

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

May 15, 2020



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Stress, distractions: Staying on point during difficult times

4 steps to get productive again, whether you work onsite or remotely

No matter where employees physically work right now, nearly everyone's struggling to stay focused and productive.

Most are distracted by uncertainty, changing responsibilities, the news on how bad things are and an unsettling desire to return to normalcy.

On top of all that, there's work!

"This means attention management is more important than ever, not just for our productivity but for our peace of mind," says Maura Thomas, author of *Attention Management*. "[It's] about maintaining control of where your attention goes and recognizing when it's being stolen."

If you can get yourself to focus again – and help employees do the same – you can regain

some of that normalcy and productivity.

Thomas suggests these steps:

Recognize what distracts you

Everyone's biggest distractions depend on where they work. For some at home, it's kids in the background or the chores around you.

For others onsite, it's the increased demand and nagging consciousness of those around them – *Why is Ron coughing so much? Am I sitting six feet from Rory? Who can help me with this when so many people are out?*

And then there's the draw of newsfeeds and social media with round-the-clock

Please see Distractions ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Worker fired for fighting and tries to sue

"I know our job can be stressful," said A/P Manager Jenn on her coffee break with Payroll Manager George. "But I never expected it would result in a workplace fight!"

"What happened?" George asked.

"Lana and Paige never got along," Jenn said. "They worked with a lot of the same vendors and were always blaming each other for things."

"Last week, Paige stormed in and pointed a finger right in Lana's face. There was some yelling, and Lana pushed Paige's finger away."

Was her firing retaliation?

"And they were both fired for it afterward?" George asked.

Jenn nodded. "You know we have a zero-tolerance policy for fighting. We felt they were equally at fault."

"Only problem is, Lana filed an Equal Opportunity complaint about a year ago. Nothing ever came of her accusations ... but now she's saying her firing was retaliation for filing the discrimination complaint."

George frowned. "I can see how she could argue that – like our company was looking for a way to get rid of her and this fight provided it."

Jenn nodded. "I have a feeling Lana might take this to court."

The employee sued for retaliation, and the company tried getting the case thrown out of court. 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.

Distractions ...

(continued from Page 1)

updates on everything that's wrong.

Monitor what distracts you from starting or getting back to work. Be honest with yourself and consider:

- What time did I plan on focusing on work, and what time did it happen?
- What did I do in the time between?
- What caused me to stop being productive?
- How long did it distract me?
- Was it necessary to give that distraction attention?

How to handle at-home distractions

To stay focused on work in a house, Thomas suggests:

- **Put up a sign or close a door** when you can't be disturbed for up to 60-minute increments. Keep a dry-erase board near your boundary, so others can write what they need in an emergency or for when you can take a break.
- **List your responsibilities** every day in order of priority. Focus on the high-priority, high-attention tasks – such as writing reports or online collaboration – when you're least likely to be interrupted or distracted. Plan low-priority, low-attention

tasks – such as cursory web searches or sorting paperwork – for times you're more likely to be distracted.

How to handle onsite distractions

To stay focused while working onsite:

- **Add distance** to the recommended six feet. During your peak productive hours, move to a place you can't be distracted by colleagues and digital alerts that will tempt you to respond.
- **Set goals and limits.** Plan weekly goals with daily goals that will help you reach them. Schedule work that needs the most attention for your traditional, most productive time. Work distraction-free for 25- or 50-minute blocks, taking five-minute, timed breaks to check the things that otherwise distract you.

How to handle the mental drain

To curb the darker, “what-if” thoughts, no matter where you work:

- Remember the media (and sometimes those around us) exaggerate negative news. Focus on positive things and plan work and life around them.
- Start a gratitude journal. Just jot down three things you're thankful for every day.
- Even better, thank more people more often for what they do.

Source: “Is It Even Possible to Focus on Anything Right Now?” Harvard Business Review, tinyurl.com/focus497

TECH CORNER

Web ‘camfecting’ is a growing security risk: Here's help

Many of us are working at home and our meetings are exclusively virtual these days. You may even be a fan of the most popular programs like Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom, Zoom, Skype or GoToMeeting.

Just be aware that once you start using any of these products, the webcamera on your phone, tablet or laptop can become more vulnerable to “camfecting.”

Malicious hackers can activate device webcams, and until you notice the webcam light going on, you won't know you're being spied on.

MalwareBytes Labs says many webcams are easily accessible to hackers without them having to actually do any real hacking!

Stop spies in their tracks

For now, the one easy solution to avoid being spied on is placing a strip of black tape over your webcam when you're not Zooming or Skyping. You may want to try this with devices you're using at home.

Some good news: Hackers haven't figured out a way to deactivate the activation light in webcams. If you see your webcam light's on, shut down the device and contact your IT department for help.

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ New norm: 7 ways to make remote meetings effective

The COVID-19 pandemic sparked the greatest remote working experiment ever. And for many organizations and its leaders, the experiment worked.

Remote meeting is the norm for now – and will be essential going forward.

“Remote meetings are inherently different from in-person meetings, and this means they are often poorly run,” says Howard Tiersky, an author of *Impactful Online Meetings: How to Run Polished Virtual Working Sessions That Are Engaging and Effective*.

Tiersky offers these tips to get remote meetings right:

- **Let them socialize.** Remote employees need to build bonds or reconnect. Give them some time to ask and talk about themselves.
- **Know the purpose and keep it in focus.** Identify and share exactly why you're meeting. Start the meeting with “Today's goal is to ... It's critical because ...” Restate it if or when people get off track.
- **Strategically plan the sequence.** After going over the priority, 1) address any “elephants in the room” so they aren't a distraction, 2) take on the challenging topics so people feel they've accomplished something early on, and 3) reveal something fun or exciting so there's positive anticipation.
- **Keep cameras rolling.** Tiersky and his co-author Heidi Wisbach find meetings are 200% more effective when all participants have their cameras on. It keeps people engaged and able to read facial expressions and body language.
- **Give as many people as possible a purpose.** Get different participants to present content, facilitate questions, keep time, take notes, etc., so they're all engaged. Rotate roles the more you meet.
- **Close other apps,** confidential documents or anything you don't want others to accidentally see.
- **Make a polished ending.** Wrap up with the original objective, what was accomplished, a measure of the two and what you can try if you fell short.

Source: impactfulonlinemeetings.com

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 ‘Joy’ call helps remote workers reconnect

We’re very fortunate that most of our employees were able to work remotely as COVID-19 spread.

Sure, it wasn’t business as usual, but it was doable.

While our situation paled in comparison to people on the front lines and patients battling the illness, employees still faced some struggles. For instance, quarantine, homeschooling young children, caring for others and feelings of isolation.

Everyone can participate in fun

We had to get work done but wanted to help everyone find

moments of joy.

So we added a daily video “joy” call that features fun things most people can and want to participate in.

For instance, we had a “kids’ talent show” when at-home kids could show an audience their best.

We organized a “let’s draw together” event. On another day, we hosted a “bring your pet to work” event.

Even those without pets could participate – some showed up online with a stuffed animal.

(Nick Mehta, CEO, Gainsight, San Francisco)

2 How we get employees back on track

Every now and then one of our employees will change – for the worse.

They’ll start coming in late or not keeping up with projects.

When that happens, my first step is to meet with the employee privately to get to the root of the problem.

Usually I start by saying: “We’ve noticed this issue (attendance, lack of motivation, etc.) Have things changed on the job or in your life?”

If it’s personal, I don’t dig for too many details – I just offer support.

Often it’s work-related. The person may feel discouraged if he or she was passed over for a raise or opportunity.

Give them perspective

In those cases, I’m usually able to give them more info about what happened.

Believe it or not, that helps – they often just want to understand why the decision was made.

Most employees improve after I’ve met with them using this approach.

(From an HR Administrator for a Midwestern company)

3 Team events don’t work? Dig deeper

I focus on developing staff members’ skills with fun, interactive programs and events.

But I’ve encountered resistance to this management style. Some staffers can seem cynical or uninterested.

Don’t assume it’s lack of interest

I once had a staff member who’d act distant during team events. When we talked, I discovered this person was actually just very introverted.

The staffer enjoyed my approach but wasn’t confident in partaking in some of the team games and challenges.

This was something I needed to work on to make teambuilding events more successful.

One step I took was making light of myself and my management style.

Acting silly makes people laugh – including those who aren’t overly receptive to my style.

It helps make me seem more approachable, and then we can talk more seriously.

(Samantha Ryan, A/P Specialist, IPL Limited, West Yorkshire, UK)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Must we accommodate if we weren’t asked to do it?

Question: An employee, who has a known disability, hasn’t asked us to accommodate her disability. Do we need to look for and offer her an accommodation anyway?

Answer: It’s a good idea to do it, says Daniel Schwartz, an employment law attorney at the firm Shipman & Goodwin LLP.

If you know about medical limitations, the knowledge alone can trigger the need to start the Americans with Disabilities Act interactive process.

Stay ahead of need

That’s when you work to determine if a reasonable accommodation can be granted to help her do the job.

It’s a good faith effort that can keep you ahead of future needs, if they arise, and potential trip to court if the situation wasn’t handled properly, Schwartz says.

Source: hrmorning.com, and ctemploymentlawblog.com

LIGHTER SIDE

■ Some candidates may not be worth the followup

You know it’s professional to follow up with job candidates.

But there are some candidates you might not want to follow up with – such as those who wrote these cover letters:

- “I am a motivated, self-igniting person.”
- “I would like to come by and show you my work in hopes of making something of my life so I can move out of my parents’ basement.”
- “I’m looking for work because even though my company was profitable last year, this year they are expecting a large defecate.”
- “I am getting to my goal, slowly but surly.”

Source: tinyurl.com/coverletter476

COMMUNICATION NEWS

No one asks employees for great ideas

Your employees have a plethora of ideas on how to improve the business.

But two-thirds won't say a word because they feel their leaders operate under the premise, "This is how we've always done it."

You want those great ideas on how to operate more efficiently, solve problems, create new products, make more money – the list goes on and on.

Get them to share the next big idea

Here are two ways to get employees to share the next big idea (and small important ideas):

1. **Ask courageous questions** such as:
 - What is the problem we have that no one talks about?
 - What do we do that really annoys our customers?
 - What is the greatest obstacle to your productivity?
 - What must I do better as a leader if we want to be more successful?
2. **Help them give good ideas.** Remind them ideas need to include interesting, doable, practical and engaging actions.

Source: Professional Association for Customer Engagement, tinyurl.com/ideas474

3 simple ways to save time in your busy workday

We all want to save time in our workday, so we can get just a little more done.

Here are three tips to do that from Jason Womack, author of *Your Best Just Got Better*.

1. End the meeting

Often meetings and conference calls will take as long as you've allotted for them.

Pay attention to how much meeting time you spend on work, and set the next meeting for that amount of time.

2. Set self-imposed deadlines

Stick to your personal deadlines. If someone tries to distract you, tell them, "I have to meet a deadline at noon."

3. Send short-as-possible emails

How short and sweet can email get?

If you're simply approving work, send a one-word message: "Approved."

This approach will save you – and your recipient – time.

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

The company won when a court dismissed the employee's suit.

The ex-employee claimed she had been fired in retaliation for filing a discrimination complaint to the Employment Equal Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

The company countered that she'd been fired for violating its no-fighting policy.

The court said that in order to prove retaliation, the employee had to provide evidence that the company had used this fight as a reason to punish her.

She wasn't able to do that.

What really sunk her case was the fact that

her co-worker was also fired for fighting.

If the employee who filed the EEOC complaint had been the only one fired, she likely would've had a case.

Good policy, fair enforcement is key

By firing both employees for fighting, it showed its zero-tolerance policy had teeth and it didn't play favorites with employees.

There was no evidence of bias for the court to allow the fired employee's complaint to move on and potentially be heard by a jury.

(Based on *Ciulla-Noto v. Xerox*. This case has been dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

Aspire to inspire before we expire.

– Eugene Bell Jr.

Change is not a four letter word, but often your reaction to it is!

– Jeffrey Gitomer

It's okay to look at the past and the future. Just don't stare.

– Lisa Lieberman-Wang

Bad decisions make good stories.

– Ellis Vidler

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