

# Communication

## Bulletin <sup>TM</sup> for Managers & Supervisors

A fast-read source of information to help managers communicate better within and between departments, twice a month.

February 3, 2020



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### Management Skills Center

Improve your skills and manage better



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Hundreds of tips to get writing right

## Get your message to stick: Expert advice on engaging storytelling

*Gain support, build engagement and get action with good stories*

It's pretty easy to rattle off data and an analysis – but it's so boring.

You can't sell a great idea, engage employees or get your boss's ear by reading off information.

If you want people at work to listen – and act – you need a story.

“Crafting a story to re-frame, reveal or resolve takes more work than spewing out facts,” says Stephanie Scotti, owner of Professional Speaking, a speaking coach firm. “But it is worth the effort if your goal is to create meaning and ensure listeners understand and are motivated to take action.”

Your story can stand alone or it can enhance the data and facts you need to share.

Here's how to write or tell a story that engages others and delivers results.

### Build interest

The good news: You probably have an arsenal of good stories to share. The key is to make a connection between your story and the business need.

Condense your story into three simple parts. The main character (customer, family member, boss, you, etc.):

1. has a goal
2. runs into unexpected problems, and
3. overcomes the problems and gets

*Please see **Storytelling ...** on Page 2.*

### *Sharpen Your Judgment*

## Can worker collect benefits after being fired?

“You're firing me because I worked too much?” exclaimed Jen to her manager.

Emily nodded. “We went over this several times. You're an hourly employee. If you work more than you're supposed to, we have to pay you overtime by law.”

“I understand that now,” Jen replied. “That's why I stopped working overtime.”

“But you didn't! I caught you working through lunch,” Emily said.

Jen shrugged. “I was clocked out. You can't tell me what to do on my break.”

Emily sighed. “I explained this. You can't work while you're on break because that's breaking the Fair Labor Standards Act.”

“So you're really firing me?” Jen asked.

“You refused to follow our policy, even though I gave you several warnings. I have to,” Emily said.

### Can she collect unemployment?

Jen was quiet. “I better go fill out forms to collect unemployment,” she said finally.

Emily didn't reply. But she knew the company would fight paying unemployment benefits. After all, Jen was fired for insubordination – consistently going against company policy.

Jen applied for unemployment, and the company contested the benefits.

Who won?

This regular feature sharpens your thinking and helps keep both you and your firm out of trouble. It describes a real legal conflict and lets you judge the outcome.

*Make your decision, then please turn to Page 4 for the court's ruling.*

### **The Purpose of Communication Bulletin for Managers & Supervisors**

Communication Bulletin for Managers & Supervisors provides relevant and actionable business ideas to help managers and supervisors improve communication and increase effectiveness.

The Bulletin helps improve communication within and between departments, a major goal for most businesses seeking better performance.

All in a fast-read format, twice a month.

## Storytelling ...

(continued from Page 1)

a positive result.

For example: A department manager wanted support for a new plan. Many of the executives she'd have to ask for approval had developed the current plan – and likely held pride in it.

She told her story: *My father recently needed a new shirt for a big event. Actually, my mother felt my father needed the new shirt! He agreed to order one from the same retailer he'd always used. Similar design, better color and the exact size he wore.*

*The shirt arrived, but it didn't fit right. It wasn't the perfect shirt he'd remembered. He had limited time – and my mother had limited patience! He had to try something different. He rushed to a local store, tried on three shirts and found one that was better than the one he'd always loved.*

(Note: A little humor helps a story.)

### Make the point

Storytelling at work isn't like storytelling around a campfire. You want to be brief, quickly moving from the goal to the obstacle to the solution and positive outcome.

Then you want to make the point – what you hope the audience

will gain from it.

The department manager went on: *Here's the point. Sometimes we think what's always worked is still the perfect fit. But it may not be the right fit going forward.*

### Apply the story

Now's the time to build the bridge. Explain why the story's relevant to your audience.

In the case of the department manager, she said: *The plan we use now had a place and time when it was the perfect fit. But it won't serve us as well going forward. Like my dad, it's time to consider alternatives. I have a recommendation based on research and use ...*

### Best practices

Try these best practices for finding and building your library:

- **Collect stories.** Pull stories and lessons from books, magazines and blogs. Take notes, make them your own and test them with friends before using them at work.
- **Listen to others' stories.** Encourage your people to tell stories and the lessons they've learned. Ask to share their relevant stories – or better, ask if they'll share in relevant situations.

*Source: SmartBriefs, tinyurl.com/story469 and Lead Change Group, tinyurl.com/telling469*

## TECH CORNER

### Still using Excel? A lot of smart changes are here

If Microsoft Excel is still a staple at your company, you're far from alone.

About 80% of companies still rely on Excel for key tasks like budgeting, planning and forecasting, says research from software company Jedox.

If you're going to regularly use this tried-and-true program, you should talk to IT about installing the latest update (if you haven't already).

### New and improved

Check out a few new features Excel 2019 offers that benefit users:

1. **New chart options.** You can use dynamic map charts to display geographical data, or add funnel charts to show values across different stages of a process.

2. **Enhanced sharing.** Your team members will be able to quickly insert recent links, view or restore changes in shared workbooks, and save files to recent folders faster.

3. **More business analytics.** If your company uses Microsoft's Power Business Intelligence (BI), you can now publish locally stored Excel files to it. Then you can click *Go to Power BI* to view files online.

*Source: support.office.com*

## COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

### ■ 3 rules of communication for every leader

Leaders want – and need – their messages to be heard, understood and acted on.

You can accomplish that by following these three rules of leadership communication from Leo Bottary, author of *What Anyone Can Do: How Surrounding Yourself with the Right People Will Drive Change, Opportunity, and Personal Growth*:

1. You're 100% responsible for what you communicate. Never assume everyone grasps what you've shared *the way you intended*. Ask them to clarify what they understand.

2. You are **not** always the person to convey your message. Employees often trust a message from co-workers more than one directly from you. When possible, give the message to the most trusted employees and have them spread it.

3. Work with the influencers. Those most trusted employees are great sources of feedback for you.

*Source: tinyurl.com/rules469*

### ■ Awkward but essential: How to get chitchat right

Whether you like chitchat or not, you have to do it in a work setting.

You can do your job more effectively and professionally if you interact well with co-workers and customers. Here are tips to make small talk big business:

- **Let up on yourself.** If your chitchatting is often full of awkward silences, stalls and breaks, it's OK. Don't judge it. Others remember how they felt, not what you say. Be sure to say at least one kind thing.
- **Plan.** If you're anxious in small talk situations, come up with a core set of questions to pull from – for instance, ask about books, shows or podcasts colleagues like.
- **Know your out.** Small talk isn't meant to last long. You're at work. You can make the right exit with, "I have to get back to the project. Have a great day."

*Source: tinyurl.com/chitchat469*

## Real Problems, Real Solutions

Our subscribers come from a broad range of organizations, large and small. In this regular networking feature, three of them share their successes in improving workplace communication.

### 1 Workplace app gave us a ton of good feedback

We decided to use technology more to help keep a line of communication open with employees.

For example: Since all of our forklifts had onboard computers, we added an observations/suggestions app.

Now when employees want to report safety problems or make suggestions, they can log in and do so.

#### Opened the floodgates!

There are several boxes to check asking if you're reporting something that's already safe or currently unsafe, what kind of hazard it is, where it is in the facility or where you feel your

suggestion would apply.

The app also asks what action the employee took to correct a safety issue. If he saw a pallet in front of a fire exit, it wants to know if he moved the pallet or just submitted a ticket.

Employees can go back and look in the system to see if their suggestion has been looked at, assigned or completed.

More than 300 observations and suggestions were submitted in eight months after we launched the app! It's boosted communication in great ways.

*(Presented by Matt Hubler, Sherwin Williams, Buford, GA, at the 2019 VPPPA Safety+Symposium)*

### 2 Jolted staff into paying attention to training

I wanted to make employees sit up and pay attention during an upcoming training session.

To do that, I decided to use the element of surprise.

The training session topic was workplace violence and bullying.

#### Role playing made it real

I met with a supervisor, and we created a skit: I was the bully and the supervisor was the employee.

During the training session, I called the supervisor to the front of the room and started yelling.

We must have done a good job acting, because everyone was quiet for a second, not sure if it was real or not.

When they realized it was an act, they started laughing.

Then we discussed the issue seriously, and everyone joined in.

From the discussion, I could tell the opening scene got their attention and got the message across that bullying is a real problem.

*(Ana Brown, HR Administrator, KX Technologies, West Haven, CT)*

### 3 Mystery got everyone prepared for meetings

We met weekly to review progress and set new objectives and goals.

It was clear to me that some people didn't review the information that was sent out ahead of time. Some didn't prepare to share information, figuring others would pick up the slack with new ideas and updates.

It was important that everyone knew, understood and engaged with all of our projects.

#### You never know what we'll cover

I made a change that got everyone to prepare for meetings and be ready to contribute: Everyone got all the information for each project to review ahead of the meeting. I told them we'd review two of the projects.

I didn't tell them which two. So they had to be prepared to cover all of them! This also cut down meeting time – while keeping everyone fully informed.

*(Pat Morrissey, GM, Upland Altify, shared this story with us about his client Andrew Buckley, Executive VP of GTM and Enablement, Traction on Demand, Burnaby, BC)*



## YOUR LEGAL COACH

### ■ We got a 'vent letter'! How do we respond?

**Question:** We got a "vent letter" from a recently terminated employee. She aired grievances that we never knew were issues when she was here. How do we respond?

**Answer:** Vent letters are on the rise, says Adam Bartrom, an employment attorney with Barnes & Thornburg. Some people just want to get things off their chest. Others have legit issues.

Bartrom suggests you:

- Treat letters as if they were formal complaints made at exit interviews. Look for potential legal issues such as harassment or discrimination.
- Investigate and document issues as if she was still an employee.
- Respond with an HR and PR mindset. Follow usual policies. Keep in mind anything you write could end up in court or on social media.

Remember: You can often avoid vent letters if you give employees a chance to speak their minds in exit interviews.

**Source:** [tinyurl.com/vent469](http://tinyurl.com/vent469)

## LIGHTER SIDE

### ■ In communication, 1 letter is a big deal

You don't want to be misunderstood at work.

So you try to speak clearly, proofread your writing and double-check others got your message right.

All of that would've been helpful for a Swedish mother who recently got a tattoo of her son's name.

She told the artist the boy's name was Kevin. The artist misspelled it by adding an L, making the tattoo "Kelvin."

The fix would be multiple, painful treatments.

The woman and her husband chose an alternate solution: They changed their son's name to Kelvin.

**Source:** *Daily Mail*, [tinyurl.com/vo7hx4r](http://tinyurl.com/vo7hx4r)

## COMMUNICATION NEWS

## Complex problem? Ditch your colleagues

When your team is at a problem-solving stalemate, send everyone off for some “alone time.”

Researchers recently found teams that take regular breaks for individual reflection are better at solving problems – especially complex problems – than those that try to push through as a group.

This holds true whether the group is meeting in person or through always-on technology such as Slack.

### The best time for breaks

Intermittent breaks work best when the problems have a lot of moving parts,

### Brainstorming in a circle is the pathway to success

If you’re looking for a variety of opinions from your staffers or other members of a work team, seat all of them in a circle.

Reason: With no delegated “head of the table,” that shape gives people a sense of equality – in other words, one person’s ideas don’t hold more weight than other participants’ thoughts.

### Puts everyone on equal level

The circle can also reduce the power of recognized leaders in the room.

researchers found.

For instance, you’d want to break for individual thinking when deciding to launch a product or expand an existing one.

The breaks allow people to consider more alternatives or combinations of solutions when they aren’t together and compelled to work toward consensus.

However, some problem-solving and execution is best done by a group.

When the situation is mostly about being organized – who does what, where and when – people work together best.

Source: [tinyurl.com/problem469](http://tinyurl.com/problem469)

Of course people know who senior managers may be, but if their seat doesn’t appear superior, people will express ideas more openly.

Some people say a rectangular table is just as effective as a circular one. Not so.

Often the boss or manager who likes getting his or her opinion across will sit at one of the ends of a rectangular table.

People pick up on that visual message and often clam up instead of giving their candid views.

## Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Jen won. An appeals court ordered the company to pay her a lump sum of benefits owed to her, as well as \$528 every two weeks until she found work.

In order for a worker to be denied unemployment benefits, he or she has to be guilty of gross misconduct, which includes insubordination.

In this case, the employee was breaking a company policy, and she’d been warned several times. In addition, if the company continued to allow her to break the rule, it would be breaking the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

But the court still didn’t see it as insubordination. They said her “insubordination

arose from efforts to perform additional work, beyond what was required of her.”

### Company and employee in a tough spot

If an employee puts you at risk of violating the FLSA – and won’t stop – it’s a serious problem.

But in this case, the court saw Jen as a hard worker, not as someone flouting the rules. As this case proved, your best bet is to make it crystal clear to employees that breaking overtime policies can result in firing.

(Based on *Smiley v. Illinois DES*. Dramatized for effect.)

### Quotes

Silence is so accurate.

– Mark Rothko

There are two ways of spreading light; to be the candle or to be the mirror that reflects it.

– Edith Warren

In times of great stress or adversity, it’s always best to keep busy, to plow your anger and your energy into something positive.

– Lee Iacocca

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