

Are you guilty of hiding behind technology?

Diane Hallifax

Human Resource Specialist

Everest Group Limited

In today's era of electronic communication many of us are using email and texting in business as a substitute for face to face contact. Flurries of emails are shot out when there should be a face to face conversation, or at the very least picking up the phone.

We often hear from employees that they never see their manager, even though they sit in the office next to them, and that instructions and feedback, both good and bad, are communicated via email. To support these views we have seen an example of someone getting fired by email and another example where an employee found out their role had been changed substantially!

Employees also tell us that 'electronic' communications, particularly when bad news is being delivered, make them angry and frustrated and that has a profound impact on morale and productivity. Conversely managers tell us that they are too busy to meet with people individually and that it is easier just to 'flick off an email', without considering how their employees feel about that. However it is generally acknowledged that electronic types of interaction shouldn't take the place of getting out behind your desk and having face to face interactions with employees.

So is hiding behind technology something that you are guilty of? And if so what can you do about it?

There are a number of simple changes you can make that will reduce the reliance on technology and enhance personal communication, as follows:

- Talk to your team and find out what type of communication they want. For day to day information sharing an email may be acceptable, however if you are planning on making changes to a system or a process a meeting may be the preferred method of delivery.
- Determine how individuals would like to receive communications. Some team members may be happy with text messages as a form of information sharing, others may prefer face to face.
- Make a point of getting out from behind your desk a couple of times a day to walk around and chat with the team. The added benefit of this is that your team may be more willing to discuss any issues or problems they are having at that moment, which could enhance productivity.
- Stand by the water cooler! While you wouldn't communicate bad news in this type of situation, it does provide you the opportunity to give praise for good work.
- Initiate informal interactions by arranging regular catch ups or taking individuals out for coffee.
- Think about the message you want to deliver and consider the most appropriate way of delivering that message. Sometimes a quick text may suffice. Other times you may need to have a one on one conversation.
- Ensure that team meetings take place and that important issues are discussed in that forum. Encourage team members to voice opinions and provide feedback on ideas that you present.

We know that business leaders and managers are exceptionally busy with heavy workloads but it is critical to remember that to bring out the best in the people you work with you need to let them see and hear you.