

# GROWERTALKS

## Features

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## The Silent Killer of Success

*Rayne Gibson*



We have all been there, maybe a time or two. Thursday morning, your coffee is just kicking in, not enough time to really get your day started, but today is weekly meeting day and it's time. You and your colleagues shuffle to the meeting room where there are some pastries (slightly cold), you grab the same chair you always sit in, wait for Steve to get in late (as always) and get ready for another meeting talking about the same things as last week. Nothing changes. You hear the familiar "We were going to, but ..." or echoes of "How are we suppose to do that when ...?" Maybe even the

repeat of last week's "What if we ...?"

### Next week, rinse and repeat. Sound familiar?

It's no wonder why every business in the world complains about wanting to improve communication. The flow of information, whether internally within the organization or externally to your customers and market, is the lifeblood of any successful organization. It fuels collaboration, aligns teams and drives productivity. But when communication lacks quality or it all together breaks down, it's like sand in the gears of a well-oiled machine, causing confusion, inefficiency and frustration. Possibly the most important thing for business owners and managers to pay attention to is understanding the root causes of communication failures and then implementing strategies to prevent them and doing this constantly. (Not once a year, Bob ...)

### The high cost of poor communication

Communication failures don't just lead to minor misunderstandings—they create serious roadblocks that can cost companies dearly. According to a study by The Economist Intelligence Unit, poor communication leads to increased stress (52% of respondents), failure to complete projects (44%) and loss of sales (18%). The most common consequences include:

- Confusion: When instructions are unclear, employees waste time seeking clarification—or worse, make incorrect assumptions.
- Bottlenecks: Information doesn't flow properly.
- Repeated effort: Tasks often need to be redone, doubling the workload.
- Assumptions gone wrong: When teams assume they're on the same page, but aren't.

- Reduced morale: Employees disengage when they feel unheard or out of the loop.
- Missed opportunities: Poor communication stifles innovation and market responsiveness.
- Turnover: Frustrated employees will be attracted by, and eventually leave for, companies with better communication structures.

## The biggest communication pitfalls in companies

One of the most prevalent communication pitfalls is information overload. Employees are bombarded with emails, messages, meetings and reports, leaving them struggling to discern what is important. When this is done, and we aren't clear that what was said was understood, our team learns to tune out and instead focus on their bubble of concern. We then wonder why critical details are lost in transit. As leaders we must make an attempt to manage the sheer volume of information coming their way, even possibly organize the information. That may seem like nonsense and probably too much work ... or is it?

Another major challenge is poor delivery. A HUGE light bulb moment for me was when I worked with a coach who showed me how for years the meetings I helped my team with had good intentions, yet fell on deaf ears because I never took the time to understand how they RECEIVED information. It's not enough to simply relay information; the way it's presented determines whether it's understood. Vague instructions, overuse of jargon and ambiguous expectations create confusion and slow down execution. Effective communication requires clarity and precision, ensuring that employees understand exactly what's being asked of them.

Many organizations also fall into the trap of routine communication that lacks real purpose. Meetings held simply because they're scheduled, reports that provide little actionable insight and check-ins that feel redundant all contribute to disengagement. (Honestly, this could have been an email). Employees quickly recognize when communication becomes a formality rather than a meaningful exchange of ideas. To keep communication valuable, it must serve a clear function and contribute to organizational goals.

A common yet often overlooked pitfall is the assumption that employees fully grasp instructions without verification. Ever play the game telephone? It's kinda like that, except your business is running off of this type of system constantly. Managers frequently believe that their expectations are clear, while employees assume they understand tasks—only for misalignment to become evident when projects go off track. Encouraging a culture where clarification is welcomed rather than discouraged can prevent misunderstandings before they escalate into costly errors. What if you were to slow down and ask them if they understood properly? It's wild I know, but I've seen it work. Ask your team to get in the habit recapping after communication.

Tip: Research the Japanese term “shisa kanko” for inspiration. It involves physically pointing at something while verbally stating what you're doing to avoid any miscommunication.

Closely related to assumption errors is the “give-it-and-forget-it” approach, where leaders believe that once they've provided instructions, the message has been successfully received. However, communication isn't just about sending a message—it's about ensuring it's understood and acted upon correctly. Without followups, key details can slip through the cracks, leading to delays and inefficiencies. Checking in with employees and creating an environment where questions are encouraged fosters better understanding and accountability.

Recognizing these communication pitfalls is only the first step. The next step is implementing meaningful strategies to address them, ensuring that communication becomes a driver of efficiency rather than an obstacle.

## Creating a culture of clear communication

To address these communication issues, businesses must commit to prioritizing clarity. Specific instructions, free from vague terms like “ASAP” or “Urgent” help employees understand exactly what needs to be done and by when. Avoiding unnecessary jargon ensures that messages are accessible to all team members, regardless of their role or level of expertise. Summarizing key points in meetings or written communication also reinforces understanding, reducing the chances of misinterpretation.

Two-way communication is equally important. Encouraging employees to ask questions, provide feedback and engage in dialogue prevents one-sided interactions where messages are simply issued without discussion. When employees feel heard and have the opportunity to clarify expectations, they’re more likely to stay engaged and aligned with company goals.

Meetings should be structured efficiently to maximize their effectiveness. Instead of lengthy, unfocused discussions, a clear agenda should guide each meeting, keeping conversations relevant and on track. Limit meetings to a time limit. Thirty to 45 minutes should be plenty of time for participants to bring relevant updates or insights. Make this time a goal and it’ll force precision information sharing, and prevent wasted time and unnecessary discussions. A structured approach helps teams focus on key takeaways rather than sitting through redundant or overly detailed presentations.

Ask the hard questions! Building a continuous feedback loop is essential in maintaining effective communication, yet we shy away from asking the questions around growth. “How can my communication be better for you?” “If you were to organize the next meeting—how would you do it? What things would you change?” Organizations should regularly assess how well their communication methods are working and seek input from employees. Complacency is the enemy of improvement, and by consistently refining communication strategies, companies can adapt to evolving workplace needs. Moreover, involving employees in decision-making processes fosters transparency and engagement, strengthening the overall communication culture.

## The bottom line

Ultimately, communication should be an integral part of a company’s daily operations and not considered an afterthought. I challenge you to go into your next meeting and look at you and your team’s communication from an outside/in perspective, then tell me what areas of improvement you saw. Training employees on best practices, leading by example and reinforcing open dialogue creates an environment where information flows effectively. When communication is treated as a foundational pillar rather than a secondary concern, businesses can avoid costly mistakes, improve efficiency and foster a more engaged workforce.

Effective communication isn’t just about talking—it’s about ensuring that information is delivered, received and understood correctly. Addressing communication breakdowns proactively allows businesses to eliminate confusion, enhance efficiency and cultivate a workplace where employees feel informed and empowered.

Investing in better communication today will prevent costly mistakes, disengagement and lost opportunities in the future. Organizations that prioritize clear, purposeful communication set themselves apart by fostering stronger collaboration, improving productivity, and ultimately, driving long-term success. Don’t let poor communication be the silent killer of your business—take action now and turn it into one of your greatest strengths. **GT**

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*Rayne Gibson is a horticulture graduate from Louisiana State University and brings extensive experience in the green industry, serving in various capacities helping businesses across the southern U.S. He also served on the boards of the Louisiana and Texas Nursery Landscape Associations.*