

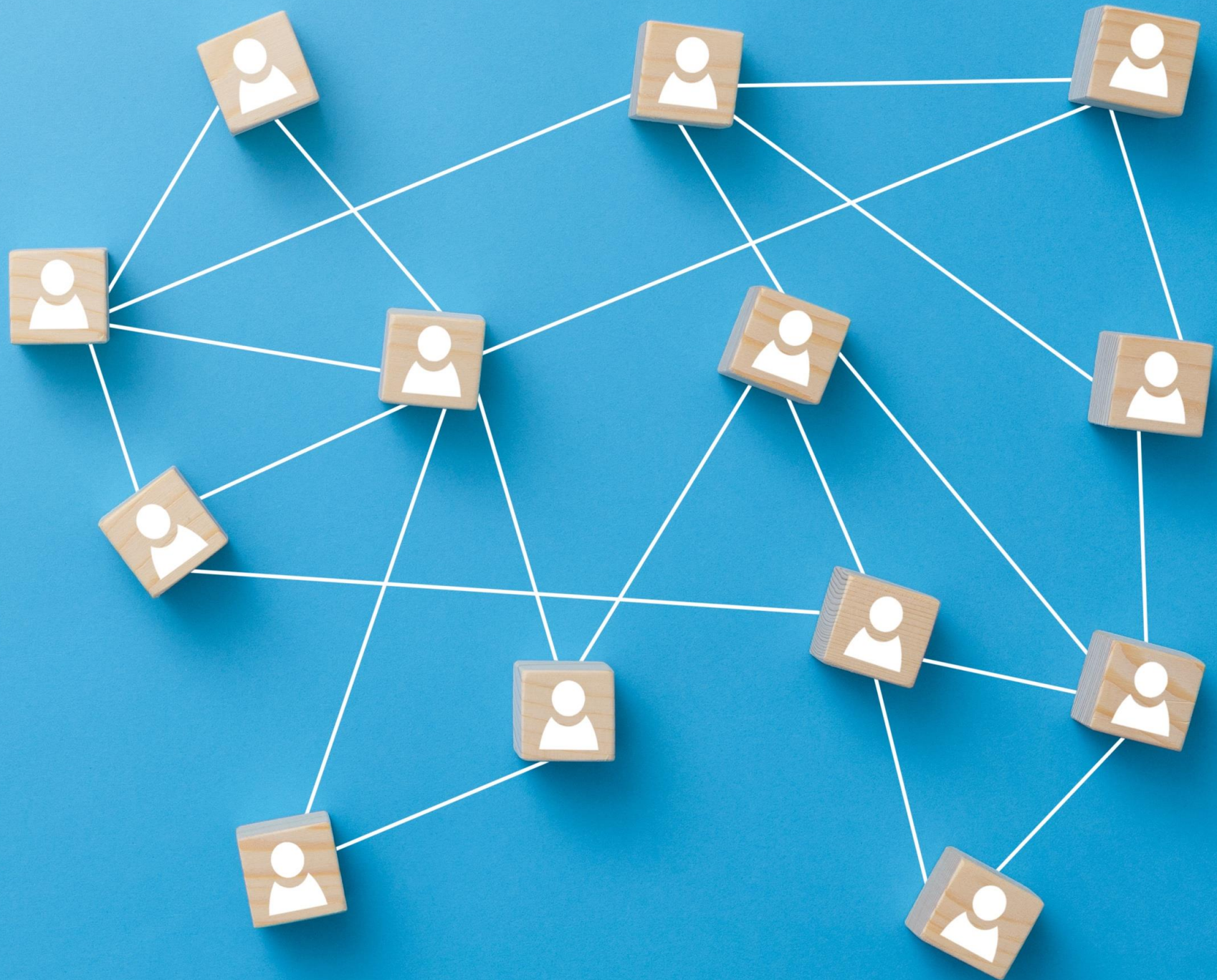



CANADIAN  
MANUFACTURERS  
& EXPORTERS

Leadership Series:

Communicating with Employees  
During Uncertainty and Crisis

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Presenter:  
**Sharon Dominey**  
CME NL Facilitator  
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# What We Know

**In a crisis,  
communication  
is everything  
and  
impacts everything.**



# AGENDA

- Dealing with Unexpected Change and Crisis
- The State of Communication
- Keys to Communicating Effectively During Uncertainty and Crisis: Where to Focus
- Getting Perspective
- How Stress Impacts Communication
- Important Skills & Elements for Effective Communication
- Planning for Success

# Sudden Unexpected High-Impact Change / Crisis

## CREATES:

- Great uncertainty
- Elevated stress, anxiety, frustration
- Short-term tunnel vision on present vs towards future



## RESULTS IN DESIRE FOR:

- Timely, available, accurate and consistent information
- Understanding and Empathy
- Openness and Transparency
- Guidance and help to make sense of what's happened, what's next

## REQUIRES:

- Effective Communication and Leadership

# Communication's Track Record



- 42%** Of employees say their company does a good job of communicating overall
- 46%** Think the communication they receive is open and honest
  - Employees are 12x more likely to be engaged when they feel it is
- 61%** Say they receive the right amount of information about what's happening in their organization
- 55%** Of workers think they're trusted with the valuable and relevant information they need / want
- 57%** Of employees report not being given clear direction and
- 69%** Of managers are not comfortable communicating with employees in general
- 57%** Of managers agree with the statement "I wish employees would tell me what's on their mind!"

# Lack of Communication

## SILENCE IS NOT GOLDEN

- In the void of information, people will speculate and assume to fill in the gaps – usually negative
- Fuels rumours, feeds fear, leads to misinformation
- Creates anxiety
- Now is not the time to go silent
- Busy is no excuse
- You cannot over-communicate



## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION IS A GAME-CHANGER

- Companies with highly effective internal communication strategies are **3.5x** more likely to out-perform their peers

Willis Towers Watson

# Current Internal Challenges

## MOST COMMON

- Communication
- Openness and Transparency: What to share? How much? Good and Bad?
- Varying sources and slants of info - social media, internet, news, government, other organizations, unions, coworkers, neighbours, etc.
- Trust
- Clarity around expectations
- Evolving company culture
- Employees feeling unsure, at risk, isolated, alone



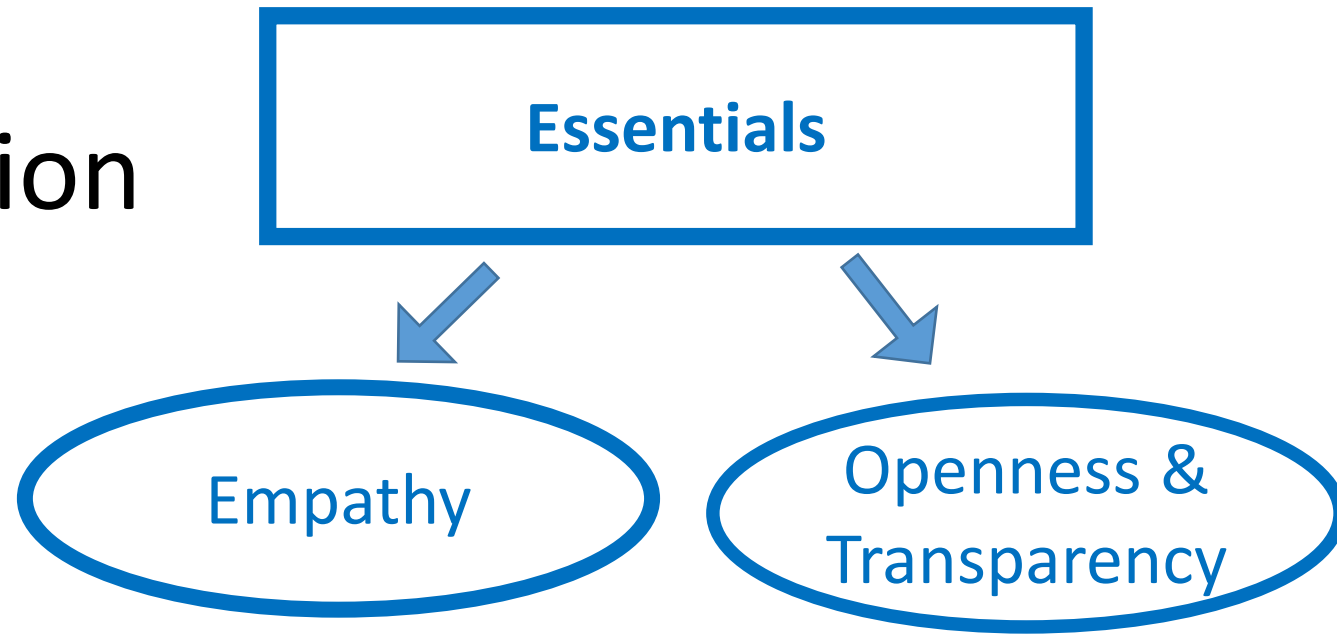
# Effective Communication

## ESPECIALLY DURING CRISIS, MUST BE:

- Planned
- Clear
- Meaningful
- Timely
- Ongoing
- 2-way: Opportunity for discussion, questions, feedback
- **Focussed on the receiver – What does this mean to and for them?**
- Help people make the WIIFM connection: What's In It For Me? (and What does this mean to my job? the company? my future?)
- When we communicate, we think about what we said. What's really important is what they heard.

## INCLUDES

- What's staying the same, what's changing and why, what's the impact?



# Keys to Communicating During Uncertainty / Crisis

## FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION STILL APPLY – AND WORK

- Review short and long-term goals. Refine as required and communicate – even if no changes
- Clearly define expectations, align with the org's Vision, Mission and Core Values – **and communicate**
- Regular, direct communication from senior leaders
  - varied formats – e.g.: electronic, face-to-face / video
- Ongoing, 2-way dialogue, listen to and understand key stakeholders



## GET DELIBERATE

- Create an internal Communication Plan: Include Who to / from, What, When, Where, How – **and Why**
- Start at the top: Leaders unite. Increase visibility and accessibility. Coordinated, consistent info cascades.
- Use a variety of channels and methods to extend reach, align to diverse communication preferences and styles, and to overcome language and literacy barriers. Use visuals to support and convey meaning.
- Create connection, reinforce and emphasize shared purpose and common goals
- Link the team: on-site / remote. All valued and part of the team.

# Communicating: Where to Focus

## HOW SMART COMPANIES COMMUNICATE DURING UNCERTAINTY AND CRISIS

Guiding principle:

- Listen first, then respond with empathy and compassion
  - Builds trust and demonstrates commitment

## COMMUNICATING INTERNALLY

- Provide opportunities for employees to share their concerns
- Over-communicate
  - What you're doing to prioritize their health and well-being (vs assuming they know)
  - Ongoing updates around decisions and priorities:
    - What they are
    - Reasoning behind them – the 'Why'
    - Impact to your employees, your customers and the business - e.g. "This means that..."
- Ask for and respond to questions, feedback, ideas, input
  - Action (or not) accordingly – **and communicate regardless** (including the 'Why')



# Effective Communicators

## CHARACTERISTICS

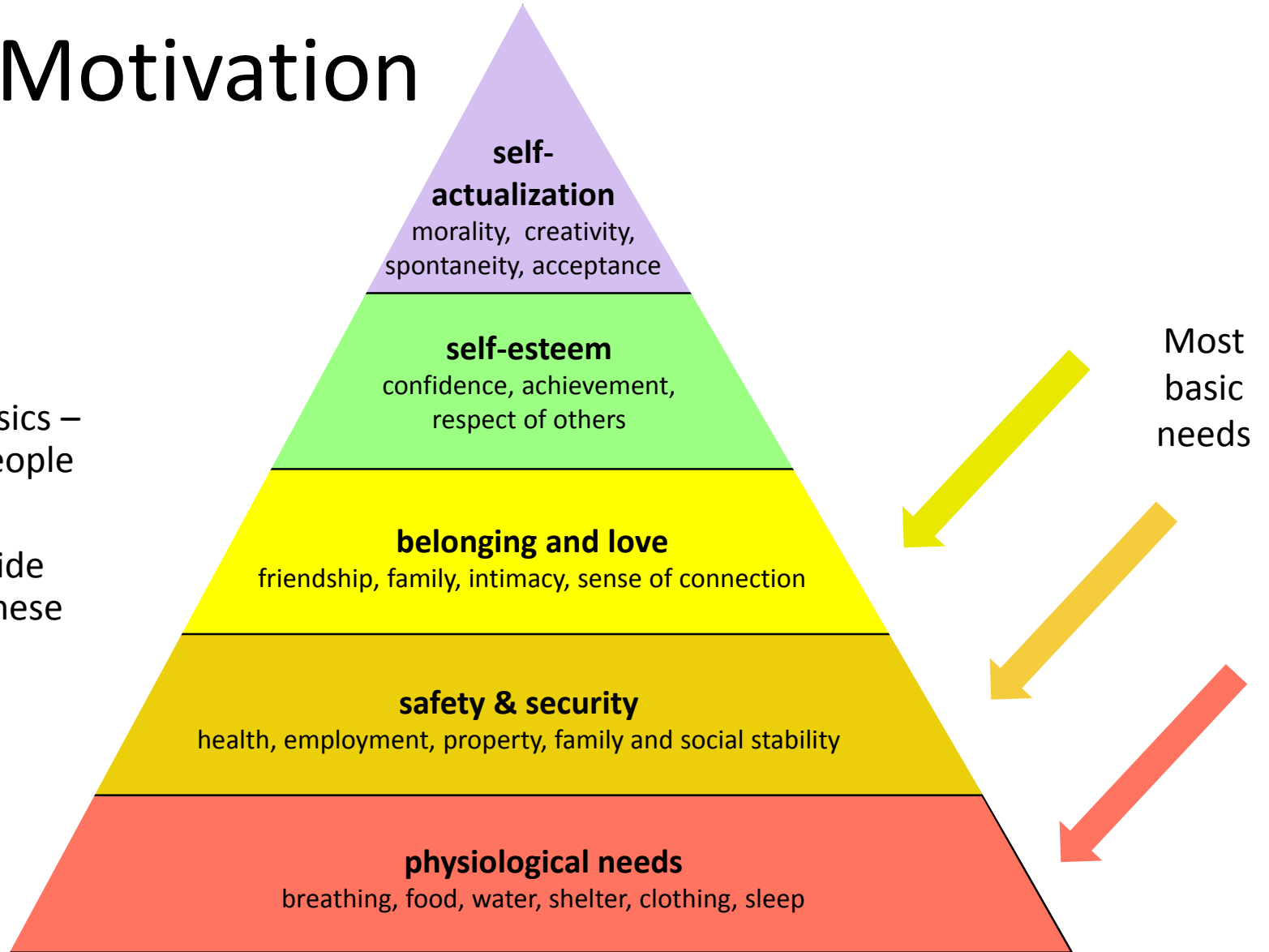
- Calm, composed, able to express constructive concern
- Optimistic and Realistic - with a vision for future success
- Empathetic
- Responsive
- Influential, able to motivate others to work with them, and together, towards a common goal
- Humble

# Human Needs & Motivation

## MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

What people need / focus on:

- During crisis, people focus on the basics – what they need for them and the people closest to them to be ok
- Important in communicating to provide information that directly speaks to these needs





# Factors That Foster Engagement

SURVEY SAYS...



## Trust in Management



2019 Survey of HR professionals, HR.com (sponsored by Glint)

## WHAT CAN LEADERS DO TO BUILD TRUST?

ACCORDING TO EMPLOYEES

- Competence 69%
- Integrity 78%
- **Show concern about the well-being of their people: Empathy 79%**

Kenexa Employment Engagement Index Scores,  
Workforce Trends Report

# Empathy

## KEY COMMUNICATION SKILL

- The ability to identify and understand another person's situation, feelings, motives
- Our capacity to recognize the concerns other people have
- Putting yourself in another person's shoes or seeing things through their eyes



## COMMON RESPONSES DURING CURRENT UNCERTAINTY

- Anxiety over health, family, employment, economic future – may have ramped down some but still there
- Need for kindness, compassion, caring

# Understanding Others: Getting Perspective

## LOOKING THROUGH THE RIGHT FRAME

*"We see the world, not as it is, but as we are - or as we are conditioned to see it."*

- Stephen R. Covey, 7

Habits of Highly Effective People

Each of us tends to think we see things as they are, that we are objective. But this is not the case. When we open our mouths to describe what we see, we in effect describe ourselves, our perceptions, our paradigms.

**Sometimes we may see people, not as they are, but as we are.**



# Understanding Where People Are

## THIS IS NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL

- People are anxious and concerned
- Status quo threatened
- Unexpected change triggers fight or flight response

## FOCUS ON PEOPLE FIRST, THEN THE WORK

- Individuals and teams
- Meetings: Small groups, one-on-ones. People need connection.
  - In person (physical distancing) or virtual (video or call)
  - How are they doing / feeling (emotional and mental well-being)
  - Fears, concerns, hopes
- Acknowledge the loss, grief
- Understand how stress impacts communication

### THE IMPORTANCE OF CARING

When employees feel cared for

**50%** say stress is manageable

VS

**14%** who don't feel caring

# How Stress Impacts Communication

## WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE UNDER HIGH STRESS

- Difficulty hearing, understanding and remembering information
- Brain slows down, ability to process information drops by up to 80%
- Tend to remember what they hear first and last
- Look for visuals to help understand what's being said
- Comprehend at 4 grade levels lower than educational level

## HOW TO HELP

- Extra patience
- Up your Empathy and Active Listening
- Keep messages clear and simple
- Focus on sense of belonging, common purpose
- Offer support



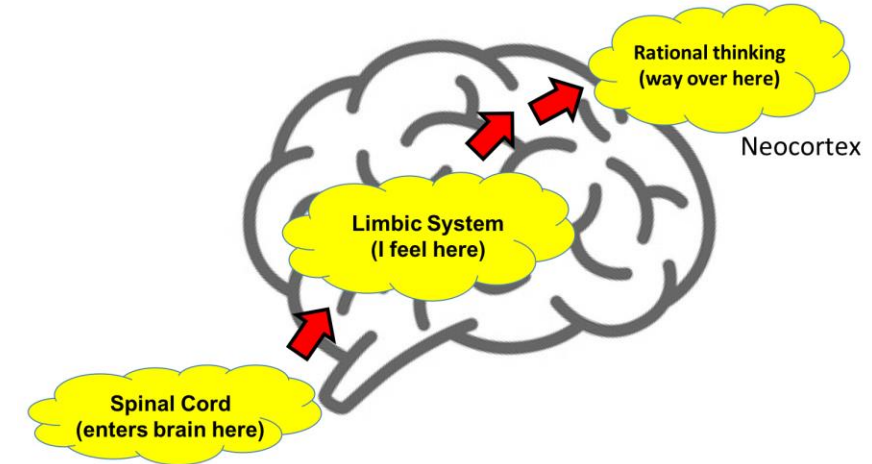


Awareness of the journey  
and the ability to direct it

# Emotional Intelligence

## WHAT IT IS

- The ability to identify, consider and control emotions in yourself and to recognize them in others
- aka EQ: Emotional Quotient
- Similar to IQ but more about how smart we are with the human connection
- Helps ensure your feelings don't control your reactions before your brain has the chance to fully process the information



## WHY IT MATTERS

- People with high EQ
  - remain calm in a crisis
  - are likely to be resilient and stay positive in the face of adversity
- Effective communicators have high EQ, are able to read and understand others and adjust accordingly
- Impacts how effectively you manage yourself and your relationships
- 90% of top performers have high EQ

# Effective Communication – Any Time

## WHAT EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATORS DO WELL – EXTRA IMPORTANT DURING CRISIS

- Demonstrate empathy
- Give people the info they need, when they need it
- Communicate clearly, simply and frequently - even if you don't have all the info, share what you can
- Repeat key messages: People need to hear things more than once (average 5 – 7X) and different ways
- Chose candour over charisma
- Strengthen resilience: acknowledge challenges, collaborate on solutions, accentuate the positive
- Distill meaning from chaos

## TAKE THE LEAD

- Engage the team, be proactive, reach out vs waiting for them to come to you
- Make information you do have, available and accessible
- Engage the team in identifying and clearing roadblocks

# Give People What They Need, When They Need It

## FINDING OUT WHAT THEY NEED

- Host regular check-ins: Daily / Weekly small group discussions and one-on-one conversations
- Face-to-face: In person or virtual – a picture tells 1000 words
- Add unstructured time to group meetings to find out what's on everyone's minds
  - 15 – 30 minutes at beginning or end
- Take advantage of impromptu chats to tap into how people are doing
  - Plan questions. Invite questions – What questions do you have? What clarification do you need? (vs Who has questions / needs clarification?)
- Solicit questions before team meetings / town halls
- Run quick, one-question polls or “pulse” surveys. Keep it simple. Include comment box for elaborating. Make it “safe” to participate (anonymous).
  - e.g. How are you feeling right now? What do you need to know? What's on your mind? What's going well? What could be better?
  - Ask similar questions during group and one-on-one check-ins
- Invite input on decisions where you can, build collaboration

# Creating a Communication Plan

## INCLUDE:

- Who, What, When, Where, How, and How Often you will communicate
- Communication channels and frequency for sharing various types of information for both distributed and on-demand - e.g.:
  - Live meetings: large / small groups. one-on-ones, in person or virtual
  - Daily start of shift, weekly overviews
  - Email, Intranet postings, flyers, posters, videos, blogs FAQs
  - Central resource where employees can go for the latest updates – e.g. Intranet, bulletin board
- Go to point(s) of contact for questions, concerns → both direct and anonymous (make it safe)
- Process to respond quickly **and strategically** when things change (as they surely will)

## WHEN COMMUNICATING

- Be clear on what you know, what you don't know, and what you're doing to learn more / close that gap. It's OK not to have all the answers. Don't wait. Timing matters.
- Make it meaningful - Explain the “Why” behind decisions, actions, direction and what it means to the organization, employees, partners and customers

# Planning for Success

## NEXT STEPS

### CREATE YOUR PLAN

- Reflect on what we've covered
- Use the Communications Effectiveness Checklist / Assessment to help focus your thoughts & ideas
- Identify and prioritize areas of focus and Opportunities for Improvement (OFIs) along with actions you will take to strengthen and increase effectiveness in communicating with employees
- Create your Action Plan / Roadmap
- Plan & check progress using the PDCA / PDSA Cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act / Plan-Do-Study-Adjust)
  - Plan - Identify area for improvement. Develop a plan to address.
  - Do - Implement plan. See what happens.
  - Check / Study - Analyze results. How did it go? What did we learn?
  - Act / Adjust - Implement change or tweak / adjust and try again.

## Communication Effectiveness Checklist / Assessment

Communication Effectiveness Checklist / Assessment

The following checklist contains examples of practices and factors that contribute to Attracting and Retaining employees.

This tool provides the opportunity to reflect on and identify strengths and potential areas for improvement. Use the questionnaire to reflect on current systems, practices, processes and behaviours in your organization that help support and increase effectiveness in communicating with employees during uncertainty and crisis.

The tool is intended as a general assessment and may also assist with planning and prioritizing.

Consider asking other leaders / groups in your organization to review the questionnaire as well - to gather information from a variety of perspectives - and then get together & talk about what you found. Use the findings to help create an action plan.

**Step 1 Identify Current State** Read each statement and identify the 'state' that best represents the current level of readiness / demonstrated behaviour within your organization on this aspect of communicating with employees - i.e. No, Yes, N/A (Not Applicable).

For example, if the particular aspect is an established process in your organization and is a consistent and demonstrated practice / behaviour, place a check mark under the "Yes" column for that row.

Complete this step for all statements listed.

**Step 2 Identify Opportunities for Improvement** After identifying the 'Current State' for each item, go back over your answers to identify potential areas of focus.

Statements with "No" responses may be areas to improve. Some "Yes" responses may also be potential areas to increase effectiveness. Place a check mark under the "Opportunity for improvement" column for aspects which could benefit from review or additional focus.

**Step 3 Identify Priorities** Finally, review all "Opportunities for Improvement" and identify the top areas for action under the "Priority" column. Consider using a ranking system to help identify priorities - e.g. Low-High.

An effort-impact grid - i.e. Value Graph - may also prove helpful to compare or evaluate effort required to address / action specific items vs the expected benefit / value.

**Value Graph**

"Quick Hits" are easy / low-cost ideas - however they produce minimal benefit to an organization.

"Gems" are ideal because they're easy / inexpensive and produce significant benefit.

"Don't Do" ideas are to be avoided as they're difficult, costly and produce minimal benefit.

"Strategic" ideas require more effort but ultimately result in significant benefit / value.

**Helpful Tips**

- Use the 'Action Plan / Roadmap' Worksheet to help plan specific actions - i.e. Why you want to review this aspect, expected outcome(s), who will do what and by when, and who else should be consulted / involved.
- Use the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle / process (aka PDCA or PDSA Plan-Do-Study-Adjust) to create, implement, monitor & update your Action Plan / Roadmap and to maintain ongoing focus on Continuous improvement.



# Final Thoughts

## SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

### YOUR APPROACH MATTERS: PERSONAL HABITS AND BEHAVIOURS

- Set the tone: As you go, so goes the team
- Steel yourself to support and be there for them
- Engage with empathy, we're in this together
- Navigate conversations with care: consider the audience, be humble, don't sugar-coat
- Exercise Emotional Intelligence
- Project confidence, strength, calm
- Keep positive and productive
- Embrace flexibility, innovation – and failure: learn and grow
- Articulate a sense of possibility and hope - words and language matter
- Encourage and empower flexibility and innovation
- **Self-care: Put on your own oxygen mask before assisting others**



THANK YOU FOR ATTENDING

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