

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

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Need to communicate bad news? 6 steps that take the pain out of it

Here's help to prepare and deliver an unpopular decision

A decision was made. No one will like it. And you have to tell everyone about it.

Communicating unpopular decisions is a difficult job for new and veteran leaders.

From budget cuts and nixing projects to wage freezes and extra workloads, "communicating unpopular decisions is a task that all leaders will tackle," says Kevin Eikenberry, leadership expert and author of *Remarkable Leadership*.

To make it easier, here are six tactics that'll prepare you to deliver unpopular decisions.

Be prompt

Don't wait. Share unpopular decisions as soon as you know about them.

"Once you have the decision *and needed information*, rip off the Band-Aid and share the decision," Eikenberry says.

This is important because you get ahead of the anxiety that can arise outside of closed-door meetings and the gossip that follows.

Anticipate the reaction

Think about how your audience will feel – initial reactions, concerns and questions. You can't predict what they'll do exactly, but if you have an idea of how they'll feel, you can craft a message that answers their immediate needs.

Will they be afraid it's the tip of a bad-news iceberg? Will they be concerned their roles and

Please see Bad news ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Worker stopped trying – is he due benefits?

"I don't understand," Ellen, the manager, said. "I know you can do this work – you did it for years. But it seems you've stopped trying."

Mike, the employee, shrugged. "I still try."

Ellen sighed. "I know you weren't happy with some of the changes we made. But you're a professional. You need to do your assignments."

"OK. I'll do them," Mike sighed. "Can I go back to work now?"

"You can, but I'm going to write this up for your file. You're already on a performance improvement plan, and this doesn't help," Ellen replied.

A few weeks later, Mike missed another deadline – and the company lost a client.

He didn't seem surprised when Ellen told him he was fired.

"That's fine. At least I can collect unemployment now," Mike said.

Decided to fight unemployment benefits

Days later, Ellen talked to HR and the company lawyer about fighting unemployment benefits being given to Mike.

"He didn't steal anything or harass anyone, but he deliberately stopped doing the work. I think it was 'willful misconduct,'" Ellen said.

The attorney agreed, and the company contested the benefits.

Did it win?

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.

Bad news ...

(continued from Page 1)

expectations will change? Will they want to know a time frame so they can prepare? Or will they just be upset and need to vent?

Anticipating these things can help you gather the most relevant information and prepare your delivery.

Be clear

This is no time for wishy-washy language to soften the blow. Avoid “maybe,” “might,” “kind of,” “sort of” and other ambiguous words.

Describe the decision, what it means to everyone and the next steps.

As long as you considered how the audience will feel about the message, you likely won't deliver a blunt, cold message.

Recognize resistance

Despite efforts to be sensitive to their reactions, you'll still get resistance.

Avoid pushing back to their pushback.

“Just like the pressure builds in a can of soda when you shake it, if you don't acknowledge the resistance to the decision or change, the resistance will continue to build,” Eikenberry says.

Give employees a chance to air their resistance.

They often lose their angry edge as they share it – and might even start to recognize some positive aspects.

Have a real conversation

Unpopular decisions often come as an edict in an email to the masses – and cause an angry whisper that starts in the break room and turns into an outright uproar by the end of the day.

Employees deserve more. They deserve a conversation.

Even if the news comes from a cold corporate email, get together with your people quickly to talk.

Allow enough time and space for people to comfortably – and appropriately – share their reactions and ask questions.

Look to the future

Let employees air feelings and ask questions, but stop everyone short of wallowing in pity or belaboring the issue.

Describe the future based on the unpopular decision, and group and individual roles.

“As you help people see the future, they will begin to move toward it,” Eikenberry says.

Source: “Communicating Unpopular Decisions,” KevinEikenberry.com

TECH CORNER

Find out who a vendor really is before signing a contract

What should you focus on when assessing software providers? It's one of the most important questions you and your team can ask.

Make the less-than-ideal choice, and you're looking at countless hours wasted due to inefficiency, which could upset your customers.

Here are three factors to look at closely courtesy of DocProcess:

3 key areas to shore up

1. **Credibility.** You want a solution with a history of success, not hiccups.

Find out if the vendor can handle your level of complexity, who its most prominent and typical customers are, and what those customers have to say about the vendor.

2. **Support.** Most providers offer basic phone and email support, but see who goes beyond with online resources, training courses and 24/7 help desks.

3. **Pricing.** Bottom line: You have to verify the long-term savings outweigh the upfront cost of software.

But don't forget to also inquire about hidden fees, extra feature charges or other “evergreen” costs. That way, you can prevent any pricing surprises.

Source: docprocess.com

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ Staff mum around you? That's a problem

If you see lots of side discussions at work, it could mean trouble.

Employees will grumble amongst themselves sometimes, but constant, muffled conversations are signs they:

- don't feel their concerns and ideas are taken seriously, or
- don't believe it's OK to tell hard truths publicly.

To avoid an unhealthy culture where employees are afraid to speak up:

- Be honest about tension and changes that will challenge everyone.
- Encourage input. You can't force people to speak up, but you can get their thoughts by asking direct questions.
- Thank messengers, especially when it's negative feedback. Solicit their ideas on solutions.

Source: “When Employees are Open with Each Other, But Not Management,” tinyurl.com/openup471

■ 7 rules for social media at work

Social media offers a potential minefield of issues at work. Yet nearly a third of workers think it's appropriate to use social media with colleagues.

You can't stop employees from friending and sharing, but you might want to share these dos and don'ts.

Do:

- understand and follow company culture
- stick to business at work
- stay positive and neutral, and
- check facts before sharing.

Don't:

- get political, religious or personal
- bully or discriminate, or
- overshare.

Source: “Top 5 dos and don'ts in tech etiquette at work,” Tech Republic, tinyurl.com/socialmedia471

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 What do employees really want? Well ...

The turnover rate at our company kept rising. We decided the culprit was today's changing workplace.

Our new employees wanted a different work atmosphere than their predecessors had.

We needed to find out what those things were and make sure we were providing them.

Here's how we dug deeper

We started talking to newer employees to find out what they looked for in a company and what was important to them.

And we took the same approach at exit interviews, asking people why they were leaving.

Our findings: There were simple things we could change to keep the younger workers at our company.

For instance, we loosened up our once-hard-and-fast policies on flex-time and the dress code.

The small changes have made a big difference. Since we started, our turnover rate has dropped 60%.

(Kay Harris, Manager, American Quarter Horse Association, Amarillo, TX)

2 Fun awards engage, motivate employees

Top performer awards can sometimes do more harm than good. When the same few people receive them over and over, others can get frustrated and even stop trying.

While we always want to recognize great work, we also wanted to broaden the recognition, and reward more employees for their specific contributions. We came up with some different rewards.

Make it unique

Most Caffeinated Colleague: A bag of coffee for the employee who makes the most trips to the pot – and always keeps it full for others.

MacGyver Award: A small tool kit for the employee who seems to swoop in and fix everything.

Master of the Mission Statement: A trophy for the person who works by high company and personal ideals.

Every company can have different fun awards. The important part is to make them unique to your situations.

(These success ideas were shared by managers on the American Express Open Forum)

3 E-communication alone doesn't cut it

We have a computerized maintenance work-order system.

The maintenance manager updates work orders (status, work done, dates, etc.) into the system.

Then the system sends people emails on the status of their jobs.

In a company like ours, people want (and need) info quickly.

But here's how we maintain the human touch with communication.

Share it with the group in person

During our morning meetings, we give people updates on the status of maintenance and facility work.

There's often a job that involves more than one department, so letting everyone know where the job stands is effective.

Whoever's in charge of a particular work order can also fill in the whole group on its status.

(Rick Hess, Environmental Health and Safety Manager, Romac Industries, Bothell, WA)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

Employee arrested: What should we do now?

Question: We got to work on Monday and learned an employee was arrested over the weekend. We don't know the charges or how long she'll be out. What should be our first steps?

Answer: Wait and see for now, says Marilyn Moran, an employment law attorney with Ford & Harrison LLP.

It could be a minor offense, and you'll need to embrace the "innocent until proven guilty" approach.

Treat them the same

Regardless of the charges, you can deal with the employee's absence the same way your policy dictates you handle absences under any circumstances. That includes absences following an arrest or for any court appearances.

If the charges turn out to be serious, you can suspend the employee without pay pending the results of the case, Moran says.

Source: tinyurl.com/arrest471

LIGHTER SIDE

... And sometimes social media works at work

You see the potential problems of social media at work on *Page 2*. But in this case, social media was truly helpful in getting the job done.

Postal workers in New Zealand received a package to be delivered to:

2 Kay + Phillip

On a farm, situated up a long drive with cows, opposite cust pub or thereabouts.

Postal workers' local knowledge didn't help, so they got resourceful and put the "address" on Facebook, where it was shared 2,300 times.

A few days later, Phillip walked in to claim his package

Source: Reader's Digest.

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Good job candidates get lost in automation

Almost half of all companies use automation throughout the hiring process.

While it's efficient, it's not personal. And it may leave the wrong – cold and impersonal – impression on candidates you really want to get through the hiring process and into your department.

Regain the human touch

Most candidates hate interacting with chatbots, taking online tests and doing multiple video interviews, says Ed Nathanson, founder of Red Pill Talent.

Process is important, but managers want to make the experience better so you get the

employees you want. To regain the human touch in hiring:

- Eliminate personality tests and digital screenings if the results don't affect the employee's role.
- Call candidates instead of emailing to let them know the next steps.
- Send handwritten thank-you notes for meeting with you.
- Keep in touch with rejected candidates via LinkedIn.

Source: SHRM, tinyurl.com/hiring471 and Ed Nathanson, founder of Red Pill Talent, redpilltalent.com

Email warned about 'clowns' but no one acted on it

Boeing already had a massive legal problem on its plate after its 737 Max crashed twice, killing 346 people.

Now all the internal email communication about the project is making the company look criminal and cavalier.

Boeing employees called the vendors who helped design the 737 Max "clowns" and "monkeys." Two staffers admitted they'd never let any of their family members fly on it.

Other emails say Boeing "covered up" problems to the Federal Aviation

Administration (FAA) and it would be a "miracle" if the FAA approved the plane.

They blew the whistle, but it didn't help

Boeing staffers felt comfortable enough to pan a project and warn of the consequences in company email.

Unfortunately no one in a higher position took them seriously enough to look into the warnings and potentially prevent a disaster.

Source: foxnews.com/us/boeing-employees-mock-faa-clowns-monkeys-737-max

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes, the company won. Mike wasn't allowed to collect unemployment benefits.

When employees collect unemployment benefits, it costs the company down the road in higher premiums. That's why many companies fight benefits when the employee is fired for "cause."

But when the cause is poor performance, those cases are tough to win.

In this situation, the employer used performance reviews to show Mike could do the job well – he deliberately chose not to.

The evidence convinced the court.

Note: Unemployment laws vary by state, so

while this was a win for the employer, it doesn't mean all courts would rule the same way.

Tough to prove, but company did it

Poor performance can rise to a level of willful misconduct. But it's tough to prove in court.

To have a chance at fighting unemployment claims in those circumstances, you'll need clear documentation of the employee's performance.

It should show the employee could (and did) perform well in the past, but stopped trying.

(Based on *Scott v. Unemployment Compensation Board*. Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

A positive attitude causes a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events and outcomes. It is a catalyst and it sparks extraordinary results.

– Wayne Boggs

Books can be dangerous. The best ones should be labeled "This could change your life."

– Helen Exley

If you don't find your passion in your paycheck, go find it somewhere else.

– Sara Haines

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