



SCENARIO: COMMUNICATING SUCCESSFULLY

STAFF PARTY, PART 2

Call in an Expert

How could I have communicated better? That was the question Jane kept asking herself in the days after the staff meeting. She understood that communication was an essential part of her job and that she would have to do it better in the future, so she hired a communications specialist to help her improve.

The specialist talked to Jane about what she had intended to accomplish at the staff meeting, how she had planned for the meeting, and what she thought had gone wrong. He also interviewed the four managers, Jane's personal assistant, and a number of staffers. This gave him a picture of what she had done well, what she had done badly, and where she could do things better.

The specialist and Jane decided to prepare Jane for her next all-staff address, which would be at the annual "state-of-the-company" meeting at the end of January. For weeks the two of them huddled and rehearsed Jane's approach. They paid particular attention to the following:

- the purpose of communication in the upcoming presentation and in general
- the pros and cons of one communication *medium* over another
- how "noise" can interfere with how a message is received
- how the message is subject to interpretation by the receiver
- the need for feedback from receiver to sender
- the importance of body language and the messages it can send

By the end of January, Jane was ready. She walked into the state-of-the-company meeting, confident things would be much improved this time.

Getting It Right

From behind the podium, Jane smiled as she looked at the staff at the beginning of the hour-long meeting. She knew she had prepared properly. She had set a start time of 10 o'clock in the morning so the meeting wouldn't be too close to lunch time, and she made sure she had no other appointments right after the meeting. A week earlier she had sent out an all-staff email with a brief outline of the meeting. Two weeks before that, she had met with her four department managers to discuss the meeting. As at the holiday party, each of them would have a role to play, talking briefly about their hopes for the year ahead.

VOCABULARY

medium
a means of delivering information



Jane knew it was especially important to communicate clearly with her managers ahead of the meeting and that this could be done better face-to-face than in a conference call, so she had taken all four out to lunch to chat about the upcoming meeting. During the lunch meeting, Jane listened to the managers' thoughts in addition to explaining what she wanted for the meeting. She found that each of them had important things to say. The managers felt Jane was treating them with respect and including them in the planning process by asking for their feedback and ideas.

When she finished her opening remarks at the meeting, Jane introduced each of the managers, praising their recent efforts and those of their departments. Each talked about what they thought they could achieve in the year ahead. But Jane had told them they were to keep their remarks brief and just to highlight the main points. She wanted to make sure there was enough time for an important part of the meeting—the Q&A at the end when the staff could ask questions and have them answered.

Jane knew how important the Q&A session was. In her email to the staff, she had told them to come with questions, and during the last 15 minutes of the meeting, she responded to everything they asked. When Jane didn't have an answer for a question, she promised to find one and follow up with the questioner later. For questions that were department-specific, she deferred to the greater knowledge of her managers and offered them the chance to answer. She even asked her audience a few questions of her own.

When the meeting ended at 11 o'clock, most people had to return to their offices. However, Jane stayed on for a quarter of an hour more, continuing to chat with various individuals about matters raised in the meeting or to seek their opinions. When she eventually got back to her desk, she sent the staff an email reiterating some of the points she had made and thanking them for all their efforts. Then she called each of her managers to express her appreciation for helping to make the meeting a success. Finally, she had only one thing left to do on her checklist—she started looking for answers for those who had asked questions that she couldn't answer during the meeting.

QUESTIONS

1. Think about each medium Jane used to communicate. Were they the right choices? Why?
2. Jane made many improvements for the January meeting. Which improvement do you think was the most important?
3. Are there any additional things Jane could have done to improve communication for this second meeting?