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Eight ways bad managers kill conversations – and motivation

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Great communication is not about delivering messages brilliantly – it's about making yourself listened to



No matter how many people you lead, every day you will have to persuade them to believe in your cause and believe in the future you see – only persuasive communication can turn strategy into action. You have to persuade employees to work smarter and faster and more efficiently. You have to persuade financiers to give you more money. You have to persuade customers to buy more of your products and services. You have to persuade your bosses or colleagues to give more resources to allow you to carry out projects. You have to persuade colleagues to collaborate.

To be persuasive, you have to learn how to communicate with skill. Standing up on a stage and being a great speaker is no good at all if what you have to say doesn't connect with people and persuade them to new beliefs and new behaviours.

Today, after the stresses and traumas of the pandemic, managers also need to learn to communicate with a great deal more empathy, and to develop their listening skills. They need to learn how to seek first to understand, before being understood. Only by doing this do they stand a chance of being even remotely persuasive.

Being persuasive is about delivering a message that resonates, motivates and engages people. It is all about changing behaviour or encouraging the right behaviours, and none of that can be done if employees feel their boss is aloof, disconnected or out of touch.

When you speak with people in a way that shows them you understand their concerns and issues; when you provide clarity and connection to a cause; when you are able to encourage people to have a conversation; when you understand what it actually takes to change behaviours – only then might you be able to communicate with power.

When leaders communicate well, and encourage their teams to communicate well, teams can innovate at speed, sharing information, successes and failures, and learn to cooperate and not compete. Being an effective communicator is one of the attributes most valued by employees.

Good communication has a major impact on whether people feel respected and motivated – and that makes them more likely to give discretionary effort. Yet most employees say that their managers are not visible and do not talk with them frequently enough.

They say there are some particularly destructive behaviours that poor communicators exhibit. Employees most often say that bad managers...

- ... are secretive and share as little information as possible – to them, information is power, so they deliberately choose to withhold it
- ... are bad at giving feedback
- ... are even worse at giving praise than giving feedback (employees always see managers who give praise as more effective)
- ... are rampant one-way communicators who are on the 'broadcast' button all the time and have no interest in listening to people's views or encouraging robust conversations to find ideal solutions. They care little about encouraging good communication between team members
- ... are invisible, and prefer the security of their office walls to going out to talk to members of their team. They send emails at all hours of the day and night, even if members of their team are but yards away in the office
- ... never prepare for presentations, preferring to speak off the cuff
- ... have no sense of their audience and are completely unaware of the audience's issues and concerns – they have a message to deliver and, by heck, deliver it they will, no matter how long it takes
- ... are ambiguous, indirect or even lie, and never check whether people have understood a single word they said.

Who of us would want to be working in a team led by a boss who exhibits any of the behaviours I have listed above?

These are toxic bosses, and they create dreadful cultures and poisonous places of work that are harmful to our health, and our ability to contribute meaningfully to our organisation. These are the bosses who will have high churn rates in their teams, with most of their employees looking to move to another department or even another company.

Happily, well-intended managers who truly want to improve their performance can address most of these bad behaviours. Being mindful of these destructive behaviours is a good place to start.

According to CMI research, as many as four out of five managers in the UK are accidental managers – those promoted to their role without adequate training. In the UK alone, that's an estimated 2.4 million bosses. Imagine how many employees that affects? According to one estimate, less than half of all employees are satisfied with their manager. How many of them are feeling disengaged and demotivated? This brings with it a massive cost in lost productivity. One way to flatten the curve is to benchmark your skills by becoming a Chartered Manager – start your journey today.

This is the fifth in a special series of articles by author and leadership expert [Kevin Murray CMgr CCMI](#), in which he examines some of the behaviours that kill trust, destroy conversations, create chaos and lead to highly demotivated teams. This article is drawn from research he did for his new book [Charismatic Leadership: The skills you can learn to motivate high performance in others](#) (published by Kogan Page). CMI members can save 20% on this book with the code CMI20.

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