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Good communication is a key to success in any endeavor.

Yet in the business world there's often the sort of "failure to communicate" referenced in the movie *Cool Hand Luke*. That failure in the movie resulted in the

premature demise of the hero. In real life, when leaders are unclear about their

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For example, most business leaders will say their top priorities include service and client satisfaction. Yet seeking improvement in those areas without being clear on what you mean by them “is a fool’s errand,” Lawton says.

To make the journey from ambiguity to clarity, he says, leaders need to:

- **Define what “client service” means.** Ask any 10 staff members, representing different levels and functions, for their one-word definition for client service. You are likely to find at least eight unique responses. “If we can’t even agree what client service means, how will we achieve excellence?” Lawton asks. He goes on to say, “define all work as products” that can be unambiguously characterized, measured and improved. This focuses on deliverables, not activity.
- **Know who the clients are.** Ask those same staff members who “the client” is. You will get a similar lack of consensus. Who is to be satisfied? Are all clients equal in priority? How does ambiguity affect performance of the staff member, the department and the firm? Lawton says the solution is to “identify which of three roles a person can play with any product: end-user, broker or fixer.” Empower and seek to satisfy end-users first.
- **Make sure there’s a client satisfaction policy.** If client satisfaction is a top priority of firm management, is there a client satisfaction policy? “Sadly, I’ve found in over 30 years of cultural transformation work that fewer than 2 percent of organizations can answer yes to this,” Lawton says. “They do have policies on hiring, money management, quality, supplier selection, cost control and myriad other issues. But not on customer satisfaction. With no policy on it, how important can satisfaction really be?”

Ambiguity can cause chaos, confusion, conflict and unproductive competition in an organization, Lawton says. Firm managers and partners can take a first step to

uncovering sources of ambiguity in five minutes, he says, by completing a free self-

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