



Get the communication flowing in your bakery

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Every workplace, whether it is a single small-scale operation or a multi-unit brand, experiences issues with communication. Bakeries are no exception.

Try adopting a simple, fast, short meeting method to your bakery to open communication channels and to get your team focused. This could lead to your business achieving great results, as well as a positive workplace culture.

When giving presentations, I notice people in the audience pick up their pens and start scribbling whenever I talk about weekly stand up meetings. I first got the idea from a seminar conducted by Verne Hamish, the self-styled "growth guy" from the US. Verne promotes a highly structured approach to managing high-growth companies, which includes an emphasis on regular, well-structured and facilitated meetings.

When I was chief executive officer at Brumby's we adapted Verne's approach to suit our Australian circumstances, in particular, our geographically dispersed group of 15 TEAM (Together Everyone Achieves More) members spread across three states. While we held meetings each quarter to formally review progress against the strategic business plan (the roadmap to success) we realised we needed more frequent updates on how the TEAM was progressing between those quarterly meetings. The weekly stand up meetings therefore were designed to keep all the key players on track and accountable for achieving the strategic business plan.

In these weekly meetings, team members either attended in person or interstate team members (or travelling team members) phoned into a conference call that was fixed at 8.30am every Tuesday. The rules for the meeting were simple – no sitting down, two minutes maximum per point each person, each question and just answer the following:

1. What's up – what's on the top of your mind?
2. Focus – what's your focus for the following week and what do you hope to achieve?
3. Blockages or bottlenecks – identify any obstacles that are going to stop you from achieving your weekly focus (and who else in the TEAM can assist)?
4. Market intelligence/ideas – have you heard any rumours or intelligence that are important to the business or do you have any ideas to increase revenue and drive down expenses?
5. How do you feel? Your sign off.



Each TEAM member would answer each question in turn or pass if they had nothing to contribute. TEAM members kept their own notes and to do lists but there were no official minutes. With everyone standing up we found this created a more dynamic environment in which there was no waffling and a more succinct, focused summary of each TEAM member's issues.

If a big issue or blockage emerged that had to be addressed it was taken off-line to be sorted out between the parties straight after meeting. The maximum time for such meetings was 30 minutes. The TEAM soon became used to the five questions and this developed a certain rhythm to the meetings. It worked a treat.

The meetings process identified issues and actions over which team members could have a direct affect. TEAM members had access to the dashboard that measured their performance and it was visually in their face every day. They could see how their performance was impacting on the scoreboard and the reward that was directly linked to their performance.

From time to time we would select a different dashboard indicator to be measured at the weekly stand up meeting. These indicators included sales per customer, debtor levels, franchisee conference attendance numbers and new franchisee enquiries. As a result of

the stand up meeting the whole TEAM could see their results each week to provide clear evidence of progress towards meeting the strategic business plan outcomes.

The meetings ensured that as chief executive officer, I was connected with and could observe the dynamics and execution ability of all TEAM members, not just the ones with whom we worked closely. At the end of each 30-minute period, we would take those people having difficulty aside to remedy the blockages straight away so they did not fester. In addition, the other TEAM members were alerted to issues or problems that would have a flow-on effect to their areas.

The importance of using this accountability and communication technique to drive improved performance in the business cannot be underestimated. The discipline and focus engendered by these meetings transformed the business in a three-year period, which saw the share price rise from \$1.20 to \$3.60 and the business sold at 17 times last reported earnings.

If your bakery is experiencing communication accountability problems with your team, try adapting the above process to your business. You will be surprised what a difference it makes. ■