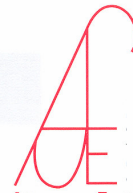


# Commbites

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Alignment Evaluation Solutions

Among the piles of information that arrives, often electronically, we can overlook gems which can help our work. So this occasional digest highlights some ideas and practical suggestions we've found recently, plus learning points from our communication experience. These are summarised under twin headings: trust and time.

## Trust, truth, transparency

The current buzz word is engagement—but how can senior management hope to achieve confidence among their people without real trust? A recent US study found that trust in senior management has risen—but still only among half the workforce. Our research shows a similar picture in the UK –mistrust only being greater for journalists and politicians. What can be done?

- Trust is not built on spin: truth and transparency are essential.
- Show management that silence/ambiguity costs: doubts cause the best to jump ship bringing loss of talent and increased HR bills..
- Calculate the price of rumour for your own organisation — one CEO did this, estimating at least five minutes gossip per day for each employee about a current issue — a hidden cost to the business
- Uncertain times can put communication on the “back burner” but information needs increase
- Include trust in agreed communication policies to balance employee needs with the integrity of the business.
- Give middle management some ownership to contribute.
- Communicate any numbers to hit/improvements to be made so employees have some control.
- Above all, create a business aware environment with information and workshops including business and financial learning so “bad” news will be better understood. Tell the why as well as the what and how.

### E-mail can be effective.....

- Work out the cost of irrelevant e mails — get some people to track their e-mails over a few days. Calculate the cost of opening/reading/deleting the unnecessary. In one company it came to £1million.
- Don't dismiss the idea of e-mail free days—they work for some
- Provide a clear framework with an e-mail guide/policy with mandatory/best practice rules.
- Hints include using the subject line to summarise the topic clearly, make action requests obvious, ensure it is less than one page.
- Manage access —only look at emails at certain times, note (on paper) those who will need a response (if not immediate).
- Balance between many mixed topics and combining messages in one single e mail to save time. Consider a weekly summary.
- Train people to be relevant—and stop those using e mail to raise their profile rather than genuinely communicate.

Our research shows mixed reactions to e-mail: keen on the speed: hate the overload...

“A weekday edition of the NY Times contains more information than the average person was likely to come across in a lifetime in the 17th century”

*Richard Saul Warman*

## Time tips

- Meetings must stimulate in the first 10 minutes so participants understand why the meeting matters and its relevance for them..
- Make the purpose and outcomes clear from the start.
- Stand up regular meetings keep to time.
- Don't stop constructive debate by avoiding conflict.
- Clear reference points — employees waste a huge amount of time searching for/recreating existing information.
- Display in print/the web — colour and graphics are proved to communicate faster.
- Scannable information is nearly twice as readable—this means halve the word count, more key words, subheadings and bullet points.
- Make “time out” to concentrate acceptable — functioning IQ falls ten points when distracted by phone calls etc—this is even worse than smoking marijuana!
- Prove to senior management that information overload is costing the business.