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How to communicate your compliance message

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Effective communication goes well beyond the basic exchange of information. It requires the ability to listen to others and articulate your message in ways that promote understanding and connection. People want to be heard and understood. As healthcare faces an unprecedented crisis with the coronavirus pandemic, we're seeing an accelerated movement toward teamwork and industry collaboration.

Teamwork, problem-solving, and innovation are more important than ever before. And communication is at the heart of those critical efforts. Though communication is often considered an inherent ability, it requires skills to cultivate authentic, meaningful connections. Clear communication reduces errors, minimizes time to address mishaps, averts assumptions that lead to fear and intimidation, and overall builds trust and respect.

Common barriers to effective communication

Many of us work in a fast-paced environment that fosters stress, conflict, and misunderstanding. Multitasking has become the norm in our professional and personal lives, making it difficult to focus and communicate effectively. Some common barriers to communication include:

- Personal fears of conflict, criticism, or retribution;
- Unwillingness to be the bearer of bad news;
- Fear of admitting a mistake or misjudgment;
- Concerns about appearing incompetent or uninformed;
- Differences in communication styles and values;
- Cultural, generational, and hierarchical differences; and
- Various levels of experience, education, and expertise.

As we write this, our nation is six months into the COVID-19 crisis. Communication in crisis can be complex and unpredictable. Sharing information too soon, before all the final details are sorted out, often leads to misunderstanding, confusion, and overreaction. This sometimes happens in an effort to disseminate details to the public for safety reasons. As a general rule, it is better to say you don't have the information yet than to share unreliable information and risk unfavorable outcomes.

Lessons from the field

We've spent more than a decade learning lessons from our experiences with clients, team members, editors, and other healthcare professionals. Here are several lessons that encourage authentic communication and

leadership.

Clients and team members Communication with clients and team members requires clarity and leadership. One of the tenets of *Dare to Lead* by Brené Brown is reflected in her statement about hard conversations: “Over the past several years, my team and I have learned something about clarity and the importance of hard conversations that has changed everything from the way we talk to each other to the way we negotiate with external partners. It’s simple but transformative: Clear is kind. Unclear is unkind.”^[1]

All too often we avoid the hard conversations only to have those difficult topics come up over and over again. It takes courage and compassionate leadership to address them up front with clarity. As Brown suggests, “Let’s have a real conversation, even if it’s tough.”

Editors

When working with editors, we must clearly communicate the topic, the author, the due date, and the content they want to cover. Editors work according to plans and schedules to lay out issues of their publications based on agreements made for articles, interviews, and specific content. Even one delay affects many other processes and decisions. If a piece is not on time, the editor is responsible for finding a replacement. One of the most valuable lessons learned is: Be honest, up front, and as proactive as possible. And, follow the editorial guidelines.

Healthcare professionals

In our experience with healthcare professionals, we understand that time is their most valuable resource. It is critical to convey the amount of time needed for interviews and the entire review process. If we take a lot more time with their hospital personnel than estimated, then the likelihood of their participation in a future project is diminished.

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