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## A four-step process to making managers stronger communicators

# HELP MANAGERS MASTER THE ART OF COMMUNICATION

Managers often lack the communication skills that are vital to keeping employees engaged. In your capacity as communication coach to the leadership team, how can you ensure they develop these skills? Andy Szpekman, author of Melcrum's report *Developing a Communication Toolkit for Managers*, offers four steps for success.

Study after study confirms the link between good manager communication and engaged employees. Yet managers often lack the knowledge and skills to be effective communicators.

In my communication workshops, I suggest a four-step process to rectify the problem. These steps, shown below, don't necessarily have to occur sequentially, but each must be addressed.

1. Inform managers
2. Motivate managers
3. Prepare managers
4. Involve managers

### 1. Inform managers

The first step is to ensure managers understand their role as communicators – from the employee's perspective. The buzzwords and concepts of employee engagement might change over time, but the underlying principles do not. It all comes down to discussing basic issues like job responsibilities, career opportunities, and corporate goals and strategies.

The takeaway for managers is to understand what employees expect in terms of communication and what it means for managers' day-to-day responsibilities. For employees to feel engaged, involved and informed, managers need to focus on the issues that matter most.

### 2. Motivate managers

If you want managers to communicate

effectively, you need to present the idea in terms that managers care about.

For instance, you might link good communication to low turnover, high productivity, employee engagement or a stock price increase. Pick something that will get managers' attention. Then show how improving communication can lead to financial rewards and achievement of goals.

Managers also need to have good communication reinforced by senior leaders and HR processes. Line managers take their cues from senior leaders. Do senior leaders convey the importance of communication in their words and actions?

Equally, if not more important, are HR processes. Communicators need to work with their colleagues in HR to ensure communication receives the right measures and rewards.

### 3. Prepare managers

Once managers understand their communication role and are motivated to fulfill it, the time is right to prepare them to be better communicators. At this point, managers are most receptive to training and advice.

The skill-building process can be



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broken into two parts:

1. Define the communication competencies managers need.
2. Provide tools and training to help managers develop those competencies.

The four core competencies, in my opinion, are:

1. Insight
2. Feedback and coaching
3. Listening
4. Informing

Once you know what you aim to develop, you're ready to offer tools and training.

In my communication workshops, I discuss the four core competencies and present templates, exercises and frameworks to help managers boost their abilities, while meeting routine communication challenges.

### 4. Get managers involved

The final step is to get managers involved in the communication process. I recommend four ways of doing this:

1. Make managers privileged receivers of information.
2. Have managers shape communication to employees.
3. Pilot test communications with managers before distributing them broadly.
4. Hold managers accountable for communicating with employees.

Now that your managers are knowledgeable, motivated and prepared, be sure to put their expertise to good use. For example, before communicating a change to employees, probe managers' insights into how employees are likely to react to the change and their knowledge of any barriers that stand in the way of successful implementation.

For more information about *Developing a Communication Toolkit for Managers*, go to [www.melcrum.com](http://www.melcrum.com)