

Being a Transparent Leader



What is transparency in leadership?

To be transparent means to be open. When you're transparent, you have no hidden agendas or motives, you share information—what you see is what you get. As a result, you can build trust with others. The opposite of being transparent is to conceal information, to not disclose why decisions were made, or to hoard information. If a leader were to do this, they would quickly find that no one trusts them.

Why it matters:

When you do not behave in a transparent manner, you waste enormous amounts of time and energy. Sharing information and explaining decisions can take time, but if not done leaves the employee to figure things out on their own. Their conclusions often are misconstrued or inaccurate. As a result, you, spend more time clearing things up.

Do you create transparency?

Determine your current level of transparency by considering the following questions. Think back to the last mistake you made—what did you learn from it? Did others realize you had made a mistake, or did you cover it up? What about the last decision you made—how did you explain the reasons for making that decision? Do you provide information in a timely manner to your employees? Do you clearly articulate your performance expectations to your team and provide them with open and honest feedback continually—or save it for the performance review? Does your team know where the organization is headed?

Actions to increase your transparency

Did you find that you could benefit from increasing your level of transparency? If so, then consider the following behaviors that will help you build this competency:

- Tell the truth
- Admit and fix mistakes promptly
- Provide accurate information in a timely manner
- Make decisions publicly, when possible, to instill trust
- Explain decisions—say “here’s what led me to make this decision and why...”
- Facilitate access to information
- Meet on a regular basis with each of your employees to discuss their work and performance
- Ensure motives are clear, no hidden agendas—When asking questions say “I am asking you this because...”
- Talk about your vision for your team

Transparency and Trust go together. To be trusted as a leader, you must be creating transparency in all that you do. This is not a one-time action, it’s repeated actions that occur on a regular basis.

Create a balance

Be aware of balancing your need to be transparent and honoring confidentiality. You don’t want to risk disclosing confidential information because you want to become more transparent. Carefully consider the impact of sharing sensitive information. Will sharing the information violate any policies or laws? Expose something shared in confidence? If so, don’t do it. Being transparent will build trust quickly, but you will lose trust even quicker if you violate confidentiality.

Conclusion

Becoming more transparent as a leader is within your reach. As you reflect on your actions and the results you achieve, consider where there is opportunity to increase transparency. If you discover that you have not been behaving this way in the past, make the decision to act differently moving forward. Taking small steps and focusing on one or two things to do differently can make a big difference. The more transparent you are, the more connected and engaged your employees will be.

Consider what you can do that will have the biggest impact on your ability to be a more transparent leader.