

Delivering a 'Sticky' Message to Your Employees

Do you deliver messages to your employees that tend to get forgotten within a day or two? Do you wonder how you can convey important messages that actually stick, rather than going in one ear and out the other?

Part of the reason people forget what you've said is that a message needs to resonate with the receiver before it can be internalised. Employees need to know three key things – why should I care about this? Why does it matter again? And what's in it for me? Because if it's not really relevant to their day-to-day lives, they are not likely to remember it for long.

The SUCCES method

One way to get messages to stick is to use the SUCCES method developed by best-selling authors Chip and Dan Heath. SUCCES stands for Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, Emotional, and Stories.

To illustrate:

- **Simple** – your core message should be simple, succinct and direct, and easy to remember. At the same time though, it should be meaningful and relevant, and not merely a sound bite or a three-word slogan. In essence, for the message to make sense, it should be easy to remember and also enable employees to make a link between it and the things that they do each day.
- **Unexpected** – it's generally the unusual, unique and unexpected that gets remembered, rather than the mundane or the ordinary. In an interview, Chip Heath said that John F. Kennedy's message to put a man on the moon really stuck for a long time because it was so unexpected. Consider how you can make your message unique and special so that it sticks.
- **Concrete** – this is where messages need to relate to them on a personal level, rather than in a general or abstract way. How does the message provide concrete benefit to them? How can they relate to it in a way that is real, and not just vague or distant? For instance, saying to employees that they need to 'make customers happy' is vague compared to providing them with specific information on how to make that happen.
- **Credible** – any facts presented in your message need to be backed up by sources that are credible to employees, otherwise they might simply be ignored or dismissed.
- **Emotional**: a message that is 'emotional' is one that stirs the emotions and inspires, going beyond providing mere information. A typical example of this is where a charity inspires people to sponsor a child rather than just donate money.
- **Stories**: the message will resonate more if it tells a story or has a narrative, rather than if it just provides bland information or facts and figures.

Thinking RIM

To expand on these ideas, think about the “what’s in it for me?” question. How is your message going to change the lives of employees in some meaningful way? This is where the idea of RIM – Reduce (pain), Improve (happiness), Maintain (security) comes in handy.

- **Reduce** – how is the message going to reduce the recipient’s problem, pain, stress, effort, anxiety and so on? In the case of employees, you might consider how it will reduce their work stress, irritation, or wasted time.
- **Improve or increase** – how will it improve their pleasure, happiness, success or ease? Here you could think about how it will improve your employees’ job satisfaction, job performance, or career path.
- **Maintain** – this refers to how it will maintain the receiver’s safety, security and rewards they’ve worked for. In a workplace context, this might relate to how it will help employees to maintain their job security, expectations, and what they’ve worked hard to achieve.

Use positive language

A message that comes with positive language tends to stick better than “thou shalt not.” This means that rather than communicating a don’t-do-this message, you provide information on what should happen. This is because our brain needs to think of the thing to avoid before being able to eliminate it – making us too conscious of what not to do. A classic real-life example occurs when an adult instructs children to “walk on the footpath” rather than “don’t run!” – providing them with a clear option on what to do rather than what to avoid.

Lastly, any message to your employees needs to be accompanied by action on your part – such as providing them with the skills and resources needed to put the message into action. Otherwise it will probably be seen as a lot of nice words and not much else – and that is very unlikely to stick!

Source (interview):

<http://rpp.wtgrantfoundation.org/library/uploads/2016/01/Crafting-a-message-that-sticks.pdf>