

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

April 15, 2020



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Leading in uncertain times: 4 keys to keep employees engaged

Adjust, adapt, overcome: The way to get through a crisis

Adjust. That could be the single most important word and action when leading in uncertain times.

While we've never seen anything as uncertain as COVID-19, one thing is certain: Managers and supervisors have and will have to lead teams through chaos and crisis. Those come in many forms – from downsizing and layoffs to natural disasters and personal or departmental tragedies.

Here are four keys to lead employees through any kind of crisis.

Communicate

Staying in touch with employees – whether you're at work together or communicating

via Skype, Zoom or another tool – will help everyone regain focus and do their jobs as effectively as possible.

You'll want to share updates on how your organization and team are affected by the crisis and what everyone needs to do. More importantly, give employees an opportunity to share how they feel about the situation, plus best practices and hacks they've found to work through it.

Imagine and act

Leaders and employees need to continue doing some things the same way throughout a crisis and adopt new roles and/or work

Please see Leading ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Promise to give worker his job back falls flat

“We can't risk having Rick come back here with a bum arm and hurting himself again or someone else,” Supervisor Len Akers said.

“I understand where you're coming from,” HR Manager Lisa Knowles said. “Rick's arm is never going to be the same since the injury here, and we probably can't have him lifting and moving stuff – that's dangerous. And our operation isn't big enough to find something else for him to do.”

“Right,” Len nodded. “So, I think we're going to have to let him go.”

“Before we do that, let's think about it,” Lisa advised. “The injury came about as a result of following your orders to move that big load. He'll probably file for disability and workers' comp, and it could look like we're firing him for that.”

“And didn't you tell me you guaranteed Rick he'd get his job back?” asked Lisa.

“Sort of,” Len agreed.

“It was right after the injury, and I didn't want him to worry. So I said something like, ‘Just get better, and we'll get you back on the job.’”

Worker felt betrayed and sued

Len insisted on going through with Rick's termination based on safety concerns.

Rick sued the company. He said his supervisor broke a promise, and the company fired him for seeking workers' comp and disability benefits.

Did the company 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.

Leading ...

(continued from Page 1)

strategies because of the situation. To determine the best route, create a vision so everyone can get a grip on what needs to be done to manage the crisis.

Steve Newhall, managing partner at consulting firm Korn Ferry, suggests narrowing down a more complicated vision so it stays in people's heads throughout the crisis and easily directs them on the tasks that are highest priority. For example:

Complicated (yet essential) vision: Keep employees, customers and community safe while moving forward so we can thrive in the new normal as quickly as possible.

Simple vision: Keep people safe and keep the lights on.

Clarify, adjust and adapt

Crisis management is a fluid activity. Rules, roles and priorities change throughout a crisis.

Leaders need to prepare employees to take quick pivots. Three key factors:

- Explain early in the crisis that roles, duties and tasks can change day-to-day based on the current needs.
- Set up a communication protocol. Define the quickest way to send and

receive messages (likely phone calls) descending to the slowest (perhaps, IM to social apps to email). Also, create priority guidelines on actions and subjects (for instance, emergencies on the phone and task reports in email).

- **Communicate at least daily.** Set a time and format for daily check-ins to relay the newest information, make changes to priorities and/or tasks, and get feedback on how employees are faring in the crisis.

Be empathetic

Many leaders maintain a sharp focus on business and overcoming the uncertainty. That's important. But the leaders who get through crisis most effectively also show calmness, courage and empathy, says Madeline Dessing, managing director at Korn Ferry.

When leaders share details, explain the vision, clarify and adjust, they want to maintain a calm and confident tone. Empathy comes a little harder.

One way to prove it: Dessing suggests sharing an empathy story. Talk briefly about a personal struggle and the fears you had throughout it – and even some you have now. Then talk again about your confidence in everyone's ability to adjust, adapt and overcome.

Source: SmartBriefs, tinyurl.com/leadership474

TECH CORNER

4 telltale clues an email is liable to be malicious

We're always hearing warnings not to open "suspicious-looking" emails. Companies' databases, customer info and bank accounts are never safe from malicious attackers.

But are there telltale signs that an email in your inbox isn't what it appears to be? There are – and they're based on years of helpful info from IT experts and law enforcement.

Clues abound in the subject lines

Be wary of any email that possesses one or more of these traits in its subject line. Always preview it first and don't

click on it if you suspect it's a fraud:

1. It starts with "Re:" or "Fwd:" followed by vague words like "project" or "meeting."
2. The words "you" or "your" are followed by terms like "loan application" or "credit card." Personalized subject lines are a bright red flag.
3. The email sender address has letters and numbers in it, not a name. Pause first and ask yourself if you're expecting an email from someone you don't usually do business with.
4. Words are misspelled, odd or inappropriate. Be careful, it could be a trap meant to lure you in!

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

Leadership communication tips from Buck Owens

Until the early 1960s, most country music artists wrote, recorded and performed with one thing in mind: themselves. They wanted to be original.

Along came Buck Owens. He wanted to build a community with his music. He wrote and performed music so other artists could play it and fans could sing along to it.

His "inclusion" mentality earned him a 50-year recording career with 39 albums – and his success is something nearly all business leaders can learn from when they communicate:

- Choose words and a tone everyone can understand and easily share
- Encourage people to pass on positive messages – and come to you to clarify it, if necessary, and
- Give employees a voice: Let them carry the tune for important news.

Source: PBS, www.pbs.org/kenburns/country-music

The key to the best feedback ever

Leaders often struggle with giving employees feedback: No one wants to be too harsh, too soft or uncomfortable.

Gallup researchers recently uncovered the key to the best possible feedback – and it has little to do with how, where or when it's delivered.

The most effective employee feedback is the kind that's requested. You want employees to say, "Hey boss, what do you think I can do about this?"

The important part: *Get employees to ask for it.* If an employee's behavior is dangerous to others or themselves, you want to correct it immediately. Otherwise, to encourage employees to request feedback:

- **Speak from experience.** Explain mistakes you made, things you changed and success you had. Don't just say, "You must do ..."
- **Recognize other experts** – colleagues and veteran employees – who can be go-tos for advice, too.

Source: Gallup, tinyurl.com/tgsmcr8

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 Social idea fixes business comm issue

Our employees were hard workers who kept their heads down and got the job done.

Problem was, when you have a bunch of people so focused on their tasks, they don't communicate much.

Even though they worked together every day, they weren't sharing information that could help each other.

What's your interest?

We wanted to improve communication, and we found a way to do that, plus increase engagement.

We asked employees to suggest clubs

to form within the company.

With their ideas, we let them vote on the clubs to form and support.

We ended up with a variety – from book clubs to gamer clubs – so there was something for everyone.

Employees jumped at the chance to share their passions with others.

It might have been a social idea, but it was a business communication fix.

(Jared Atchison, Co-founder, WPForms, shared this success on SmartBrief's Young Entrepreneur Council)

2 Sent right message promoting from within

Our business was growing, and we needed to hire more managers.

Instead of bringing in people at high-level positions, we decided to create a system for promoting employees from within.

We hoped this would motivate them, since they'd have upward mobility. Plus, we'd feel more sure they had the skills to do the job.

We asked employees to let us know if they were interested. Next, we had to train them and find out if they could really do the work.

Made the most of top performers

To do that, we paired managers-in-training with our best managers.

They worked as a team, and the newer employees had a chance to learn the ins and outs of the job before we promoted them.

The system's worked great. Our trainees have done well, and everyone's enthusiastic about the program.

(Mary Ellen Vanzale, Office Manager, Continental Rental, Bay City, MI)

3 Customer focus shot morale sky-high

We wanted to show employees their work was important to our customers.

Problem was, it wasn't easy to draw a direct line between what we do and happy customers.

In our case, we make a product that is a small but vital part of larger machines.

To get past the disconnect, I needed to get creative.

Showed what their work means

That's why I started the "People Depend on Our Products" campaign.

I developed and displayed a series of posters that show all the different ways our product is used – from ice machines to airplanes.

Each poster features an eye-catching picture and under it is a block of text detailing the impact our product makes.

Employees paid attention. The posters definitely gave them pride in a job well done.

(Brian Deaton, Manager, Barker Microfarads, Hillsville, VA)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Non-negotiable policies are safe, right?

Question: To treat all employees fairly, it's a good idea to have non-negotiable policies to cover things such as leave, pay and scheduling, right?

Answer: No, says Andrew McLaughlin, an employment law attorney with Stearns Weaver Miller.

Don't confuse the good practice of evenly enforcing employment policies with enforcing non-negotiable policies.

Sometimes you need to make exceptions to policies to comply with equal pay, religious and disability accommodation laws, McLaughlin says.

One recent example: An employee won a big settlement when her company required women to resign by their fifth month of pregnancy – a violation of the Pregnancy Discrimination Act.

Bottom line: Create fair *and flexible* policies.

Source: *BeLaborThePoint.com, tinyurl.com/nonnegotiable474*

LIGHTER SIDE

■ 'I won't be in' excuses extend to Sundays, too

Some employees get creative with the reason they take a day off work.

In the same vein, some people get creative with reasons they take a week off from church.

Pastors in the online community Church Answers shared what they've heard:

- "Both of my girlfriends attend church there."
- "The pastor stays in the Bible too much."
- "My wife cooked bacon for our breakfast, and the entire family smelled like bacon."
- "The church is too close to drive and too far to walk."
- "I always get hemorrhoids on Sundays."

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Why you must get employees engaged now

Engaging employees with their work, company and colleagues is more important than ever.

With the pandemic – and call for social distancing and remote working – people feel more isolated, even after employee engagement levels hit an all-time high in Gallup polls.

3 ways to get better

Engaged employees:

- produce higher quality work
- treat customers and colleagues better, and
- are more likely to be loyal to their employer.

To improve engagement now:

Grumpy workers? It doesn't have to be that way!

How can you help employees who are viewed as grumpy turn those frowns upside down?

As with many attitude problems in the workplace, a change in motivational tactics usually does the trick.

Grumpiness wears us all out

Try one of these three steps to get staffers past their grumpy habits:

1. Emphasize the good. Look for positive news in your company or industry. Share it with employees – along with how they'll

- **Make it a top-down initiative.** CEOs and other executives drive and support engagement ideas at companies with the highest engagement levels.
- **Focus on strengths.** Managers want to identify and build employees' strengths to achieve better outcomes.
- **Recognize and be recognized.** Top companies use employee recognition as a way to develop and stretch employees to new levels of success. Executives recognize managers regularly to reinforce that value.

Source: tinyurl.com/engage476

benefit long term.

2. Give them a break. Has an employee been working hard and feeling stressed? Look for opportunities to give him a breather. Reallocate resources or pitch in. Encourage him to take vacation time.

3. Ask them to share their goals. Have employees share their long-term goals. Be specific: Do they want a promotion? What tasks do they enjoy the most? Then outline a realistic plan to help them achieve some of those goals.

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

No, the company lost.

A judge ordered the employer to pay the employee \$275,000 in damages on top of the disability and comp payment he received.

The judge took into account three factors:

The employee was injured as a result of being ordered to take on an unsafe task – so the company held some responsibility for the injury.

The firing, disability and comp claims were so linked that it was hard to ignore the connection and the possibility of retaliation.

His supervisor admitted that he had made an informal promise that the employee would get his job back.

Put the three together, the judge said, and the case of the employee is undeniable.

Avoid promises you can't guarantee

When an employee gets injured or sick, it's an emotional time and supervisors might be tempted to say or do something that could come back to bite them later.

It's best to fight that temptation and deal with the issue in a businesslike way, including clearing any statements or actions with HR, to make sure decisions are consistent with company policy.

(Based on *Hamlin v. Hampton Lumber Mills*. Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

A surplus of effort could overcome a deficit of confidence.

– Sonia Sotomayor

When you lead with your nice foot, you will win every time. It might not be today, it might not be tomorrow, but it comes back to you when you need it ... I promise you, it will appear exactly when you need it.

– Kristen Bell

One extends one's limits only by exceeding them.

– M. Scott Peck

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