

TRANSPARENCY: THE CORE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

A WHITE PAPER BY ECSELL INSTITUTE

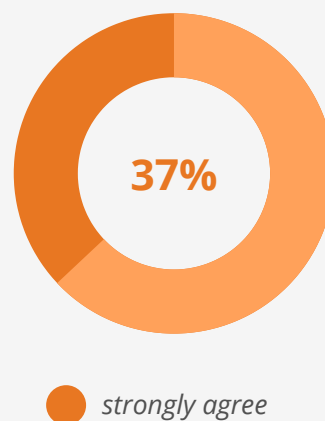


Eccsell[®]
INSTITUTE

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Just last week, I watched a friend of mine - a client success manager at a tech company - go through what seems like an all-too-common situation. Leadership of their organization had just announced that they'd been working with a big consulting firm and would be initiating a company-wide restructure in light of their findings. "Stay tuned for more information" was the extent of details they received. Across the next few weeks, my friend slowly saw his colleagues get invited to ominous zoom meetings, sent by email addresses they didn't recognize. The lack of transparency caused the whole organization to freeze; nobody could effectively do their job while they waited to learn of their fate. When leaders undervalue open and transparent communication, they create unnecessary roadblocks that inhibit the achievement of their goals.

Only 37% of employees strongly agree that their manager is transparent about why decisions are made.



Communication is one of the six essential coaching skills, defined as a leader's capacity to effectively share information, strategies, and expectations with team members. With transparency being one of the key components of effective communication, it's critical for leaders to learn how to exercise this skill well.

[Want info on the other essential skills for leaders? We call them "coaching themes," and you can learn more about all six of them in our [Coaching Effect Academy](#).]

Transparency is the element of communication that focuses on how much information we choose to share with team members and when. If leaders are effectively transparent, their team members believe that they are a valued part of the team and are worthy of being in-the-know. In fact, transparent managers are:

- **7X** more likely to be rated as high performing by their team members
- **3.4X** more likely to retain team members
- **12X** more likely to be easy to talk to about difficult issues or problems
- **16X** more likely to be trusted by their team members

But gauging what's appropriate to share isn't always easy. Perhaps you've just received a promotion to a new department - do you tell your team now so they can prepare for the shift, or do you wait until you know who their new manager will be? Maybe there's something tough going on in your personal life - is it best to let your team know so they can understand why you're not as available as usual? Whether there's difficult news to break or an exciting initiative to announce, a lack of thoughtful transparency can cause feelings of confusion and distrust amongst team members. They may find it difficult to focus on their work while they grapple with too much or missing information. To help leaders achieve effective, consistent transparency, we've combed our data and put together a set of simple best practices.

3 WAYS TO PRACTICE TRANSPARENCY

1 Get familiar with daily open rapport

When there's difficult news to share - restructuring, layoffs, etc - we often see leaders compelled to hold their cards close for fear of causing worry amongst their team. Some leaders struggle to be transparent in general, believing their role as leader means they shouldn't share openly about who they are, how they feel, and what they think. If we practice proper transparency during our day-to-day interactions, we'll build the foundation for our team members to trust the organization and its leaders when it comes time for these major moments as well.

Start by getting curious during your one-to-one meetings. Our research finds that transparent managers are 3 times more likely to ask their team members about their life outside of work, which helps create trust-based relationships. Begin your meetings with dedicated time to talk about non-work topics, like weekend plans, a new book they just read, or how their family is doing.

2 Allow transparency to be a two-way street

Our research shows that when managers are transparent, team members are 9 times more likely to feel safe being exactly who they are with their team. This illustrates how transparency is inherently reciprocal: when you share, they share. Therefore, whenever you impart information to your team, it's important to create space for questions and dialogue.

When practicing daily transparency, be prepared to share at the same level as your team member. If you want to talk about their past weekend, expect to comfortably share about your own weekend as well. If you want them to be honest about why they're struggling to hit deadlines, you may need to model this by sharing ways that you struggle as well.

When delivering bigger news, set aside time to process both as a team and in one-to-ones. Some team members may have thoughts or questions right away, and others may need time to sit with the information, so ensure that your team knows you are available to discuss at any time.

3 Be okay with not knowing

A major roadblock to transparency can be the feeling that we must have all the facts and details before we disclose anything. On the contrary, it's okay to reveal that you don't have all the answers. This can open the door for new collaboration opportunities and increased trust. Team members report that transparent managers always keep them informed of matters that affect them, which can happen as a slow drip. It doesn't always require waiting until there's a fully painted picture.

To put this into practice, resist the urge to come up with a solution the next time your team is facing a challenge. Rather, try opening up a discussion with your team about how they might handle the situation. Allow yourself to respond to questions with, "I don't know."

HOW TRANSPARENCY REFLECTS POSITIVELY ON LEADERS

Responses from real employees via the Coaching Effect Survey™

- "My manager is very transparent with myself and my team. She always keeps us updated with the company's goals and expectations and teaches us methods in which we can accomplish goals/meet expectations. She always allows time for any questions or concerns that my team and I may have and is always patient. She provides us the tools we need to succeed."
- "She is very transparent, humble, and open minded to bettering the team and work environment. I think she handles pressure well and always gives feedback. Very good at responding in a timely manner."
- "My manager does a great job communicating changes to the best of his ability. He is very transparent in what he knows or doesn't and opens up the discussion for how we should handle the situation and approach it with our teams. I have great respect for him as a leader, I know I can bring things to him for help when needed and he has my back."

CONCLUSION

Transparency is a critical tenet of communication that affects everything from trust to turnover. While it can be difficult to determine the right amount of information to share at the right time, there are several ways that leaders can practice open dialogue and vulnerability to hone this important skill.

When leaders are intentionally & thoughtfully transparent, it helps their team members achieve higher levels of performance and growth, and organizations can reap the benefits.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



CLAIRE ECKSTROM

Claire Eckstrom is Executive Director of Brand Experience at Ecsell Institute, the world's foremost authority in metric-based performance coaching and growth.

Claire spent 6 years leading an international sales team in the luxury fashion business prior to joining Ecsell. Now, she works to bring Ecsell's clients cutting-edge research straight from the source.