

The
COMPREHENSIVE
POWER OF **COMMUNICATION**

A 3-PART
COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
FOR **LONG-RANGE IMPACT**

The JOHN MAXWELL Team



- **PROTECTING** *the* BOTTOM LINE
- **BUILDING** *the* TOP LINE
- **ENHANCING** *the* MIDDLE LINE



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It was October of 1854, during the Crimean War. A unit well-trained and equipped for an intended mission received a miscommunication that, instead, sent them into the gauntlet of death. It is captured in the famous poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson.¹

*“Forward, the Light Brigade!”
Was there a man dismayed?
Not though the soldier knew
Someone had blundered.
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do and die.
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.*

Over a century later, a CEO stood before a group of well-trained and equipped employees and said, **“The numbers are looking better and better.”** Those employees – thousands of them – were unwittingly led down the path to unemployment as the company met its demise.



Communication Affects *the* **BOTTOM LINE**

From the battlefield to the corporate front to the home front, miscommunication and lack of communication can have serious impact. Throughout history, the root of many disagreements, arguments, and unfortunate consequences has been a simple point of miscommunication or non-communication that could have been prevented.

In a company, lack of communication or miscommunication can impact the bottom line in the form of delays, inefficiencies of cost and time, or service issues; and, in a worse-case scenario, financial loss, workplace accidents, or lawsuits. Carried to a logical end, miscommunication or non-communication can have a leader sending employees into territory for which they are not prepared.

According to an article by **SHRM**, the cost is quantifiable.

David Grossman reported in "The Cost of Poor Communications" that a survey of 400 companies with 100,000 employees each cited an average loss per company of \$62.4 million per year because of inadequate communication to and between employees. Debra Hamilton asserted, in her article "Top Ten Email Blunders that Cost Companies Money," that miscommunication cost even smaller companies of 100 employees an average of \$420,000 per year.²

The bottom line is that communication affects the bottom line.



Communication Affects *the* **TOP LINE**

Top-line revenue in a company is the company's gross sales. Gross sales are grounded in one thing: customer service. How well a company serves its customers is directly reflected in the top-line revenue numbers.

In this arena, communication is critical. Anticipating and listening for the expressed needs and desires of customers, hearing and responding to their feedback, and dealing respectfully with their issues and questions are the hallmarks of success. Highly profitable companies like **Zappos** were built on such a premise. Their mission is simple. It was never "Deliver the Shoes" but "Deliver the WOW!" They have been delivering the WOW! for over two decades.

"We hope that in the future people won't even realize we started selling shoes online. Instead, they'll know Zappos as a service company that just happens to sell _____."³



Communication Affects *the* **MIDDLE LINE**

Artists, filmmakers, and photographers understand the power of the middle line. A truly great piece of art will have a prominent middle line – horizontal or vertical – that captivates the observer. A horizon, wall, centered eye, or edge of a cliff – this middle line is subtle but highly impactful. An observer may not notice it, but they will immediately sense its impact.

Between the top line and the bottom line in any business is the powerfully impactful middle line – the people who, with focused and concerted effort, create and support the customer deliverables while also protecting the bottom line. Customers may not see them, but they will sense their impact.

Communication is critical to a company's middle line. Done well, it creates a cohesive team that operates with high efficiency and effectiveness, feeding the top line and supporting the bottom line.

Powerful COMMUNICATION ACROSS ALL LINES OF BUSINESS



Protecting *the* **BOTTOM LINE**

The bottom line of business is all about protection. It is guarding against the factors that could adversely impact the customers, team, and organization. A key leadership responsibility is to protect the bottom line. This requires both broad and highly focused communication.

> **COMMUNICATION BETWEEN *the* LEADER AND SELF**

The mindset of a leader has direct impact on the bottom line, and on everyone and everything tied to it.

Author and entrepreneur, **Mike Michalowicz**, tells the story of a business owner who had been in business ten years.⁴ She approached him during the break at a live event, asking if he could do his “Instant Assessment” on her business. While the top-line revenue looked robust, when they got to the bottom line, she saw the serious reality of her business. She had worked and sacrificed for ten years with essentially nothing to show for it.

The reality hit hard.

The problem was that, for ten years, her mindset had driven her habits. She had told herself she was doing well, based on the top-line revenue. But she declined to heed that inner thought that questioned whether she really was doing well...until that day.



> **COMMUNICATION BETWEEN *the* LEADER AND OTHERS**

The entrepreneur did one thing right. She opened the lines of communication, both internally and externally. For the first time, she was honest with herself about the state of her business. And she went to Mike and asked for help.

Leaders in trouble sometimes internalize communication and push it to a point of denial because denial is easier to accept than reality. Strong leaders, however, understand the need to communicate honestly within themselves and to enlist the help of mentors and accountability partners to ensure their internal communications are on track with reality and supporting them for growth. Strong leaders will also communicate openly with their teams when there are issues to be addressed. This shared responsibility has the power to develop a focused and dedicated team that works together to solve problems and create innovation. Strong leaders communicate honestly with vendors and also ensure customer communication lines are open and transparent.

PROTECTING THE BOTTOM LINE IS **COMMUNICATING CLEARLY ACROSS ALL LINES TO**
ENSURE EVERYONE UNDERSTANDS THE IMPACT OF THEIR PARTICULAR PART ON IT.

Failure to communicate is failure to protect the bottom line.

Building *the* TOP LINE

Customers communicate in the language of currency. If top-line revenue is an issue for a company, it indicates a serious communication issue. It may be that customers have a need that is not being addressed, customer expectations for quality or price are not being met, or customer support is lacking.

While many address this as a marketing and sales issue, it is more often a customer communication issue. If a company has a product or service that its potential customers desire, if the quality and price are right, and if the company is known for great customer service and support, sales will happen as a conversational side effect, not as a result of a high-pressured sales pitch.

Listening to and serving customers well not only affects the top line, it greatly improves the bottom line. Higher sales volume, customer retention, and lower costs for sales and marketing creates financial viability at both levels.

> **SOME QUESTIONS to ASK:**

1. *Is the company serving the needs of its customers well?*
2. *Are the quality and price of products and services in alignment with customer expectations?*
3. *Are the front lines supporting customers at the highest level possible?*

These questions are all based on a “conversation” with customers – one where leaders and teams purposefully listen to the needs of customers and pro-actively address them.





Enhancing *the* MIDDLE LINE

TOP-LINE REVENUE AND BOTTOM-LINE PROFIT ARE NOTHING WITHOUT A STRONG MIDDLE LINE.

A strong middle line will produce the quality products and services that sell, support the customers, and create the efficiencies that ensure financial viability.

In his book, *Good to Great*, Jim Collins illustrates the value of having the right people in the right places and notes how having honest communication, vigorous debates, and differing perspectives can save a company.⁵ Developing a solid team creates a formidable force against challenge. A leader's goal should be to create a team that will aggressively attack an issue, willingly but respectfully voice differing opinions, and openly share varying perspectives and ideas.

These simple strategies not only make team members feel valued and respected; they also build the platform for individual and company success.

> COMMUNICATION MODEL

Leaders set the example by communicating regularly and clearly with their teams. They take the time to address their questions so they can progress on initiatives.

This is not about being a micro-manager or, conversely, the "ostrich leader" who buries their head in the sand. This is more about guidance and mentorship. It includes everything from clearly conveying and discussing mission, vision, and goals to being clear on plans, processes, and job roles.

Leaders are responsible for setting the example for great communication in the workplace.

> COMMUNICATION METHOD

Communication is a two-way street. What is conveyed may not always be what is received.

Good leaders make it a mission to get to know their people and to learn their individual styles of communication. This works for everyone. In education, teachers are especially adept at this concept. They look for ways to reach each student on a level of their interest. If they know a student likes to play a certain sport, for instance, they may use a sport analogy in a lesson. Inevitably, the student will show visible physical signs of increased interest – they will sit up straight and engage with eye contact. When the connection is made between their interest and the lesson, there will be a "light bulb moment."



Adults have this same need for relevance and connection. When communicating with employees, make it interesting and relevant. Use examples they can relate to and communicate in their style.

The Maxwell Method of Communication Impact Report provides a valuable tool for learning the individual styles of each team member, how they best communicate, and how leaders can best communicate with them. Consider scheduling a discovery discussion with the John Maxwell Team Executive Director who provided you with this report, to see how you and your team can leverage this important communication tool.

The report is based on Dr. William Marston's DISC theory, which is centered on four different personality traits: **D**ominant, **I**nfluencing, **S**teady, and **C**ompliant (**DISC**). While each individual is a combination of all four of these categories, most score highest in one or two of them, with the other categories playing a lesser role in how they think, work, and communicate.

Most leaders innately communicate in their style. But the most connective leaders adapt their style in such a way that they are able to also communicate in the style of the other person. This is a learned skill and is highly effective.

Tips for
COMMUNICATING
WITH DIFFERENT STYLES

- **COMMUNICATING** with a **D-STYLE PERSON**. Use action words and speak in clear, concise "bullet points." Don't speak in terms of the past or future, but in terms of what can be done "now."
- **COMMUNICATING** with an **I-STYLE PERSON**. Make it fun and interesting. Use stories to make a point. Keep it light and avoid assigning them to projects that are long and laborious.
- **COMMUNICATING** with an **S-STYLE PERSON**. Be cordial and conversational. They naturally want to help, so tap into ways they can be of help to others. Avoid being pushy or overly aggressive.
- **COMMUNICATING** with a **C-STYLE PERSON**. Don't make it too personal. Let them know what needs to be done and provide a timeline; then allow them to think it through before responding or coming up with a plan. Once they have a plan, Cs can act swiftly, as they are task oriented. But give them time to think first. Remind them, though, to share their thoughts at intervals so the rest of the team can keep pace as well.



> **COMMUNICATION MEANS**

Each person has preferred ways of learning, working, and communicating. Good leaders make it a habit to notice what works best for each person on the team and to create an environment that is supportive.

- Do they prefer verbal directives, kinesthetic learning, written instructions, or visual demonstrations via video or other means?
- Do they prefer email, phone, chat, or text for communications?
- Do they need a solitary space to do their best work, or do they work better in groups?

Knowing the style of each team member helps a leader tailor the means to help them perform at their highest levels.

> **COMMUNICATION MITIGATION**

“I need this done ASAP!”

“Is that done yet?”

“This is not what I wanted!”



These are snapshots of conversations that happen daily in the workplace.

According to **research**,⁶ 40% of workers reported their job was very or extremely stressful, and, alarmingly, 25% viewed their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives.

Stress has **serious side effects**⁷ – physical, mental, and behavioral. According to a publication by **Eastern Kentucky University Online**⁸, this translates to financial losses of \$602 per employee per year for every missed workday, in addition to its effect on productivity on the days employees are at work. Collectively, the **cost of stress**⁹ is estimated to be \$300 billion annually for health care and missed work days.

While many companies address workplace stress from different (and important) angles, there is one major factor many fail to consider. It is the impact of communication.

WITH JUST A FEW MINOR CORRECTIONS, LEADERS CAN BEGIN TO
CREATE A HEALTHIER, HAPPIER, AND MORE ENGAGED WORKFORCE.



DEADLINES > *Details* > DELIVERY

> DEADLINES - NO "ASAPs"

ASAP is essentially an undefined term. A leader's definition of ASAP is likely to be "immediately." The employee, however, may be looking at it in terms of their overall workload, in which case ASAP would be two days from now.

STRESS: The gap between these two internal definitions will surface as stress.

SOLUTION: Define the Deadline

There are certain personalities who use ASAP quite often. In these cases, it is not about priorities; it is about their personality. For them, an idea is an ASAP. A menial task is an ASAP. Anything to be done is an ASAP.

The reason is because they want these things out of their heads, off their list, and moving forward. As quickly as they can pass them off to others, they are free to explore new ideas and possibilities, and get results.

Consider the impact of this term on a dedicated employee who truly wants to help. In their mind, a mental fire alarm goes off. It tells them they must take immediate action because this is very, very important. Adrenalin is released. They are ready to fight the fire.

Except...this the tenth fire of the day. They are engulfed in overwhelm.

The leader has no idea this is happening because they have released the burden and have now begun to explore other new ideas and possibilities.

This scenario creates a cycle of stress, which could easily be avoided by clear communication of deadlines and determination of priorities.

> DETAILS - NO AMBIGUITY

Busy leaders think fast and move fast. They expect their team members to intuitively keep pace with their thoughts and intentions. Although there are many who are gifted in working efficiently and knowing the "how," even they will need to discuss a few details, so the project is completed according to what the leader envisions.

STRESS: The lack of clarity creates a stressful blank canvas.

SOLUTION: Discuss the Details

This is an important point of communication for both sides. A leader's responsibility is to convey clear vision to the team. They should expect questions and allow time to address them.

The employee's responsibility is to listen closely to the vision as it is conveyed, and to quantify their questions succinctly.



> DELIVERY - NO ACCUSATIONS

Leaders who have chosen qualified candidates to fill positions and who have dedicated employees with good character habits have a very valuable resource. But what happens when a team member fails?

STRESS: The employee's best effort does not meet the leader's expectations.

SOLUTION: Determine the Difficulty

Unless the leader knows otherwise, they should give the employee the benefit of the doubt, acknowledging that he or she has given their best effort based on the information provided and the time allotted.

Then the leader should determine where the breakdown in communication occurred. Were details properly conveyed? Was the assignment within the strengths and skill zone of the employee? Was there a question the employee was afraid to ask or a challenge with which they needed help?

Good understanding of individual strengths and open communication can help ensure best efforts meet and even exceed expectations.

Conclusion

John C. Maxwell stresses a very important point in his best-selling book, *Everyone Communicates Few Connect*.¹⁰ He emphatically states,

"If you want to succeed, you must learn how to connect with others. If you can connect with others at every level—one-on-one, in groups, with an audience—you have the capacity for strengthening your relationships, increasing your sense of community, generating teamwork, and multiplying your productivity."

The key to tapping into the comprehensive power of communication is to apply solid communication strategies at every level of the organization. It is ultimately about understanding, connecting, and communicating with the people who collectively create a successful business.

Protecting *the* **BOTTOM LINE**

Building *the* **TOP LINE**

Enhancing *the* **MIDDLE LINE**

"The one thing that makes or breaks a leader is the ability to connect with others."

— JOHN C. MAXWELL¹¹



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As an Executive Director with the John Maxwell Team, I am committed to serving business leaders and their teams with leadership and professional development programs that will help them leverage the comprehensive power of communication across all lines of business to create long-range impact.

> **CONTACT ME FOR MORE INFORMATION**



Resources

¹ Tennyson, Alfred Lord. "The Charge of the Light Brigade," 1854.

² <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/behavioral-competencies/communication/pages/the-cost-of-poor-communications.aspx>

³ <https://www.zappos.com/about>

⁴ Michalowicz, Mike. *Profit First*, Gildan Media, LLC, 2017.

⁵ Collins, Jim. *Good to Great*, Harper Business, 2011.

⁶ <https://www.stress.org/workplace-stress/>

⁷ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress-symptoms/art-20050987>

⁸ <https://safetymanagement.eku.edu/resources/infographics/work-related-stress-on-employees-health/>

⁹ <http://www.businessinsider.com/how-stress-at-work-is-costing-employers-300-billion-a-year-2016-6>

¹⁰ Maxwell, John C. *Everyone Communicates Few Connect*, Thomas Nelson, 2010.

¹¹ <https://www.johnmaxwell.com/blog/one-thing-that-makes-or-breaks-a-leader/>