

WATCH

You may be wearing the CEO's hat, but there is no reason you should talk through it

BY SULEKHA NAIR

Effective communication is critical. Especially when it comes from people who helm organizations, teams or even a country, for they articulate the values, principles and standpoints of the organizations they represent. When leaders make careless remarks, the damage done ricochets on the organization and its image. There are those in the public eye who will harp on others' mistakes even as they play down their own or those of their associates. Gaffes and defensive talk go on ad nauseum.

There have been frequent studies on how effective communication is within and outside organizations in India. "Employee engagement surveys" conducted by Ernst and Young for different organizations over the years, for example, have shown consistently that senior management needs to communicate more effectively.

Explains Anurag Malik, partner, advisory services, Ernst and Young, Mumbai: "We measure the effectiveness of communication within the organization and its impact on employee engagement. The communication

VINITA SINGHANIA

Managing director, JK Lakshmi Cement, and president, Cement Manufacturers Association, New Delhi

The spokesperson must pay heed to the various components of the communication—keeping a check on the choice of words, the tone of voice and body language.

My golden rules: Communicate the right message at the right time using the right platform to the right target audience; communicate with employees on a regular basis in order to avoid any communication gaps; avoid

KUNWER SACHDEV

Managing director, Su-Kam Power Systems, Gurgaon, Haryana

The opening of any speech or presentation is very important and should be planned in such a way that you attract everybody's attention. The speaker has to be well versed with the profile of the audience so as to establish a connect while addressing it.

My golden rules: Sometimes I change my speech sitting on the dais itself just to get the audience interested in the subject. Going by

AMITABH CHAUDHRY

Managing director and chief executive officer, HDFC Life, Mumbai

A CEO must focus on doing homework on the subject, spend a couple of minutes discussing the key messages to be communicated and also anticipate probable issues in the minds of the people one is interacting with. Crisp and clear communication, backed with real data, always has a deeper impact.

My golden rules: People may not like the message but they always appreciate integrity

YOUR

scores, especially those pertaining to senior management, are on the lower side in India. Our surveys have shown that CEO and senior management need to play a strong role in driving effective communication and percolate across to all levels in the organization."

This is the picture both within organizations, and outside them. It is a given that the more measured the leader's voice, the better it is for both the speaker and the organization.

Malik adds that employees in India typically rate organizations between 25% and 60% on the effective communications parameter. They find senior

management lacking most in areas such as sharing strategic priorities and business direction, awareness of employee concerns and seeking staffers' views on company matters.

While CEOs need to encourage a culture of good communication within the organization, what they and their senior management staff say outside too makes an impact.

Padmaja Alaganandan, executive director, consulting, PricewaterhouseCoopers, Bangalore, says: "In the crowded marketplace, where a quote or a byte is the order of the day, it is desirable if a CEO or leader inculcates

UDAY DHARMADHIKARI

Chief executive officer, Usha Breco Realty, Mumbai

Take time to listen and not jump to conclusions—this helps in avoiding misunderstandings. Also do not criticize people; choose your words carefully.

My golden rules: Communicate the strategy well, so as to not allow for confusion, and ensure what you are saying is easily understood.

Preparing for the big talk: It is very essential to keep the person's concerns and priorities

DR PERVEZ AHMED

Managing director and chief executive officer, Max Healthcare, New Delhi

A two-way communication process needs to be exercised for effective communication. The message is the crux of any communication process; therefore it must be crisp and clear so that the audience is able to interpret the message in the right manner. Striking a chord with the audience is an important aspect that must be employed at all times. The message should be prepared keeping in mind the nature of the

WORDS

three subtle traits. (The first is) sensitivity and respect. When a CEO disagrees with what is being said, he/she should be careful not to run down another or make remarks about race, gender or values. (The second trait is) transparency. For instance, in difficult times, like during a slowdown, when cost-cutting and difficult measures are needed, a CEO who is transparent about the difficulties the organization is facing and requests support is far more likely to get employee commitment and be successful. And (finally,) humility coupled with openness, especially to different views—this is a good

trait to cultivate.”

Outlining the minefields to avoid while communicating, Hari Menon, CEO of IndiaSkills, Bangalore, says: “A leader should not talk about himself in any conversation or speech—instead, share the organization’s vision, refrain from criticizing anyone in the public arena as this adversely affects the organization, and don’t be judgmental—while it is important to have an opinion, a leader should always be tolerant and open-minded.” IndiaSkills is a joint venture between Manipal Education, Bangalore, and City and Guild, UK, and offers vocational training.

When a leader talks, it is imperative that he/she focus on the communication that the organization or party he/she is leading wants to speak about. “Do not put the focus on yourself,” says Kumar Parakala, partner and chief operating officer, KPMG Advisory, Bangalore. “Ensure that the information is targeted in the right manner, and is appropriate for the group being addressed.”

We asked CEOs across industries to outline the golden rules they follow as leaders and opinion makers within their organizations and outside them. Here are some rules they swear by:

DR PERVEZ AHMED

Managing director and chief executive officer,
Max Healthcare, New Delhi

A two-way communication process needs to be exercised for effective communication. The message is the crux of any communication process; therefore it must be crisp and clear so that the audience is able to interpret the message in the right manner. Striking a chord with the audience is an important aspect that must be employed at all times. The message should

GV NAGESWARA RAO

Managing director and chief executive officer,
IDBI Federal Life Insurance, Mumbai

A CEO should have full control over the information, with all facts on hand. He or she should be polite while speaking to employees or addressing any meet or conference. A leader must keep the organization’s goals in mind while speaking to anyone and must never highlight personal goals. Be diplomatic when speaking on competition, regulatory issues

KARANDEEP SINGH

Managing director, Sapient, Bangalore

While communicating with internal stakeholders, a CEO should listen to their praise and grievances, while sharing the company’s points of view and goals. His communication strategies within the organization should highlight a “clear plan” as to where the business is headed. Humour is always a good tool that can be used to break the ice and initiate a discussion. As a communicator to an external

... issues are

... talk. To main
to be plann
rest befo
the way
in thou

PRADEEP RATHINAM

Chief executive officer, Aditi Technologies, Bangalore

The ability to empathize and prioritize, be honest, transparent, approachable, result-oriented and passionate—this comes from one's conviction and by connecting to people.

My golden rules: Focus on crisp messages, and keep it simple and precise. I prioritize, and keep the line of reasoning and questioning ability with me when I speak at industry-related meets. When commu-

nicating bad news or poor results, I try to be as subtle as possible. Here, relationship-building with everyone comes into place and I ensure that everyone understands the importance of the decision in the context of the long-term benefits of the organization.

Preparing for the big talk: I think in bullet points and then think about how to add colour with stories. Also, I try to balance connection and conviction—these are the two important basic aspects needed to be able to connect with people.



M
A
r
i
P
T
R

Mint

WATCH YOUR WORDS

Date: 25/07/2011 | Edition: Delhi | Page: 12 | Source: SULEKHA NAIR | Clip size (cm): W: 251 H: 262

Clip: 5 of 5

Mind the talk:
A leader must always remember that anything said by him on a public platform will reflect company policy, not personal views.

AMARNATH ANANTHANARAYANAN
Managing director and chief executive officer, Bharti AXA General Insurance

Whatever a leader says should reflect the organization's core values. In our case, it would be innovation, integrity, teamwork, pragmatism and professionalism.

My golden rules: Do what you say and say what you do. Listen and get the pulse of the audience. We should try to keep it as honest as possible at all times and never try to paint a wrong picture. If there is confidential information that can jeopardize the company's or employees' interests, it is better to steer away from the topic rather than give false answers that could create speculation.

Preparing for the big talk: Get the content, know your audience and get the context in place to deliver the relevant message in a concise and lucid manner. Discuss with relevant team members before going public.