

BUSINESS SENSE

Next Level Tools for Entrepreneurs & Small Business Owners

HUMAN RESOURCES SERIES

Leading at the Speed of Effective Communication

Business is nothing more than a series of conversations.

Why is this important?

As reported on [Grammarly's website](#), a 2023 Harris Poll, "The State of Business Communication 2023", representing over 1,000 workers across many industries found that poor communication costs the US approximately \$1.2 trillion, or \$12,506 per employee. That same poll noted that communication is getting worse instead of better. As we come out of the throes of the pandemic and return to in-person office settings, we would have expected to see improvements in communication at work. Instead, "lowered productivity" went from 28% to 43%, compared to 2021.

Effective communication is the process of exchanging ideas, thoughts, opinions, knowledge, and data so that the message is received and understood with clarity and purpose. Effective communication in business can boost employee motivation, increase employee engagement, satisfaction, productivity, and reduce workplace conflicts that can arise based upon the diverse cultures and beliefs of a workforce.

Effective communication is the single most powerful tool a leader has to move a team into constructive action. Whether face-to-face, via email, through video conferencing or in a group meeting, one of the most difficult tasks a leader must perform is providing constructive feedback that allows team members to make difficult adjustments, improve their 'game' and succeed at their job. When communication is valued as a core competency, organizations improve in all areas of performance excellence.



Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

How to Make Improvements

Here's a list of tools, tips and resources to help you communicate better:

- Run effective meetings people WANT to come to - meetings that matter! Where employees feel heard and respected.
 - Use tools like "[Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matters Most](#)", as created by the Harvard Negotiation Project, to better understand the 9 different conversations that occur during every interaction.
 - Become a Learning Organization, where everyone is encouraged and supported to learn a common effective communication framework. In addition to the one noted above, you might find these to be a better fit for your organization:
 - [Fierce Conversations](#)
 - [Crucial Conversations](#)
 - [Appreciative Inquiry](#)
 - Know how to listen to both what's being said, and what is NOT, and how to bridge the gap.
- Handle emotions more effectively; start by recognizing that they exist, even though they are rarely talked about.
 - Share information more clearly and consistently.
 - Set clear limits and boundaries - though it may sound counter-intuitive, Brené Brown, an award-winning author and expert on leadership notes, in her book, [Rising Strong](#), that "*Compassionate people ask for what they need. They say no when they need to, and when they say yes, they mean it. They're compassionate because their boundaries keep them out of resentment.*"
 - Help others develop and grow - don't wait a whole year to sit down and review an employee's goals, aspirations and motivation. Try to make it happen at least once a season. Do it while taking a walk at least once a year, more often, weather permitting.

Listen [appreciatively](#), Walk your Talk. Be present.



BUSINESS SENSE

Next Level Tools for Entrepreneurs & Small Business Owners

Tips for Effective Communication in the Workplace

1. Communicate the Right Way

For more effective communication, first, ask these questions.

- **What is the goal?**
- **Who needs to hear this?**
- **How should I pass the message across?**

Ineffective communication often occurs when leaders or managers talk to the wrong employees or share information in the wrong workplace setting. The communication purpose should be directed only to relevant recipient(s) and your method of communication should be appropriate for the employee and the situation. For example, an employee may prefer email, while another opts for a physical interaction, where there's eye contact, and they can read your body language. Generally, it's best to communicate urgent information or instructions, major news or sensitive news such as

a promotion or transfer face-to-face.

2. Prioritize Two-Way Communication

Effective communication in the workplace involves speaking, active listening and feedback. Both parties need to understand each other.

Practice active listening: To avoid missing important information, don't listen to a coworker just so you can reply. Instead, listen to understand them. Maintain eye contact with the speaker, take notes to capture your thoughts while they're speaking, and respond with relevant gestures to show you're actively listening.

Embrace feedback: Ask your team members for feedback on your message and communication style either during meetings or anonymously in suggestion boxes, and note their comments and concerns. When you offer feedback, but do it thoughtfully and in person, not publicly. Adopt constructive feedback by first expressing

appreciation for their work and then pointing out how to improve. Invite employees to share their thoughts on your feedback.

3. Build Your Communication Skills

Be clear: To communicate effectively, be clear about your goal, use easy-to-understand words and avoid incomplete sentences. Also, provide context when communicating with your team. For example, if you're setting expectations for a big push to get things done in what might be considered an unreasonable amount of time, let people know WHY this is important and how it will benefit both the customer and the company. Also, encourage employees to ask questions to minimize errors and maximize productivity.

Remain courteous: Practice respectful communication and work through differences positively. Even during disagreements, try to stay polite, avoiding offensive words. Monitor your body language and facial expressions, and use the right tone, to avoid unintentional cues.

Stay open-minded: Make sure your employees feel comfortable approaching you with ideas or concerns. Consider their thoughts and address them respectfully, even when busy. And if you have concerns about an employee's behavior or performance, discuss it with them directly.

4. Embrace the Uniqueness of Each Employee

Every employee has their own unique communication style. Learn about their preferred communication channels and style - and then tailor



BUSINESS SENSE

Next Level Tools for Entrepreneurs & Small Business Owners

your methods to their select style. While the sales team seeks endless data analytics, the bookkeeper might not want detailed stories about how to land clients.

5. Make Time for One-on-One Interactions

To improve workplace communication, you need to be intentional about relationships. Schedule one-on-one meetings with your team. These meetings show your employees that you value them and are willing to connect with them more personally. Employees who are more reserved or quiet tend to be more open and share valuable information and feedback in private settings.

6. Schedule Weekly Team Meetings

Routine meetings create space for employees to speak their minds. Team leaders can meet with members to review each week's accomplishments, challenges and concerns, and set goals and tasks

for the future. Document important conversations and share recaps to clarify points and help the team remember recommendations and action points.

7. Invest Time in Team Building

Creating a dynamic working environment enables people to feel safe and confident. By promoting social interactions and casual, collaborative activities, employees feel more connected to one another and understood which improves retention and enhances work culture.

8. Show Appreciation

Businesses with engaged and happy workers make significantly more profits than those with miserable employees. Appreciate employees and show you care. Thank them for their brilliant ideas or for completing a task quickly. Be specific and genuine with your praise so that they can replicate it with their co-workers as future situations warrant.

9. Use Tech - Get a Team Communication App

The pandemic reminded us that absent of good team communication, there will be miscues, especially in remote or hybrid work environments. Consider team communication tools to stay up to date and collaborate on projects. These tools can provide a valuable hub to meet to carry out tasks, share information and discuss upcoming deadlines. Communication apps include project management tools, video conferencing tools and intranet shared drives within a business.

NOTE TO READER

The information contained herein is based upon sources believed to be accurate and reliable. While we have exercised reasonable care to ensure the accuracy of the information contained here, no representation or warranty is made as to such accuracy. Readers should check primary sources where appropriate and use traditional research techniques to make sure that the information has not been affected or changed by recent developments.

The author of this information does not render any legal, accounting or other professional service through publication of this document. Due to the rapidly changing nature of the law, information contained in this document may become outdated. Readers are encouraged to seek legal or other professional advice for their particular needs.

Business Sense is a no-fluff source of information that gets right to the heart of what small business owners need: essential tools and informational resources to help their businesses grow. Written by our team of business coaches, this series shares their decades of experience in areas such as financials, operations, sales and marketing, human resources, leadership, and governance. Business Sense is designed to provide entrepreneurs and small business owners in various sectors, including agriculture, forestry, waste management, renewable energy, and environmental technology, with recommendations and practical advice to help their businesses not only survive but thrive.

Our business management coaching and Business Sense Resource Guide are designed to accelerate the growth of the enterprises we work with and expand the leadership capacity of the entrepreneurs who own and manage these businesses.

Let Us Help You and Your Business

The Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund provides tailored business management coaching, entrepreneurial support, and training to position Vermont-based entrepreneurs and small business owners in our designated market sectors for growth and long-term success. We partner with state government, private sector businesses and nonprofit organizations to build a thriving economic, social and ecological future for Vermont. Learn more at [VSJF.org](https://vsjf.org)



Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund

Accelerating Sustainable Economic Development

[Learn More](#)