

# DEAR CEO



Here are 10 rules of best communication practice that will help your business improve its performance and the satisfaction of your people.

1

## Define a vision and values

Paint the vision for people – describe what a day in the life of your company looks like 10 years from now. What will customers experience? What are the papers saying about you? How will your business look different from where it is today?

Share the vision with the top team and encourage them to help describe it. Outline the journey to the vision with them – imagine key milestones along the way and what you need to communicate at each point.

Invite all your people to imagine the future and what your vision will make the business look like.

Translate your values into behaviours – for you and all your people. Draw up a list of scenarios that challenge the values and debate these with your executives. Make them real. Stand by colleagues who live the values and warn those who do not that you will not tolerate it.

2

## Build a close knit top team

In addition to the regular meetings about the business and its performance spend time away with your senior team every month. Debate how you work together, challenges, priorities and longer-term broader issues.

Define your top team to include the teams of your immediate colleagues. Get this group together at least once a quarter for an evening followed by a morning's discussion. Use these forums to address the priorities for the business. Encourage debate but use these meetings to keep emphasising the vision, the values and the priorities. Encourage this group to own these goals by debate – the more they can challenge and debate about them, the more they will begin to buy-in and the better the vision will be.

Get to know these people one to one.



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### Build a picture of how you want people to work around here

Visions, values, missions are not enough. Articulate the way you want people to act – what you want them to do. Work on this with your top team. Ask them these questions; “How should customers feel about buying from us? What should we do to make them feel like this? How do we want our people to feel about working for us? What do we need to do to make them feel that way? Are we working like that now? What do we need to do differently?”

Debate this with all your people. Hire some consultants or get some of your people to ask these questions. Provide feedback to the top team and the whole company. Publish the actions you decide to take. Put in feedback systems to check that your leaders are behaving in the way you say. Practice what you preach.

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### Follow the money

You may be clear about how you make money, but is everybody else? And if you are in the public sector what are the things that drive service and the satisfaction of those you serve? Identify the things that drive up your revenue or satisfaction and ensure your people understand these and how they contribute. What is more important to you – winning new business from new customers or building relationships with the ones you already have? What is the balance between these two goals? Make sure you communicate about your business to support these goals so that people design the right processes to achieve them. Develop communication processes dedicated to the service, marketing and sales processes and celebrating the successes you have. If you lose, be open about the lessons so that they do not get repeated.

Ask yourself the same questions about the costs in your business and open up the communication process so that people understand these. In particular explain why you have the disciplines that you have so that people understand their importance. Invite people to think about how the disciplines can be improved.

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### Communicate to innovate

Constant change and the development of new products and services is key for any organisation to grow and stay competitive. Set up ways to share knowledge and learn from your customers and employees. Ensure the R & D team are in touch with the marketing team. Ask customers or clients to have a say in your internal communication. Publish stories that talk about new service improvements and product introductions.



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### Create ambassadors

Identify the persuaders – natural communicators popular with their colleagues who have credibility and influence. Create programmes for them to get to understand your goals and pressures so that they can explain issues to people and help mobilise your resources. Use these people during times of major change.

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### Align your operations and your policies

Messages get sent by the major operating units, the human resource, marketing and corporate departments. Are they aligned? Do the people you recruit and promote exhibit the behaviour you want? Does the promise you make customers get reinforced through the reward and recognition systems for your people? In addition to your vision, appoint people to sit across these internal divisions and encourage co-operation and joint working. Check policies focus on the values you have identified.

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### Align internal and external communication

Do not let organisation structure get in the way of co-ordinating communication – both content and its timing – across the internal and external audiences. Make sure your people are copied on press releases. Involve your people in the brand definition process. Use your own people to advertise your services. Hold workshops for your people to debate how they can support the brand promise.

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### Manage and support your intranet – and the manager behaviour it requires

Rapidly the intranet has become one of the most powerful tools. It needs to reflect your organisation and you need to control it. Put someone in charge who understands the business and who can influence those who contribute to it. Spend money on your intranet so that navigation is easy and the search engines work.

Your managers' roles are changing. Information is moving faster and freer than ever before. In this new era what do you want them to do – provide context, lead, facilitate change? Define the managerial and communication behaviours you need to lead the field and invest in training and development.

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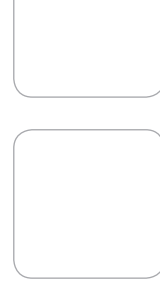
### Measure

Measure the effectiveness of how you communicate – use all available means and co-ordinate feedback. Keep your ears close to the ground by checking on what your customers and your people are feeling and thinking. Identify the lessons and share them.

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### There is no best practice

The eleventh rule – there is no best practice because each business or organisation needs to tackle these issues in the way that makes sense for them, their people, their culture, their customers and their organisation. But if they follow the rules above they should be world beaters!



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