

MIND THE GAP

HOW TO HANDLE MANAGER-EMPLOYEE PERCEPTION GAPS

EXECUTIVE REALITY AND EMPLOYEE REALITY ... DO THEY MATCH? RARELY. BUT YOU CAN FIX THAT.

What happens when team members, managers, and executives have differing perceptions of a situation, policy, program, or other business-related decision? Nothing good, that's for sure. *Perception gaps*, as they're called, come in all shapes and sizes, and they're extremely important to uncover and address because they can really put a drag on your operations. Facing perception gaps head-on—and fixing them—should improve business outcomes and the work environment.

IT ALL COMES DOWN TO COMMUNICATION.

Sometimes it's not *what* was said that led to a breakdown, it's *how* it was said. Too often, information is shared through the lens of the decision-maker with little regard for how the news impacts the recipient. (Or sometimes information is never shared at all because the decision maker doesn't deem it important!) But that is so wrong! There are very few communications that should ever be made with a specific emotional undertone; most communications should be approached with careful detail that communicates the “why,” “what,” and “when” to the recipient.

For example, new hires and new service offerings are often viewed as exciting additions by executives and the resulting announcements are full of cheer and exclamation points, but employees are often fearful of the impact of a new leader or the increased workload that comes with learning and delivering on a new service offering. Or, conversely, the loss of a big client or departure of a staff member may not hold the same meaning across divisions, and communications that lament a loss can leave groups of employees unnecessarily confused or worried.

Take great care to review your communication plan and get opinions from a wide variety of individuals on the planned communication before making—or not making—a big announcement. Common examples of areas where perception gaps start and can fester are:

*A leadership change · A new program or service offering · A change to bonus or compensation structure
The loss or addition of a large client · Corporate restructuring · A change to benefits programs
Changes to operating procedures or handbook policies · Change in technology
Change in structure to office space/office environment/where people work*

TAKE A TOUR!

There's no time like the present to attempt to uncover or fix perception gaps. One of the best ways to engage with employees is to send a representative on a “listening tour.” Set aside time—or have each manager set up time—to sit down with employees and ask for feedback on corporate communications. And don't just ask about desired methods of communication; ask employees to identify areas in which the communications they receive (or don't receive) differ from the type of information they need and want in order to do their job effectively. You might be surprised at what you uncover when you stop communicating and start listening.

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