

1-3 Communication Breakdown

Southern New Hampshire University

Byron Fields

[04/05/2014]

The breakdown of communication as it relates to the case of Tim Armstrong vs. Abel Lanz started when Mr. Armstrong (The CEO of AOL) made an aggressive phone call to over 1,000 employees demanding for them to stay on board and improve their performance. When the CEO fired Mr. Lanz (the Creative Director of AOL's News Division 'Patch'), it created overall embarrassment and represents unprofessionalism. Based on the interpretation of this conference call, I conclude that the timeliness and the lack of personally evaluating the effectiveness of employees work performance should always be considered before making irrational decisions. Policies need to be set in place in order to manage a team of people involved in a large corporation.

In This case, Mr. Tim Armstrong was giving his Wall Street analysts that patch would shrink from 900 to 600 websites. This felt like Mr. Armstrong was saying that a lot of employees were going to get laid off in the near future (Carlson, 2013). While presenting this lecture, 2 minutes onto the conversation, Mr. Armstrong mouthed to Mr. Lanz to put the camera down. Mr. Lanz, in the past recorded the conferences of this sort (Carlson, 2013). On this particular occasion was the first time in which Mr. Armstrong raised the concern and terminated him on the spot. However, according to another source, Mr. Lanz launched an update to Patch 2.0 that Mr. Armstrong was dissatisfied about. That was the premise of the conference call regarding his displeasure (Carlson, 2013). The entire incident was irreversible and one that Mr. Lenz has yet to respond to since last year when it occurred. Also, Mr. Armstrong, after receiving much backlash, has apologized for this unprofessional act (Etherington, 2013).

There are a number of things to be identified when one faces a manager with the characteristics that Mr. Armstrong possessed. These characteristics are a direct reflection of the

company and could dismantle the vision that it stands for. One source labels his actions as having unorganized thought. This means that a leader is too all over the place with their emotions and acting on decisions that they haven't completely analyzed themselves (MSG, 2014). This action is often called acting on impulse, which could lead to doing something that one might regret. In relation to the incident, Mr. Armstrong told Mr Lenz to "put that camera down!" immediately after he started taking pictures. He then rapidly to him "you're fired!" before Mr. Lenz had a chance to actually put down the camera. Mr. Armstrong may have felt that by doing this in front of multiple employees that this would set an example so they could perform better.

There are steps that can be executed for employees to avoid workplace conflict. These steps instill in them ways to communicate better and solve issues more effectively. Since Mr. Armstrong exemplified aggressive behavior, he should have instead asked Mr. Lenz to speak with him in a private location. That way, he wouldn't have raised his awareness of his displeasure with Mr. Lenz picture taking. Taking an employee to a neutral or solitude area such as a private office to discuss personal issues not only promotes professionalism but reduces gossip among other employees (Miksen, 2014). This is an implemental tool that could be established in an 'employee best practices' section of the company packet. According to Demand Media also stated that one should watch their level of tone when talking to employees. As a manager, it is important to instill hard work and dedication in employees but doing so too aggressively creates an on edge feeling when they are constantly being yelled at by the manager or person in charge (Miksen, 2014). Mr. Armstrong should have first stated that he wants to see Patch grow into something powerful or according to his vision and gave them constructive criticism on how it could have been possible (Miksen, 2014). Implementing this type of policy

would get employees to work harder because they would understand the value behind the projects they are working on. Also, if need be, these conversations/conference calls could also help to re evaluate their performance overtime to reduce complacency.

There are five specific and detailed communication strategies that can be utilized for any business. These forms of communication can also help the company grow and keep their reputation along with its employers positive. The strategies are: Well-Reasoned, supportive, confident, expressive, forceful, and specific. A forceful communication strategy was already defined by the way Mr. Armstrong carried out terminating Mr. Lanz. His threatening behavior was attributed and to the power he possesses as CEO of the company. Another good strategy outlined by another source is the quality of possessing empathy, which is the exact opposite of Mr. Armstrong's characteristic. It is important to imagine one's circumstances when speaking to them. To put yourself in another person's shoes helps to monitor your tone of voice and form of expression before communicating a message (UW, 2014). The Well-Reasoned communication strategy is defined as providing convincing, and persuasive points about your statement to get people on board with your cause (P.E, 2013). The supportive communication strategy provides emotional support and understanding towards employees (P.E, 2013) Doing this acknowledges the work that was already performed among the employees and the encouragement that they need to keep going.

There are a number of ways in which effective leaders can communicate. The employees of a company are a reflection of the leaders that are running the business. It is important that effective communication strategies are utilized in order to promote better employee practices. The strategies mentioned above should assist in the overall effort the retaining morale and

employee satisfaction. Mr. Armstrong's actions were unacceptable and did not represent what the CEO of a company should do to their employees.

References

- 1.) Carlson, Nicholas. Aug. 12. 2013. *Listen to AOL CEO Tim Armstrong Fire a Patch Employee in Front of 1,000 Co-Workers.* <http://finance.yahoo.com/news/listen-to-aol-ceo-tim-armstrong-fire-a-patch-employee-in-front-of-1-000-coworkers-140600015.html>
- 2.) Carlson, Nicholas. Aug. 12. 2013. *New Info Hints at the Real Reason AOL CEO Tim Armstrong Fired An Executive in From of 1,000 Co-Workers.* <http://www.businessinsider.com/why-tim-armstrong-fired-abel-lenz-2013-8>
- 3.) Etherington, Darrell. Aug. 13, 2013. *AOL CEO Tim Armstrong apologizes for Brutally Fired Employee During Patch All-Hands Call.* <http://techcrunch.com/2013/08/13/aol-ceo-tim-armstrong-apologizes-for-brutally-firing-employee-during-patch-all-hands-call/>
- 4.) Miksen, Chris. 2014. *How To Deal With Aggressive Employees.* <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/deal-aggressive-employees-22263.html>
- 5.) MSG. 2014. *Role of Communication Barriers in Ineffective Communication.* <http://managementstudyguide.com/role-of-communication-barriers-in-ineffective-communication.htm>
- 6.) Personality Explorer. 2014. *Most Effective Communication Strategies with Various Personalities.* <http://www.personalityexplorer.com/FREEResources/CommunicationStrategiesForVariousPersonalities.aspx>

7.) University of Waterloo. 2014. *Effective Communication: Barriers and Strategies*.

<http://uwaterloo.ca/centre-for-teaching-excellence/teaching-resources/teaching-tips/communicating-students/telling/effective-communication-barriers-and-strategies>