

Learn to share



There are many reasons employees don't share knowledge or experience, from silo-thinking to fear of ridicule. Mandy Flint and Elisabet Vinberg Hearn, authors of *Leading Teams*, suggest six ways to encourage employees to share relevant information with each other.

1. It starts with you!

People often think knowledge is power and hold on to it rather than give it away. As a leader or communicator, if you want other people to share information, you need to be the one that kicks it off and show you're not afraid to share, you're not afraid to give something away.

You can't say 'You all need to talk to each other' unless you're prepared to go first. By doing that you're not saying 'Do what I say', you're saying 'Do what I do'.

2. Make people aware of the effect

Feedback is essential. Use it to encourage people so they know that sharing was right. Tell everyone 'By sharing that information, this is what you get'.

But also, point out when sharing might have helped – and didn't – and do it in real time if possible.

Everything is about learning. Create a culture that 'We're in this to learn'.

3. Create and run sharing 'PODS'

Get people together and say 'We're going to share on a specific subject'.

Increasingly, the speed of change means people haven't got all the information they need. It's impossible. Organisations that want to be a step ahead get people together to share information on a specific subject.

Make the group as diverse as possible to get a wide range of views - and there needs to be an outcome. Why are we sharing this? People must understand there's a purpose.

Someone needs to facilitate to make sure there's fair sharing and everyone gets heard – be prepared for conflict! - and key points are drawn out and captured.

There must be a conclusion on how to use the shared information in the future, so the next step is communicating the outcome.

4. Link to the big picture

This is the real crux of sharing information – if you understand context, if you understand why and how it links to what

you are doing, the more likely you are to get involved and share yourself.

The famous NASA story of the cleaner saying 'I'm helping to put a man on the moon' is the archetypal example, but too often people don't see it. They just think 'I'm doing a job' rather than contributing to something big.

It doesn't matter if you're in the NHS or banking, people need to understand they depend on other people, and people depend on them. That's how any organisation works – it's much bigger than the individual person.

5. Celebrate successes

By celebrating success of sharing you're using it to look at something that's worked already.

Then dissect it. Why did it work well? If it worked well, it's not as simple as doing it again. Find out why it worked and do that again.

The pace people work at now means we haven't got time to stop

and celebrate something done well because we're on to the next job. But it's worth it, to stop and reflect.

6. Dare to share

This is the hero. This is about the fear involved – fear of losing face or saying the wrong thing or sharing too much.

Something very powerful happens when people see someone else dare to share. Behaviour breeds behaviour, disclosure breeds disclosure. Other people think 'Oh, I'll give it a go' and suddenly you're on the way to a more open organisation.

No-one knows everything and the only way to improve is to share – otherwise you're shooting yourself in the foot.



Mandy Flint is the CEO of Excellence in Leadership and Elisabet Vinberg Hearn is the founder of Think Solutions UK. Their clients include the NHS, American Express, RBS and IKEA. Their book, *Leading Teams*, is published by Pearson.