and working closely with other functions such as HR, marketing, operations and strategy.

Effective dissemination

By establishing a forum where leaders can voice their opinions, and ultimately shape messaging strategies, ensures effective dissemination. Do this by helping leaders to understand business activities, and work through what this means in practical terms for them and their teams. In this way, you can set up clear leadership communication responsibilities, and make sure they are held accountable for them (hey, make these responsibilities part of their KPAs if necessary).

As a result, companies provide the relevant training and materials to support leaders with communication (remember, soft skills aren't for everyone!). Be sure that the leadership communication team understands that communication does not only involve telling - they need to be able to listen to their team, and create a feedback loop between employees and the business.

Jamie Walters, president of Ivy Sean Inc offers the following five steps to improve leadership communication:

1. **1. Get agreement:** Understand what leaders feel about communication, and gauge their perceptions of the organisation and issues that are facing it. You will then be in a position to review communication's importance in good leadership, and get agreement on the role managers play.
2. **2. Link leadership communication to effectiveness:** Promote communication as a business imperative, and share data on where a lack of communication (or communication problems) may create costly issues for the business.
3. **3. Be mindful of language:** "The words a leader chooses affects the impact of the communication," says Walters. Avoid the use of intense business jargon when communicating with staff, and rely more on clear language that gives people a vision of where the business wants to be.
4. **4. Build on the leader's own style:** Do not try to package the leader into a spokesperson for the organisation, flashing their Colgate smile at unconvinced employees. Rather focus on their strengths. Bringing those to the forefront when cascading important company information will do more to get the message across than trying to re-shape them.
5. **5. Maintain integrity:** Leaders need to believe what they are saying in order for employees to buy into the messages. It is through leadership communication forums that leadership buy-in is obtained, where questions can be addressed and healthy debate can take place. Walters adds; "With leaders under great scrutiny and audiences more sensitive to 'being sold to,' mindful, honest communication and impeccable follow through, are more important than ever."

By involving leaders in the communication process, companies are effectively able to incite buy-in from employees, and establish a relationship of trust with the organisation and its leaders. This contributes to an engaged, productive workforce - ultimately lending itself to profitable business growth.

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