

HUBBARD COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
Saint Hill Manor, East Grinstead, Sussex

HCO POLICY LETTER OF 10 APRIL 1963

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RE-ISSUE SERIES (12)

WHAT AN EXECUTIVE WANTS ON HIS LINES

(Re-issue of HCO Policy Letter of May 26, 1959)

There are only four things which an executive wants on his incoming communication lines.

These are:

1. Information.
2. Appointments and dismissals of personnel for his action or confirmation.
3. Financial matters.
4. Acknowledgements.

He does not want on his lines:

1. Demands for decisions.
2. Backflashes and can'ts.
3. Entheta.

Demands for decision are always indicative of irresponsibility; people want the executive to create the mistakes; and an executive can make mistakes if he is asked to make decisions distant from his zone of action equipped with insufficient data to make the decision correctly.

Backflashes, by definition, are an unnecessary response to an order. This can get fairly wicked. They are not acknowledgements, they are comments or refutals. Example: "Sell the bricks" as an order, is replied to by "Bricks are hard to sell" or "We should have sold them yesterday". This is a disease peculiar to only a few staff members. They cannot receive an order directly and are seeking to be part of the comm, not the recipient. This goes so far as senseless "Wilco's" or "I'll take care of it" when the executive only wants to know Is it done? Despatches or orders, in most instances, are held until completed. We assume that they got through or rely on other means of saying they didn't. Only a few situations require an acknowledgement to an order over long lines and all of these occur when there is doubt that the recipient is there.

In the matter of can'ts, an executive seldom orders the impossible and generally consults with people before issuing an order. A persistent "Can't be done" means "I am unwilling". I have learned this the long way. Person A on a job, saying "Can't" all the time, changed to Person B, receiving the same orders, discovered to me that the job could be done since B, on the same post, receiving the same orders, never said "Can't" and the job did get done.

Entheta means embroidered reports. Data is data. It is not opinion. Data, not entheta, brings about action. All entheta does is cut the lines.

To jam an executive's lines is a serious thing to do. The result is a cut line. A bottle-neck is created by staff when staff jams a line to an executive. Eating up an executive's time and patience destroys harmony, dissemination and income.

Depending on an executive for petty decisions, is sure to jam lines and cost units.

The role of an executive is to plan and execute actions and to co-ordinate activities. To do this he gets people to do their jobs and establishes the overall plan of action. Only an executive can string lines and co-ordinate actions and resolve the jams that impede things. For an executive to decide for people decisions applicable only to the sphere of one job is folly.

WHAT AN EXECUTIVE'S LINES SHOULD LOOK LIKE

INFORMATION:

When a member of an organization does something of importance, he should always inform the executive after the fact. It is perfectly all right to take actions within one's organizational purpose. It is not all right to keep it a secret.

1. Do it.
2. Tell the right people and the executive by adequate communication at the speed necessary to the case.

Similarly, an executive ought to tell people his goals and plans and, when he does something of any importance to others, he ought to say so. The captain who tells the ship how the action is going saves a lot of nerves and useless motion.

APPOINTMENTS AND DISMISSALS:

Minor hirings and firings in a department by authorized persons should always be subject to confirmation at least after the fact. Major appointments and dismissals of key personnel must be okayed by a senior executive before the fact and action taken only on the senior executive's authority.

For example, it is a board action to appoint, transfer or dismiss an association secretary or an organization secretary. It is an executive director action to appoint or dismiss department heads and then only on the advices of an association secretary or organization secretary. It is an association secretary or organization secretary action to appoint, transfer or dismiss deputies or section chiefs. It is a department head's action to appoint or dismiss other staff but always, in every case, with permission from the next superior and information all the way up.

FINANCE MATTERS:

Consistent finance information as in advisory committee minutes and authority for changes and capital expenditures are an executive matter. My own authority is needed only on major changes of policy or expenditures and on extreme financial emergencies. Ordinary financial planning and routine actions are better handled locally by the association secretary, organization secretary or the director of accounts. I do need financial information. But where I have done planning and promotion and it is agreed upon, further handling of finance is handled under a blanket authority from me except for extreme financial emergencies or major capital outlays which are local matters.

These are the things I want on my lines. I change personnel as the answer where information is chronically withheld, where appointments and dismissals are irregular, or when an organization starts getting insolvent. Where people are continuously demanding that I make the decisions they should be making, I again recognize other ills and again change personnel.

If we all understand what's wanted, we can do it.

Well, let's look this over and do it and win.

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