



## CLARITY OF INTENT - QUICK TIPS

*A leadership position amplifies the effects of your words and actions. Because a position of authority can affect how your messages are received, improving your clarity of intentions and expectations can maximize efficient and productive communication. Here are five quick tips for being clear as a leader.*

### *The Clearer You Are, the Better the Outcome*

- At the beginning a new project, delegation, or committee appointment, being clear about your expectations and goals at the outset will increase the likelihood of a desirable result.

- \* What is the scope of the project?
- \* When must it be completed?
- \* What is the required output from those working on it?

**EXPECTATIONS**  
for effective projects

- Such specificity helps those working on the project to stay on task.
- Situating tasks within the larger context—and how the project fits within it—can assist those charged with it to contribute more effectively to the overall mission or goal.

- \* Your work will be incorporated into our strategic plan for the department, and will be adapted for proposals seeking funding for the three key strands of our future direction.

**CONTEXT**  
for effective projects

### *More Recipients Means More Interpretations of Messages*

- Your early leadership roles, such as graduate mentoring, may involve communicating within a small group with whom you have much common ground. In these settings, it is possible to course-correct and clarify if confusion or misunderstandings emerge.
- In small groups, anticipatory understanding can take place rooted in relationships or personal history. People who know you well, and who have worked with you for a long time, might know what you mean even when you do not express yourself with precision.
- The larger the group you lead, the less you will be able to rely on such approaches: it thus becomes important to think carefully about how you frame your communications, because those around you will make more assumptions, create diverse interpretations of your meaning, and read between the lines.
- Being as clear and transparent as possible in all your communications is a means of preventing misunderstandings or inaccurate readings of your positions.

### *Mind-reading is an Imperfect Form of Communication*

- ◆ Concluding each group meeting or individual discussion with a brief recap, especially of agreements, assignments, or deadlines, can prevent later difficulties.
- Prevent misinterpretations through your own clarity and precision.

- \* If you are simply expressing frustration, make sure the listener understands and does not interpret your remarks as specific instructions or orders.
- \* Make it clear when you are setting a requirement, rather than making a suggestion.
- \* In discussing confidential matters, do not assume the listener knows what is and is not

**EXPRESS INTENT**  
to prevent later  
problems





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to be kept in confidence—articulate boundaries for the protection of yourself, the subject, and the listener.

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- When an expectation you thought was established is not met, consider before taking your next steps whether you articulated it with sufficient clarity at the outset: Be prepared to consider that insufficient precision on your part contributed to the current state of affairs.

## *Nobody Knows What "Everybody Knows"*

- In any workplace, there are some topics, concepts or bits of information that are taken for granted or assumed: “Oh, that’s something everybody knows.” Since “everybody knows” them, specifics are not routinely confirmed or conveyed—and often it develops that what is taken as a consensus is actually an opinion held by only a few.
- These topics might include rules governing the use of facilities or equipment, protocols for addressing others, or priorities.
- Strive as a leader to signal that clarifying questions are welcome—and then work to assure that is so.

## *Make it Habitual*

- There are some aspects of communication that take time and patience to cultivate. There are others you can apply immediately to enhance the clarity within your unit.

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- \* Repeat key information. The longer a project, meeting, or even a single conversation continues, the more likely the initial thread or goal may be lost.
  - \* Summarize and recap action items at the end of every meeting.
  - \* Express expectations and deadlines in concrete terms.
  - \* Particularly for more formal matters, put agreements in writing and share with affected parties.
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HABITS  
for clarity

