Why the most effective leaders champion transparency

The fear of the unknown, next steps or even the fear of losing control will see us relying on trust to help us through. Without trust, progressing to the next stage is an absolute waste of time.

Honesty and transparency are some of the core drivers of trust, and being open and sharing the intentions will help to build this trust.

Never risk misinformation or purposely withhold information, especially when it is evident that you are withholding information. Trust is a hard emotion to build and even harder if the trust has been lost or damaged.

Communications should be regular and ongoing and should be a mix of both formal and informal, scheduled and ad hoc. Create the right balance, as too much communication can also make people switch off, and no-one is begging to be inundated with multiple emails in their inbox.

The four communication modalities

Communications need purpose, to be clear and precise and cover all four modalities of the people in your team:

- Visual
- Kinaesthetic
- Digital
- Auditory.

We know everyone utilises all four of these modalities when communicating, but all of us have a default that we align with more frequently.

Visual people want to see it and observe what happens and how it looks. Communication should include infographics, diagrams, the big picture, colour and images.

Kinaesthetic people want to use their hands and connect with the person, the information and to get involved. Is there something they can test out or touch? Communications should be in person and should create an emotional connection.

Digital people want the details — the full details. So, communication will require the research, the data, the manual, something that they can read to understand every step. They will also ask quite a few questions until they have everything they need.

Auditory people will want to talk it through, not in a loud or large group but in their own space and led by their questions to process the information through repetition in conversation and clarification.

If we are unsure what default modality the person is, ask them how they prefer to receive communication. If it is a group of people, cover all four default modalities.

Own the change

We tend to have a habit in the workplace of everything needing to work out and for us to be right and successful. This can at times cause us to hide or downplay things when they don't go to plan. We put blinkers on and just keep going for the end prize, knowing perfectly well that it's unlikely but not wanting to admit an error, unsuccessful outcome or failure.

As we know, even the best laid plans don't work out. It is key to be transparent.

If the amazing change was expected to do X but only delivers a small part of Y, don't try to hide this. Call it out and be transparent in saying that while the aim was X, here is the reality and this is why we have landed here.

Sometimes, when things really aren't going to plan, it might be best to abort the change. This takes huge awareness and ownership, yet often our fear of failure means we push forward and implement something that is really substandard and quickly walk away while others are left to deal with the aftermath.

Remember that emotional intelligence (EI) isn't about getting it right every time; it's about having the self-awareness and ownership to admit it when it doesn't work and to do what is required to make it right.

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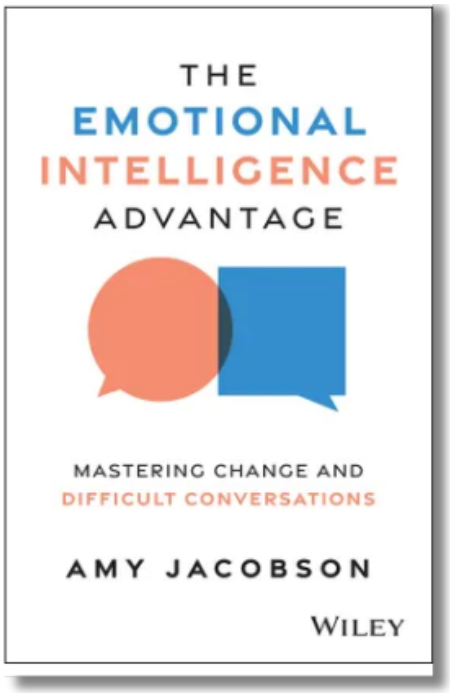
New leader, new voice

The new leader will always differ from the old leader. That's the great thing about people having different wiring: we have slightly different approaches and with that comes learning opportunities and sometimes annoyance!

The worst thing the new leader can do is to come straight in and start making changes, comments or judgements, or expecting the team to buy in to them and everything they say. The team should also take some time to let the leader settle in and for them to get to know the new leader and how they work and are wired.

For most of us, when we start a new leadership position, there are several emotions challenging us, such as nerves, imposter syndrome, fear of not being liked or being judged, lack of understanding, and wanting to prove ourselves to others or even more to ourselves for our own confidence.

A new leader should take time in their liminal space to understand all aspects of the new role and to settle in. During this period, they should be transparent with everyone about what their approach is and — even more importantly — to share some of their 90-day plan (their actions for the first 90 days in the role) so the team knows what to expect.

Without information, our fight or flight can kick in and members of the team will go into emotional hijacks causing defensive mechanisms and pushback to the new leader.

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