

“He Walks the Talk”: Does your team say that about you?

Communication Essentials for a Leader

“Managers do things right. Leaders do the right things”. If you have heard of this phrase before, it wouldn’t be surprising. And if you are a ‘Designated Leader’, God forbid, you might have even spoken of it on numerous occasions.

We all hear these phrases in our daily lives time and again, but sometimes fail to understand their real meaning. Time to question ourselves; are we doing the ‘right’ things?

Often one would find leaders at different levels who practice the “Do as I say, not as I do” philosophy. This could prove highly detrimental to the culture of the leaders’ team, resulting in cynicism and sense of disappointment among the team members.

It is the responsibility of the leader to inspire the people around him. Inspired team members push themselves, explore their own potential and create a culture of achievement. To achieve this, a leader has to burn the rubber and show people the way by doing it himself. A quality which Aristotle termed “ethos” or influence of performance. This type of leadership is defined by the way the leader conducts himself rather than focusing on what he says.

‘A promise is a promise’ words said by Mr Ratan Tata at the Nano unveiling ceremony have echoed throughout the Tata Group.

When a leader leads by example, he creates a picture of what’s possible. His team would always be willing to follow his lead because the people would know that he always keeps his word.

At the Annual Robert P Maxon Lecture in George Washington University's School of Business, Mr. N R Narayana Murthy, chairman of the board and chief mentor at Infosys Technologies Limited acknowledged that "there have been occasions when officials in my country have demanded bribes and we have said no, and that was the only time."

The ability to 'Walk the Talk' is one of the most reliable indicators of trustworthiness in leaders. To develop this here are few pointers:

- Any stated intentions of action are promises - Period. Consider them as promises that you're willing and able to keep.
- It is good to be action oriented, but if one has doubts about whether the results can be achieved, then it is always better not to be in a haste to commit. Never a good idea to create expectations that are difficult to meet.
- When committing, always be specific on your deliverables, otherwise others might end up setting the deliverables on your behalf and you would have expectations that you can't or have no intentions to, meet.
- Consistency is not only important but critical in communication, especially so in a leadership role. Make sure you convey the same message to different people.
- People like to give advice, correction – People 'love' to give advice. So ask for opinions or advice only if you are ready to give them due consideration. Next step, be sure to communicate what you heard and how you have considered it.
- Lastly, it is also important to 'Talk the walk'. Sometimes people just miss the signs and it is the leader's responsibility to help people notice that you are 'walking the talk'.

For an organization to grow it is important that its leaders are constantly pushing their people forward with excitement, inspiration, trust and vision.

If their teams don't trust them, productivity of the organization would drop, the vision which would have been carefully drafted and nurtured over years, would lose its appeal, all because the teams do not trust their leaders anymore.

So, time to answer for ourselves: Are we doing the right things? Just start by walking the talk!

We can help you with more details on this subject in form of customized interventions. If interested either mail at kbhatia@tata.com or check our programme, 'Getting Through – Programme in Communication Skills' in the Programme Calendar.

