

HOW TO FILL THE CEO INFORMATION VACUUM

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In ancient times, pharaohs killed the messenger who came with bad news from the battlefield. Some CEOs today come close to acting the same way when employees come with news that they don't want to hear. They get angry, cast blame or otherwise intimidate employees to the point that nobody ever wants to confront the CEO with the truth. The result is an information vacuum in which the leaders of an organization only hear news that will make them happy and viewpoints that are the same as their own.

Information vacuums can exist around even the most low-key boss simply because nobody wants to disappoint the top dog. It takes work to break through this inherent tendency to shield the leader from bad news. This work is crucial so that CEOs can get all the information they need to make reasoned decisions based upon actual circumstances.

CEOs who are serious about banishing the information vacuum need to take two, key steps:

- Create a work environment that stimulates honest feedback.
- Develop sounding boards

Create a More Open Work Environment

Leaders won't hear the truth – or great ideas – if employees are too intimidated to speak or have no forum for dialogue. To create a work environment that celebrates feedback and ideas, CEOs should:

- Complete an [Emotional Quotient Inventory \(EQi®\) Assessment](#) to determine their emotional social intelligence. This self- assessment tool will help them identify strengths and weaknesses when interacting with other people.
- Do a 360° Evaluation to get feedback from the people around them to determine perceptions of strengths and weaknesses and identify communication issues.
- Become more accessible by doing more informal networking and “Lunch with the CEO” so employees come to know the boss and aren't as intimidated to share ideas.

- Meet with senior staff regularly to discuss the latest company issues and industry events and hear about their recommendations.
- Run an open focus group or forum to give employees an opportunity to express opinions and exchange ideas. The CEO should let someone else communicate in meetings if he or she is not good at establishing a dialogue with other people.
- Hire a third-party to conduct a focus group with employees to determine current roadblocks to effective communication and provide a starting point for ideas for new organizational structures that get information flowing.

Develop Sounding Boards

Develop a network of people who will tell the truth and provide real opinions. This network may include:

- Peer circle: Some CEOs get so busy that they cut off ties to peers. It is important to re-establish these connections because peers provide a great source of feedback that is free from office politics or hidden agendas. CEOs should share information and bounce ideas off of other CEOs at a regular gathering set up expressly for that purpose. Invite CEOs from different industries so that competition issues don't interfere with discussions.
- Mentors: Just about everybody has some help on the way up to CEO. Leaders should re-connect with trusted mentors and solicit their advice.
- An [executive coach](#): Executive coaches provide a trained, third-party viewpoint about an organization's culture and issues that it may be confronting, as well as the CEO's leadership skills. This clear vision provided by an executive coach can be invaluable to CEOs who are otherwise shielded from day-to-day realities.

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