

How Can I Lead Them If I Can't See Them!

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In the old days, managers saw their direct reports daily. They may even have eaten lunch with them or been on the same company bowling team. However, today, managers often oversee people around the globe, in places as far away as India, Kuwait or Korea. The days of interacting face-to-face with one's direct reports are long gone. Today, managers lead people via teleconferencing. The challenge is how to lead them when you can't see them.

To be an effective manager, a leader must establish trust. Establishing trust via teleconferences isn't easy. The wise manager considers not only the message, but how he delivers it.

In terms of his message, the manager should prepare well in advance. He should be clear on what the objectives of the meeting are and be able to explain ideas in a clear and concise manner. In addition, because some listeners may not have English as their primary language, the manager should also be very consistent in word choices.

The logic of the manager's message should make sense to all listeners, regardless of where they reside. Ideas should not be a string of ramblings. Sentences should come to a definite end, and major points should be distinguishable from each other. Listeners do not want to struggle to follow the leader's argument.

Up front, the manager should alert his listeners to his point of view, the action step he is expecting, and the benefits for group. He should not try to cover too many things in one meeting. Three key points are ideal. If examples or facts are relevant, the leader should make sure to include them. At the end of the meeting, the manager should again summarize how he feels about the topic, the action steps he desires and the benefits. There should be ample time for questions.

In addition to the message, the smart leader consciously thinks about how his voice can back up the message. He or she should never read or script out his message to his listeners. They will get a sense they are nameless, faceless entities.

In a teleconference, listeners get bored easily so a monotone voice must be avoided at all costs. To bring warmth and energy into the voice, the manager should pause often and take frequent breaths. Without pausing and breathing, a voice runs out of air, and it cannot be expressive. The manager should also use gestures and smile frequently even if he is alone in his office. A person who is smiling brings warmth into his voice.

Listeners also need time to digest the thoughts. Again, pausing between ideas is essential. If the audience has English as a second language, it gives them "think time," as well as the opportunity to voice questions. For the manager, a one, two or three second pause between points enables the speaker to sharpen articulation and pronounce all of the syllables in the words. It eliminates "ums," and "ahs" that chip away at credibility.

The leader should directly elicit interaction by asking if these ideas make sense. He or she should periodically stop and ask what concerns people have and how this would apply to their country or region.

To lead people when you can't see them, pay attention to how you communicate. It does make a difference. It affects people's perception and ultimately, whether or not they trust the individual.

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