

From [KAFF Systems](#)

There's More to Communication than Meets the Ear (Part Two)

You hear it again and again and you know it's true. We see it every day and we know it's true. The biggest cause of workplace problems is poor (or even lack of) communication. Improving communication will lead to gains in productivity, quality, employee commitment and morale. But, before you begin to improve workplace communication and reap the benefits of your efforts, you should have a clear understanding of just what constitutes communication. It's more than what meets the ear ... it's more than just talk. In [November](#), we wrote about talking and employee handbooks as common forms of communication. Now, it's time to say a few words about less obvious but clearly important forms of communication.

Policies and Procedures. What's the best way to consistently tell all employees what the Company expects from them? What's the best way to tell employees how to communicate with the Company? Banners? Posters? Newsletters? These methods all work, but what works better is a group of supervisors who are trained on current policies and procedures contained in the Company's Policy and Procedure Manual (PPM). The PPM clearly sets forth Company expectations: What's the workweek? Where can employees park? What's the proper mode of dress? How are employees paid? To how much vacation are employees entitled? What happens if employees "break the rules"? What do you do if one employee accuses a co-worker of harassing behavior? How do I know when to counsel an employee? The PPM also clearly sets out the channels, which employees can use to communicate with the Company: Who do employees call if they're going to be late? With whom do employees talk about scheduling vacation? How do employees express a concern or complaint? How do employees make suggestions for improved quality and productivity? Who do employees speak with concerning benefit questions? But, the PPM only works as a basis for two-way workplace communication if supervisors are "up to speed". That is, the PPM only promotes two-way communication if supervisors know and understand what's in the Manual, know when changes have been made, have been trained to apply what's in the Manual and are motivated to freely and openly talk with employees about the Company's policies and procedures. Yes, it comes back to "talk", but this talk is more than casual interchange. It reinforces the Company's message regularly, loudly and consistently (and always from the "same page").

Performance Reviews. What better place for the Company to set forth work performance expectations, tell employees how they've performed in relation to those expectations, provide clear guidance for performance improvement and provide employees a non-threatening means for responding frankly to what's expected of them, the evaluation and the improvement suggestions? Unfortunately, the process for setting and communicating expectations, evaluating performance and guiding improvement is a difficult one for most supervisors and employees. Being frank, forthright and non-emotional is difficult, not only when identifying "problems" with performance, but also when identifying "positives". Many times, supervisors and employees choose not to offend or choose to downplay serious issues; choose to introduce minor "untruths" and

choose to omit important details. They're "only human" and often try to avoid offending someone with whom they must continue working. They often try to help "make the medicine go down" more easily. They often allow emotions to creep into conversations and often withhold praise because the "bad" far outweighs the "good". With proper training for supervisors and employees, however, the performance review process can be a premier communication vehicle.

Making Communication Work. Whether it's **Talk, Employee Handbooks, PPM's** or **Performance Reviews**, communication only works if everyone actively works at it, and working at it always seems to involve two underlying themes: Working at communication means **Training**. To make communication work you must train supervisors *and* employees on Handbooks, PPM's, and Performance Review. You must train them how to talk with one another in a non-hostile work environment. You must train objectivity, consistency and comprehensivity. Working at communication also means **Documentation**. Handbooks and PPM's are documentation. Successful Performance Reviews require thorough, consistent, objective documentation as do disciplinary actions. Indeed, the long-term communication value of all relevant supervisor-employee interchanges requires documentation. We say again, making communication work requires working at it. Just because we regularly read, write and speak the language (with varying degrees of proficiency, of course), does not mean that we can communicate effectively and automatically reap the benefits we touted in the opening paragraph.