

How poor communication can foster toxic leadership

Culture in a workplace dictates the effectiveness of the work produced. Positive relationships between senior managers and employees are essential to a well functioning company. Poor communication can signify a company in decline; one that does not have the means or the confidence to rectify internal issues and create a happier workspace.

When basic training is being abandoned and managers are slipping on their responsibilities, it can have a tremendous impact on employees. This often results in toxic culture, which is fostered by toxic leadership. It can have dire consequences on companies, such as increased resignations and disorganisation in teams. To avoid these scenarios companies must understand and prioritise clear, effective communication. Here's how.

Focus on how leaders communicate

Poor communication, by definition, is the inability to convey a message clearly. This includes unclear briefs, failure to share important changes, and unhelpful feedback. When this goes unmonitored, it can lead to toxic culture as employees won't receive effective guidance, which impacts their output. If managers are being unkind, unclear or simply projecting their stress onto workers, those on the receiving end will feel demoralised, frustrated and might even think about quitting. If your team is showing signs that they're putting the minimum effort into their work and are not as engaged or enthusiastic about their job, then perhaps it is time for some

introspection for leaders. Before blaming employees, look to what the leaders of your organisation can improve first, starting with communication.

Quiet quitting has emerged as a phenomenon. People are withdrawing from the daily tasks their job requires; not attending training or meetings, not working overtime, being less of a team player etc. This has been going on for decades. Social media has now created a movement of quiet quitters and speaking out against negative work culture and toxic managers is becoming the norm. To avoid a scenario like this, line managers ought to arrange a meeting one-to-one to figure out what the problems are and work with the team member(s) to rectify them and boost morale. Leaders need to listen, act and communicate with confidence (especially if times are hard).

At PitchNinjas we helped a team who were going through a big change programme. We helped the individuals in that team improve their interpersonal communication, to collectively deal with the big challenges they were facing. During periods of change toxic culture can emerge. In this instance effective communication skills helped the team pave the way to success.

How leaders can communicate more effectively

Be clear and honest with your team. A significant part of the leader's role is to identify a team's strengths and weaknesses, harness their talents and provide support to things they find difficult. All of this is achieved through clear communication. Neglecting this part of their duty can often lead to low productivity and even a toxic environment. If employees aren't improving, then neither are the managers. Providing detailed, clear, actionable feedback is a simple way of resolving this issue, as well mitigating low productivity and poor performance.

Consider training. Enhancing training is another course of action to take. Upskilling managers to be prepared for different situations can resolve internal conflict and encourage empathy. A lack of expertise can make those in leadership positions feel vulnerable, so effective training and mentoring for them is also required to prevent toxic leadership from happening. Poor performance reflects badly on managers, so if they are not providing consistent feedback, the whole team suffers.

Be clear on values and objectives. Another way to combat toxic leadership is by implementing clear values and objectives. This is necessary to motivate workers and improve leadership. Having everyone on the same page is important for a healthy workplace, but also allowing diverse opinions so that no one is isolated is also integral for a company to function.

In addition to the emotional consequences, poor leadership can cost a company millions. If the well-being factors are not enough, the financial consequences ought to be a concern. This is why finding out what works and ensuring all levels of staff are content should be the priority for companies.

To end, the consequences of not treating employees properly and refusing responsibility are terrible for companies, financially and emotionally. If we want to increase retention and promote greater harmony and productivity, those in leadership positions and their managers should roll out more training and rebuild relationships with employees before it's too late. Low productivity, high stress and negative managers are the perfect storm to avoid, be prepared, act accordingly and most importantly listen to your workers. All of this then comes down to improving communication from leader to employees and ultimately from peer to peer. Leaders need to be clear, compelling and concise. They need to use words to inspire, to support, to show empathy, to guide. PitchNinjas works with individuals to make sure their messages have conviction behind them and truly land. These skills go such a long way to improving workplace culture. If leaders communicate well, others will follow and a virtuous circle begins. Lucero Tagle & Joanna Mollo are the cofounders of *PitchNinjas*.

Article by LUCERO TAGLE & JOANNA MOLLO