

# COMMUNICATING CHANGE LIKE A HUMAN

How to talk so your team actually  
listens (and follows)





# Why Communication Fails

- **Too vague:** “Things are changing”
- **Too formal:** Sounds like a legal contract, not a conversation
- **Too much jargon:** Using corporate speak that hides the truth
- **One-way street:** Broadcasting orders instead of starting dialogues
- **The one and done trap:** Assuming people remember the email you sent three weeks ago

In many small businesses, communication fails because we assume proximity equals clarity. Just because you sit in the same office doesn't mean you are on the same page. The biggest mistake? The one and done trap. You tell the team once and check it off your list. Research shows people need to hear a change message 5 to 7 times before it will actually sink in.

# The Problem with Management Speak

**The Mask:** Sounds impressive, but means very little to the frontline.

**The Result:** Creates confusion and breeds 'office rumours'.

**The Risk:** Reduces trust it feels like you are hiding something.

**The Disconnect:** Feels cold and corporate.

**Example:** "We are optimising synergies to leverage cross-functional pivot points."

**Translation:** We are trying to work together better.

## Sound like a human being

Management speak is a defensive mechanism. We use big words when we aren't 100% sure of the details. In an SME your team is quick to spot what doesn't add up. If you start talking about optimising synergies they hear layoffs or more work for less pay. Be brave enough to use plain English. Trust is built when the person at the top sounds like a human being, not a press release.

# Corporate vs Human Language

The Corporate Version	The Human Version
We are restructuring operations	We are changing how teams work together
Driving efficiencies	Saving time and reducing wasted effort
Scaling our value proposition	Finding more ways to help our customers
Human capital alignment	Getting the right people in the right roles

## Clarity Drives Action

Clear communication is essential in any organisation, but especially in an SME environment where teams need to act quickly and confidently. Overly corporate or jargon-heavy language can create confusion, slow decision-making and dilute the real message. By translating complex or abstract phrases into simple, human language, you make your intent clearer, help teams align faster and ensure everyone understands what is expected of them. When people understand the message they are far more likely to engage with it and take meaningful action.

# What People Actually Want to Know



**What is changing?** The facts

**Why is it happening?** The logic or necessity

**How does it affect me?** The personal impact

**What do I need to do?** The action

**When is it happening?** The timeline

When change is announced, every employee immediately asks themselves one question: ***What does this mean for me?*** If you don't answer that question in the first 2 minutes, they will stop listening to your big picture strategy. Be direct. Tell them if their hours change, if their software changes, or if their seat in the office changes. Address the 'me' before you address the 'we'.



**Simple beats clever:** Don't try to impress, try to inform.

**Clear beats complex:** If you can't draw it on a napkin, it's too complicated.

**Short beats long:** Keep updates punchy.

**Direct builds trust:** Say the hard things plainly.



Clarity is a leadership superpower. In an SME, you have the advantage of being direct. You don't have to navigate a PR department. *Use that!* Short, clear and direct communication reduces anxiety. Anxiety lives in the 'gaps' of information. When you are clear, you close those gaps and keep the team focused on the work, not the worry.



# The Power of Clarity

# Repetition is Key

**The Rule of 7:** People need to hear it multiple times.

**Mix the Media:** Email it, say it, post it, slack it.

**The 'Consistency' Check:** Is the message the same every time?

**The Feedback Pulse:** Don't assume they 'got it' because they nodded.

**Timing Matters:** Repeat at key moments, not just once.

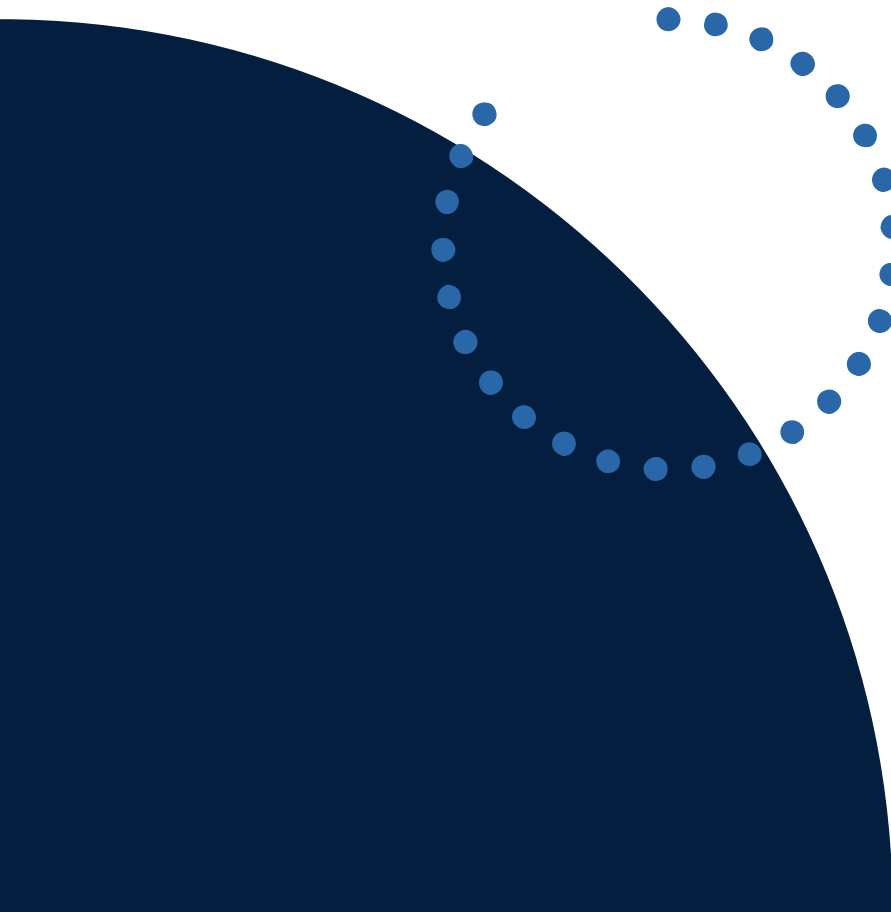
**Highlight Benefits:** Reinforce what's in it for them.

**Short & Simple:** Each repeat should be clear and digestible.



## Feedback

You will feel like a broken record long before your team has fully understood the message. That is okay. Repetition isn't annoying; it is reinforcing. Use different formats. Some people learn by reading an email; others need to hear it in a huddle; others need to see it on a poster in the breakroom. Keep repeating the 'why' until you hear the team saying it back to you.



# Two-Way Communication

- **Ask for feedback:** “What is the biggest roadblock you see?”
- **Listen actively:** Don’t just wait for your turn to speak.
- **Encourage questions:** Even the ‘negative’ ones.
- **Address concerns:** Don’t dismiss fear, validate it.
- **The goal:** Build a dialogue, not a monologue.

In a small team, the best ideas for how to change often come from the people doing the work. If you announce a change and no one asks a question, that's a bad sign - it means they have checked out. Encourage the questions. They often point out the practical risks you might have missed. When people feel heard, they are 10x more likely to support a decision, even if they didn't originally agree with it.



# Communication Channels



**The town hall:** For the big picture and the why.

**The 1:1:** For personal impact and addressing fears.

**The huddle:** For daily next steps and quick wins.

**Written updates:** For a single source of truth.

**Leadership visibility:** Be present on the 'shop floor'.

Different messages require different channels. You wouldn't announce a major shift in someone's job role via a group slack message - that requires a 1:1. Use your SME size to your advantage. Be visible. Walk around. Ask Questions. The most effective communication channel in an SME is the informal check-ins. It shows that you care about the person as much as the process.