Action Planning Tips for Managers and Supervisors

UC Davis Health System has identified the survey item, “The person I report to is a good communicator”, as one of two items of focus for the organization based upon the results from our last staff engagement survey in September 2015. The other survey item being focused on is, “I get the training I need to do a good job.” This document provides tips related to the manager/supervisor communications topic that you may find useful in your action planning and discussions with your teams. We will be conducting our next staff engagement survey in April 2017.

Staff Engagement Survey Item:  The person I report to is a good communicator.
Survey Domain:  Manager
Survey Theme:  Leadership

Understanding the Issue:  All leaders should aspire to cultivate effective communication skills. Communication is a critical component of almost everything that happens in an organization. Managers sometimes take for granted that the information they convey to their teams will be received the way they intended. The reality is that several factors affect the message including: method, style, timing, and choice of words. Efforts to improve your communication skills will pay big dividends over time.

Improvement Ideas:

1. Ask your employees specific questions about your communication style, like: “When we talk, do I communicate clearly?” or “What specific ideas do you have about how I could communicate more effectively?”

2. Work with your employees to develop communication standards for the team.
   a. Determine the information they need from you, including how it is provided.
   b. Determine the information you need from them, including how it is provided.
   c. Ask the team to establish an agreement for handling misunderstandings that result from poor communications. If not addressed promptly, poor
communications can lead to team conflict. An example of an agreement might be: When in doubt about a communication, do not make assumptions. Ask the other person to clarify their message.

3. Use electronic communication appropriately. Make sure that you are not over-relying on electronic communication. Face-to-face communication is still the most effective method for connecting with your staff. Avoid communicating emotions or expressing different opinions electronically. For these discussions, talking face-to-face is the best option, followed by a phone conversation.

4. Determine how individuals on your team like to communicate. Some people prefer voice mail, others emails, others memos. Within practical reason, customize your style to your employees.

5. Use active listening techniques to demonstrate to your team that you are listening and considering their input and suggestions. Behaviors that demonstrate active listening include making eye contact, head-nodding, and saying “Let me see if I understand you,” and paraphrase their comments.

6. Look for opportunities to recognize and reinforce the desired behaviors that support the communication agreements the team establishes.

7. Ask for coaching from your manager or a mentor. Consider working with an internal or external coach who can give you personalized suggestions for improvement. Ask your manager or HR representative if this option is available to you.

8. Consider taking a course in communications. Ask your manager or Human Resources’ Training and Development unit (734-2676) about the many courses that are available internally.

9. Adopt the attitude that improving communication skills is an ongoing initiative. Read books and articles that address these skills.

**Reminder:** UC Davis Health System will be conducting our next staff engagement survey in April 2017.