

Cascading Communication Process

Cascading communication is the name of a process undertaken by leadership to ensure the decisions and messages of great significance reach employees at every level in the chain of command. Cascading communication drives clarity and alignment around what has been decided or committed to, starting at the top and working down.

Implementing cascading communication is very simple, but it does require that leaders make a commitment to either face-to-face or telephone communication with their employees. Communication via email or delegating the communication to support staff will not suffice; it is a leadership task that must occur one-on-one.

The process is straightforward:

Step 1: After a thorough discussion and debate, the Directorate makes a decision or launches an initiative that will have a significant effect on members of the workforce. Before adjourning, the Directorate agrees to begin the cascade of communication about the decision or initiative to the next level in the organization. They all commit to holding a **face-to-face or telephone conversation** with their direct reports within **24-48 hours** to explain the decision or initiative and to allow discussion and receive feedback. Doing this ensures that all members of the Directorate are clear about the decision or initiative they are announcing.

If the issue is one that will be extremely controversial or important, it is best that members of the Directorate agree on a date and time within the 24-48 hour period for announcing the decision or initiative together across the nation. Any other form of internal communication on the issue, such as an all-employee message, can be timed to coincide with the first level of face-to-face cascading communication.

* On Program-specific issues or short timeframes, RDs may agree that the cascading can proceed from an AD down to Regional Program Assistant Regional Directors (ARDs).

Step 2: Assistant Directors hold a **face-to-face or telephone conversation** with their Washington Office staffs and Regional Directors meet with their Regional Directorates within the specified timeframe—**24 to 48 hours**. This conversation allows this next level of leadership--Chiefs and Assistant Regional Directors--to ask questions; air any concerns they have; make suggestions or recommendations; and, ultimately, to support implementation of the decision or initiative even if they disagree. (This is called, “Disagree and Commit” and it only happens if all opinions and ideas are aired.)

Before adjourning, ADs and RDs secure a commitment from their Chiefs/ARDs to repeat the process with the next level of leadership in the organization within 24-48 hours.

Step 3: Chiefs/ARDs hold a **face-to-face or telephone conversation** with their Project Leaders (Regional Office and field) **within 24-48 hours** to explain the decision or initiative. What is important is that Project Leaders have the opportunity to weigh in on the matter in person.

Before adjourning, Chiefs/ARDS secure a commitment from their Project Leaders to cascade the communication about the decision or initiative to their employees within 24-48 hours.

Step 4: Project Leaders hold a **face-to-face or telephone conversation** with their direct reports **within 24-48 hours**. This final step ensures that within a week's time, all affected employees get the word on the decision or initiative; can ask questions, air concerns, make suggestions or recommendations; and, ultimately, can commit to participating in implementation, whether or not they agree with it.

Cascading communication helps to dispel rumors and miscommunication and breaks down resistance to new ideas by allowing discussion and input. Employees do not need to have their ideas or recommendations accepted to support a decision or new initiative, but they do need to know that they have been heard. Employees must know what leadership has decided and the intent behind it and have the opportunity to understand and respond. Cascading communication is a trust-builder.

Optional Step 5: Project leaders can be asked to report back to ARDs/Chiefs and ARDs/Chiefs can be asked to report back to ADs and RDs via e-mail that the agreed-upon communication has occurred. Until cascading communication becomes institutionalized, this level of accountability may be useful. Ultimately, the goal should be for all levels of the organization to be trusted to cascade important communication as a standard operating procedure.

Cascading Communication Creating Dialogue to Achieve Buy-In

Within 24-48 hours, dialogue will be created with employees about all key decisions and initiatives in the following order:

