

*“Research indicates that employees have three prime needs: Interesting work, recognition for doing a good job, and being let in on things that are going on in the company.”*

Zig Ziglar

Why limiting  
communication  
to your inner  
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## Why limiting communication to your inner circle can also limit your growth

The American football huddle was invented at a university for the deaf to keep the opposing team from seeing their hand signs. While you can impress your friends during a Super Bowl party by knowing the history of the huddle, you might make the wrong impression at work when you keep things confidential.

Ask yourself, *“Is there a good reason not to share this information?”* Sharing both good and bad information can be empowering to the people you rely on to get results. Open communication can build trust, create feelings of ownership, surface issues faster, and generate useful feedback.

What kinds of things do people want to know?

- Things that are going to impact their work
- Performance feedback
- Results, especially when their performance contributed
- Coming changes
- The big picture--where’s the organization headed?
- What’s happening in the industry or profession?
- What’s being discussed in board meetings?

Lean toward transparency. You obviously make the call whether information gets shared, but remember it’s easier to win when your employees don’t feel like they are on the opposing team.

Researchers over the last half-century have analyzed the link between communication and productivity. A study published in the *International Journal of Business Communication*, “Employee Perceptions of the Relationship Between Communication and Productivity: A Field Study,” observed that company information shared by supervisors positively influenced productivity of workers, middle managers, and top managers. Sharing information impacted managers more than workers, according to the study, but played a role in higher productivity in all three cases. The degree of impact when comparing the perceptions of workers with the perceptions of managers varies, but a high percentage of employees in the study, at all levels, indicated that more open communication mattered.

The contemporary research published by Korean social scientists, Sam Sup Jo and Sung Wook Shim in *Science Direct* sheds light on the reasons that open communication may encourage higher productivity. They suggest that trust between workers and middle managers and between middle managers and top managers greatly influences individual motivation and performance. In their abstract, they state, "Supportive oral communication relates positively to individuals' perceptions of management's supportiveness and friendliness. Perceived support creates trust that the organization will fulfill its exchange obligations by rewarding employee efforts. The survey results indicated that trusting relationship was positively related to measures of communication management, suggesting that those employees receiving positive communication are more likely to be motivated to form trusting relationships with the management level."

The basis for popular conclusions about the link between productivity and communication is consistently tied to access to company information. Academic analysis aside, the practical way to benefit from the research is to open up. Share more information. Talk with employees and managers about the direction of the company, both the good and the bad. Trust others by including them in conversations about coming changes and especially about results.

In their book *LOVE 'EM OR LOSE 'EM: Getting Good People to Stay*, Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans shared this statement by Jack Stack, president and CEO of Springfield Remanufacturing Company: "We are building a company in which everyone tells the truth every day — not because everyone is honest, but because everyone has access to the same information: operating metrics, financial data, valuation estimates. The more people understand what's really going on in their company, the more eager they are to help solve its problems."

The American football huddle is a visual reminder of an important leadership behavior: Communicating. Talk about the plan, about the way the team works together, and about the impact.