



connecting the dots between customers • colleagues • communities • results

Contagious Conversations

Inform, Align, Engage

One person at a time...

What if you were able to make a personal connection with every single employee in your organization that created a direct line of sight between what they do everyday and your organizational vision, values and goals?

What if you could accomplish it in a month's time?

What if all it required was that your managers and supervisors dedicate 30-60 minutes with each of his or her direct reports – enough time to grab a cup of coffee, a bite to eat or a walk around the parking lot?

One of the most important goals that leaders have within their organization is to inform, align and engage employees around the organization's vision, values and goals. This assignment is so important and core to a company's success that we often over-look the simplest and most cost-effective way of accomplishing it.

Have a conversation.

Here's how it works:

1. **You have an important message to communicate** with your employees. You want it to stick. You want their feedback. You want them to be involved. And you don't want to rely on standard methods like posting it on the intranet or writing about it in a newsletter.

Example:

Your company just completes its annual employee satisfaction survey. You have identified 4 areas where you need to improve:

- Professional Development
- Recognition
- Communication
- Accountability

2. **Each Manager and Supervisor creates an opportunity to meet with each of his or her direct reports for 30-60 minutes.**

*This personal conversation will enable you to **inform** them about the survey results, hear their ideas on how you can **align** what you are doing to address the areas ripe for improvement, and **engage** them in the solutions.*

3. **Continue to Cascade.** *The “contagious” element of the conversation is that leaders will ask their managers and supervisors to then have the same kind of conversation with their direct reports...thereby cascading the same messages and gathering the same kind of feedback from every single employee.*
4. **Create an easy way to document feedback and put ideas into action.** It will be key to make sure that not only are employees informed and their feedback gathered but to also make sure that their ideas are considered and the viable ones put into action (it must be made clear in the conversations that all ideas will be reviewed but all will not be eligible for implementation). User-friendly ways to collect and post ideas are: corporate wikis, blogs or bulletin boards.

*The purpose of Contagious Conversations is to **make a personal connection with each of your team members so that you can align, inform, and educate them about the most important organizational issue of the moment. Contagious Conversations enable you to gain valuable insights from your people to help you better execute against your goals.***

Why One-on-One Dialogue?

Unlike group meetings, one-on-one conversations give you the opportunity to make your team members feel special, and through these conversations, you can solidify your team members’ understanding of and their connection to your goals while also establishing accountability for action taken.

When to start the Conversations

Designate a one-month time period for the conversations to take place. In any given month, a manager has approximately 25 opportunities – one per day – to have that one-on-one conversation. If you have more than 25 direct reports you may need to double up or expand your time period slightly to accomplish meetings with everyone on your team. Less than 25 direct reports can easily be accomplished – as long as it is made a priority.

How to make your Messaging Consistent

The key to successful cascading of messages is to provide a simple guide for leaders, managers and supervisors to follow. Create a guide that shares the following:

- What’s the conversation? (Include subject matter to discuss, key messages and conversation objectives)
- Provide format to follow.

- Include key questions to ask your employees
- Establish what you want to ask from employees. What can they do (and what will they commit to) to support the organization's goals and objectives?
- Share the process for cascading.

Get a jump-start on performance reviews.

There's an added benefit to this entire process. Through these one-on-one dialogues, you'll be better prepared for your team's annual performance assessments by getting early insights into what employees are thinking and feeling, now. And you can also help them make course corrections or shape their thinking going forward to be more aligned with current areas of organizational focus.

A few final reminders:

- **Keep it simple**
- **Make it meaningful** (be sincere and present)
- Whenever possible, connect it to your personal leadership goals.
- **Do your homework prior to the session.** Prepare for the session by being informed and making sure you have a solid understanding of the issues you will discuss prior to being with your team member.
- **Practice.** Seek advice or input from your manager or another trusted colleague prior to conducting your meetings. Test what works and what doesn't and remember that every conversation will be "customized" to the preferences and style of the individual you're meeting with. One size does not fit all.
- **Manage any expenses incurred within your current budget**
- **Enjoy getting to know your team members better**
- **Make it fun!**

What if a conversation could be the catalyst to more effectively inform, align and engage your people to help drive your company's success?