

Managers: Your Projects Fail Because Your Communication Stinks

By Aaron Stannard

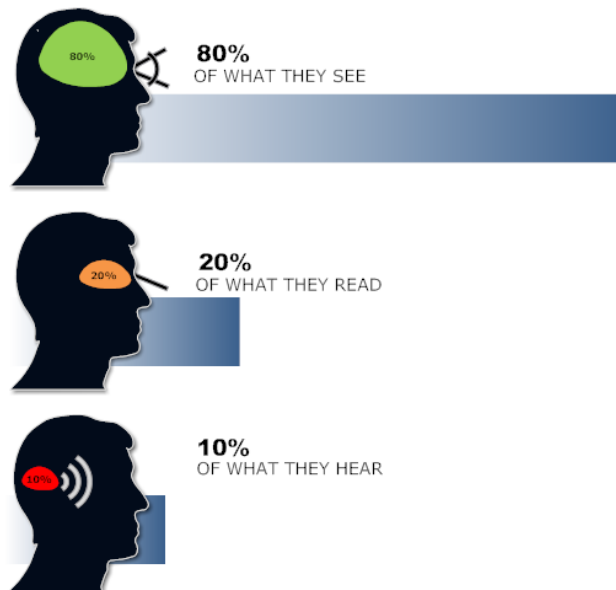
The most frustrating part of project management is when people on your team screw up the directions. You told them to do X, they did Y, and so forth. It happens all the time, especially on projects that are unfamiliar or new to your team. And when someone inevitably screws up, what do you have to do? Show them exactly how to fix it—if the team screws up often enough, you’ll inevitably have to slip into micromanaging the entire project.

So what can you do? You don’t want to treat your co-workers like robots, able to do the work only when told *exactly* what to do down to the very last letter, but at the same time they seem to make bad decisions when you give them too much leeway. What’s the problem?

Most of the time the problem isn’t your team, **it’s you**. Well, I meant that it’s us—all managers are at fault to some extent. Specifically, it’s our communication with our team members that’s the problem. We know what we want done and we try to communicate that as best as we can, but we usually fall short. Here’s what most of us do wrong:

1. **We communicate too many critical details verbally**—Studies have shown that verbal communication is not only the most-often used form of communication, but it is also the least memorable. *People remember only 10% of what they hear on average versus 20% of what they read and 80% of what they see.*

How Much Do People Remember?



2. **We only tell them “what they need to know” which often isn’t enough** – Managers tell their team members only “what we think they need to know” but all too often we *don’t know what they need to know*. Does the new guy in IT know that you’re never, ever supposed to take more than one of the web servers out of the cluster when deploying a

new version of the website? Well, if you *assume* that he knows that and therefore don't bother warning him before you instruct to him to deploy a new version of the website, who's fault is it when the website goes down? Yours.

3. **We don't properly explain the business objectives behind the projects** – Team buy-in is important; if your team doesn't understand *how their work advances the business' objectives* then the chances that they might do something counter-productive increase. If you asked your MarCom team to design a prospecting email that shows off your company's latest product without telling them that the email's *intended for non-customers*, then there's a good chance that my team might not include the appropriate calls for action, right? Right.

So the next time you see that one of your team members goofed up on a project, rather than get angry at them, figure out what you can do better. Here's how you can get started:

1. **Write key details down, draw pictures & diagrams, and give printed / electronic copies to your team members for reference** (instead of just *saying* them)
2. **Refer back to documented standard processes when they're relevant for specific projects** (instead of making assumptions about what people do or don't already know)
3. **Clearly explain how your project advances business objectives X,Y,Z** (instead of just handing them the project with