

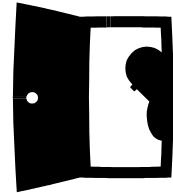
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Is the Door Really Open?

Many managers proudly claim that they have an open door policy. And sometimes employees have reason to believe that:

The door may be open but the mind is closed.

Managers who want to do more than pay lip service to an open door policy need to **show** that they are receptive to ideas, suggestions, comments, or complaints from employees. Receptivity doesn't automatically mean agreement. You may hold a different opinion, or may think it's not the right time to act on the information, or there may be a range of other reasons for you not to give the employee the hoped-for response. But the open-door-manager always receives the input with respect and doesn't leave the employee feeling his/her words have disappeared into a black hole.



It is nothing won to admit men with an open door, yet to receive them with a shut and reserved countenance.
Sir Francis Bacon

How does a manager demonstrate that the employee's input is welcome and valued, especially when disagreeing with the employee? First of all, pay attention to the speaker rather than the computer screen or your loaded desk. Asking open questions conveys that you're interested in exploring the issue further. Checking out the accuracy of your understanding before reacting to what you think was meant is always a good idea. You may need to respond with, "I'm feeling pressured with other things right now but I really want to hear more. Can we continue this tomorrow at 9:30?"

However you feel about the employee's input, be honest. Your response may be something like "Thanks for bringing this to my attention; I'll think about it and let you know," or "Let me check into this and I'll let everyone know what I find out." Or "I understand that you're concerned. Here's the reasoning behind that decision." Or "That seems important. Let's put it on the agenda for the next staff meeting."

Some general pointers for responding to employees who avail themselves of your open door policy:

- Let them state their case first *without interruptions*.
- Ask questions to ensure that you understand their perspective accurately.
- Be open to imagining yourself in their shoes.

A climate in which people feel free to express themselves offers many benefits to the savvy manager. It's a morale-booster. It can alert you to significant information that you otherwise wouldn't get or would get too late to use effectively. And keep in mind that the early surfacing of a concern increases the likelihood of resolving it.

A closed communication climate, on the other hand, one in which it's risky to walk through that open door, encourages people to keep their heads down and their mouths shut. Don't be like the boss of this anonymous employee who said *"I used the open door ONCE, thinking I would be heard. I was mistaken. I received a verbal warning and the next day the whole department knew what was said."*