



Silence is Not Golden

By Patti Hathaway, Business Advisor & Author

Have you been reared on the management philosophy: No news is good news? If you don't hear from the boss, you must be doing okay. Do you realize how terribly demotivating that is to employees? Employees tell me, "I just wish my boss would tell me how I'm doing. Even if it were bad, I'd rather know, than not know anything. This living in silence is killing me." Is that not true for you? One of the most vicious and unfair things you can do to a person is to withhold communication from them.

The definition for silent feedback is -- no response is provided. The purpose of silence is to maintain the status quo. Is that what you want for your organization? Status quo? The results are not surprising -- silence decrease an employee's confidence and performance. It also creates surprises during performance appraisals that can be problematic.

Here is some interesting research on the use of silence by managers. This is from the book, *Setup to Fail Syndrome*. The authors found that the use of silence can create a vicious cycle. Most managers feel their weaker performers are the hardest to deal with and the slowest to improve. The authors conclude that these managers never consider that the difficulty may arise because of their own behavior, not in spite of it. Because the managers don't see their own role, they create a vicious cycle including the powerful undertow of expectation. Research shows that when interviewers send negative nonverbal signals, interviewees actually performed more poorly.

The authors go on to report that bosses don't understand the impact of even the subtlest of low expectations and they don't understand why subordinates don't fight against it. They determine that it is extraordinarily easy to turn high achievers into underperformers with constant rejection. Employees can begin to doubt themselves, and lose enthusiasm within days.

Often with our least productive employees, we act very subtly and can make passive-aggressive sarcastic comments. We send non-verbal signals that send a message that the employee translates to mean that we think that they are worthless. Managers create a negative self-fulfilling process by their own behavior. They actually create weaker performers in a way that blinds them to their own responsibility and spurs them to continue. The process becomes self-reinforcing and turns into a vicious cycle that is difficult for either party to escape.

Do you use silence as a way to punish your employees? No news is never good news. No news means you are abandoning your role as a manager and leaving your employee to figure out what your expectations are and whether or not they are fulfilling them.

Excerpted from Patti Hathaway's new book, *Secrets for Unleashing Employee Greatness: The Step-by-Step System to Maximize Every Employee's Greatness*, 2005. Patti Hathaway, CSP, *The CHANGE AGENT*, is one of fewer than 7% women worldwide to have earned the Certified Speaking Professional designation from the National Speakers Association for her proven presentation skills. She is a Business Advisor and the author of 6 books that have been translated into 5 languages and have sold over 100,000 copies. Patti solves your people challenges by providing highly customized solutions to meet your needs. Contact Patti at 1-800-339-0973 or at her web site: www.thechangeagent.com for information on her speaking and consulting services or to receive her free e-mail newsletter/blog.