

## How Does Your Management Measure Up?

by Ellen R. Kolender, RHIA, CTR

In my more than 28 years in the record management field, I have seen a variety of management styles accompanied by varying degrees of success. As a manager, I continue to learn from my successes *and* my mistakes. I hope that sharing some of my experiences will help others facing similar situations.

### Talking the Talk

Departmental communication can make or break work relationships. Communicating on a “need to know” basis can cause fragmentation within a department. It can be difficult to decide whom to share information with and how much to share. In my opinion, it is better to be honest and err on the side of sharing more rather than less. Including all employees affected by change in discussions *before* the change occurs leads to successful outcomes. When you allow employees to be a part of the change, they are more likely to respond positively when the implementation takes place. Excluding people can lead to resentment fueled by a lack of understanding.

One way to stay in touch with your employees is by meeting monthly with each direct report. Talking at a scheduled time each month enhances communication and makes employees feel their needs, work, and efforts are valued.

### At Ease

Typically, manager and employee communication—whether professional or casual—occurs over the barrier of a desk. Communication with a boss seated behind a desk tends to send an authoritarian message. On the other hand, I have found having an employee sit to the side of my desk—a more casual seating arrangement—to be more effective. Being able to make direct eye contact and talk without a desk dividing our conversation is valuable and effective.

### Take Time to Explain

Answers that sound “automatic” can be unnerving to me. A simple “no” without discussion may be appropriate when parenting a child, but in the office setting, employees appreciate an explanation for the “no.” While employees know the boss has the final say, understanding the reasons behind the decision can be helpful.

### Communicate Honestly and Often

I believe that clarifying issues and talking honestly with employees allows effective working relationships to develop. Once I had to let an employee go and—unbelievably—the employee actually thanked me! The conversation did not come as a surprise, because we had been addressing the employee’s progress—or lack of progress—each month. We had established time frames for meeting standards, and we had discussed how not performing at the set standard was holding the department back. When we discussed the termination, I explained that while the present job was not working out, there were many other positions at which the employee could excel.

### Stand By Your Staff

Embarrassing your employee in public (for example, at a committee meeting or a conference) is a good way to tear down a working relationship. Not only can this ruin your rapport with your direct report, it may also influence how others perceive the employee. In public situations, I believe managers should stand by



their subordinates. If you do not agree with what your employee is saying, make it clear that you will meet with the employee to discuss the matter further and report to the group later.

### Give Credit

Recognizing employees for work well done is essential for a manager and his or her department to succeed.

Acknowledging employees’ work offers tangible benefits. First, it lets them know that their manager has recognized their work. It is also important for employee satisfaction. Acknowledgment can range from a simple verbal, “Thank you for your excellent work” to a written note of appreciation or an invitation to lunch.

### Walking the Walk

Effective communication, a positive attitude, and frequent employee recognition are characteristics of successful managers. Remember, your attitude—whether positive or negative—is contagious and will travel through your department. Modeling behavior has always been the number one behavior preached to managers—and “walking the walk” does matter! If you are often late to work, dress unprofessionally, or project a negative attitude, you can expect the same behavior or worse from your staff. It may not be possible to be a “perfect” manager, but you can still strive for excellence and usually your staff will follow your lead. 📌

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*Ellen R. Kolender, RHIA, CTR, is manager of the Cancer Registry Department, Roper St. Francis Healthcare in Charleston, S.C.*