

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

June 15, 2020



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No hard feelings after a 'tough' talk: 6 steps to success

Go in with 2 objectives: Fix the problem, maintain the relationship

Most leaders dread tough conversations because they're uncomfortable and unpredictable in the moment.

But the worst part is what can happen after the conversation. Will it irreversibly damage the relationship with a good employee? Or will it destroy a solid connection with a colleague? Or could a tough conversation with the boss hurt your career?

That's why difficult conversations need a double objective: Fix the issue *and* maintain the relationship.

"Remember that an organization is simply a network of strong, collaborative, mutually beneficial adult relationships," says Quint Studer, author of *The Busy Leader's Handbook*:

How to Lead People and Places That Thrive. "The better the relationships, the better the company."

Handled right, tough conversations can strengthen relationships. Here's what Studer says is the right approach.

Ask yourself 3 questions

Before going into a tough one-on-one, check your intentions. Ask yourself:

- Am I being fair and consistent? Make sure you have the same rules for everyone.
- Am I focused on being right? Just because you don't agree with what someone has said

Please see Success ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

FMLA-related firing lands company in court

"I think we need to talk," said Mike, the supervisor, to his employee Jennifer. Mike was surprised to see Jennifer at work. She'd stopped showing up after she was denied leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA).

"After you stopped coming to work, I assumed you'd quit," Mike said, closing his office door.

"What? I was on FMLA leave," Jennifer said. "I told you about it."

"Didn't HR deny you leave?" Mike prodded.

"Oh, that," Jennifer said. "I figured it was a misunderstanding. I re-submitted all the paperwork. There's no way that wasn't covered."

"A trip to Vegas?" Mike asked.

"A trip to take care of my mother – who's dying," Jennifer corrected. "She was given the trip by the Fairy Godmother organization. They make wishes come true for terminally ill patients."

"I'm sorry about your mother," Mike said. "I knew it was a little complicated, but HR clearly said it wasn't covered."

Is the law in her favor?

"It wasn't a mistake?" Jennifer asked.

"No, it wasn't," Mike said. "And since you violated our absence policy, I have to let you go."

Jennifer sued, saying the company interfered with her right to take FMLA leave. The company tried to have the case dismissed. 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.

Success ...

(continued from Page 1)

or done doesn't mean it was wrong.

- Do I need a witness to document the conversation or consider legal issues? If there's any question, call in HR.

Be clear on what you need to say

Be ready to clearly explain:

- the problem
- how it impacts others, and
- what must change.

Use facts, statistics and documented incidents – not just observations. Stick to those points and don't go off topic.

Schedule it

When possible, schedule the difficult conversation on neutral ground to give the other person a chance to gather their thoughts and emotionally prepare to discuss it.

You might say, "Jared, I'd like to chat about what happened in today's meeting on the Jones account. Can we meet tomorrow at 8 a.m. in the Beacon conference room?"

Focus on civility, relationship

You can cover difficult topics – such as performance, hygiene, conflict, etc. – while treating people with dignity,

respect and empathy.

Start the conversation with a pledge to civility: "Our relationship is important to me, and this conversation is just one moment in our time. I want to walk away with the same strong relationship we came in here with."

Collaborate, don't dictate

Your conversation will be more successful if you work together to make things better. Help the employee or colleague feel ownership in the solution.

Ask questions to get a different perspective and collaborate. Try:

- What factors do you think lead to this issue?
- How do you feel about this?
- Do you have any ideas on what both of us might do differently moving forward?

Give time and attention

When you ask questions, let the other person gather thoughts and contribute ideas. Avoid asserting your point to fill silence.

Then listen actively – focusing on what the other person says and does to relay emotions. Summarize what's been said so you both agree to what was discussed, what needs to change and how it will be resolved.

Source: thebusyleadershandbook.com

TECH CORNER

Beware phishing scams! They're just getting worse

For a business email compromise (BEC) scam to work, a criminal must gain access to your company's computer network system.

The No. 1 way to do that is through a phishing attack. There's been an explosion in phishing attempts in recent weeks, all using the coronavirus as the hook to get people clicking.

Coronavirus email getting clicks

Now's the time for companies to be launching an educational blitz on all the different types of coronavirus scams out there.

Have IT lead the charge – and be specific. You want them to give examples of specific attacks: what they look like, the language they use.

Managers, supervisors and top executives may also need to send out examples of what kinds of information requests are inappropriate (or illegal) in an email ask.

Be wary of expedited orders, canceled deals and refunds that look to be coming from trusted vendors or business clients. They could be legitimate – or they could be phishing attempts. Get IT involved if you suspect foul play.

Source: tinyurl.com/phishing478

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ Time to set rules for Slack and any IMing at work

Slack and other instant messaging platforms are more popular than ever in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak.

With more teams using these to communicate, you'll want to set some guidelines. Experts at Harvard Business School suggest:

- **Define expectations for personal messaging.** Is it strictly professional or can employees send GIFs and jokes? Is it an outlet just for work collaboration or also for debates over sports and TV plots?
- **Remind employees that your policies** on bullying, abuse and harassment extend to your IM platform – and enforce them.
- **Respect the work/life balance.** Don't message or expect responses after hours.
- **Promote face-to-face communication.** Remind employees it's still the most effective way to accomplish goals.

Source: tinyurl.com/raxn4yt

■ 3 ways to get your next best employee

Many managers miss out on great new employees because they ghost candidates for too long, a recent Gallup poll found.

Taking too long to followup with job candidates at any point in the hiring process leaves room for them to take another job. Instead:

- **Create a protocol.** Determine the exact timing and way you'll communicate with candidates at each stage. Let them know it, too.
- **Use time wisely.** Set up meetings only when you know everyone who needs to be there can be. Make sure virtual candidates can connect before the actual meeting. Create and share agendas for on-site meetings.
- **Be realistic.** When you communicate the next steps or an offer, explain what candidates need to do and what they can expect you to do.

Source: tinyurl.com/candidates476

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 Big goals help interdepartmental communication

Like most companies, ours had many departments running parallel to each other. They were headed in the same direction, but not necessarily together.

So, many people and departments didn't need to communicate or interact much – and that caused silos.

Everything can run better

We wanted to get people communicating because sharing information, ideas and perspectives can make companies and departments run better.

To improve collaboration and

communication, we created a few companywide, high-level goals – visionary, financial and/or process goals that affected everyone.

When employees had tasks and goals without borders, they started to work from different perspectives.

They wanted to learn about those angles and share their own.

Soon enough, communication and collaboration improved. We hit goals and built our companywide team.

(Zohar Steinberg, CEO, Token, New York City, shared his success on SmartBrief's Young Entrepreneur Council)

2 Staffers take lead with professional training

We were always challenged to come up with new and different training opportunities for employees.

Of course, the training had to be relevant to the goals of the employee and the company.

Keeping on top of that was almost a full-time job in itself.

'You're in charge'

Our solution: have employees find their own training. We told them they could choose their own training, but approval would be based on two major stipulations:

1. The employee had to show the connection between the proposed training and their jobs and careers.
2. Cost would be a factor in approval. The more expensive the training, the greater the benefit the employee would have to show to get approval.

The result: We saw that our best, most motivated people who really wanted good training did take charge and had good selections. That made us a better company overall.

(Norma Anthony, supervisor, B.F. Moltz, Medford, NJ)

3 Need good input? It's all in how you ask

To keep a lid on our workers' compensation costs, we needed an effective light-duty program.

The problem with developing light duty: Where do you start? Whenever we asked our workers to give us ideas for light-duty jobs, they'd usually come back with, "I dunno."

What's the best place for you?

So we tried a different approach with them, without even mentioning "light duty." Instead of asking them for suggestions about light duty, we said: Give us a list of tasks that you'd like to see done in your department but never have the time or people to do.

When we phrased it that way, our employees deluged us with great ideas no one had mentioned before.

We took those ideas and categorized them into light-duty jobs that injured workers could do.

Since getting the employees involved in creating light-duty jobs two years ago, we've cut claim amounts by 75%.

(Hal Beeler, HR director, King's County Truck Lines, Modesto, CA)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

Do we need to stop the cursing at work?

Question: We have a group of great employees who have a bad habit of cursing. Does their language put us at risk of having a hostile workplace?

Answer: Yes, depending upon the degree and frequency, says employment law attorney Robin Shea of the firm Constangy Brooks Smith & Prophete LLP.

Frequent use of crude language can become harassment territory if it's:

- directed at a specific employee
- severe or pervasive, or
- in reference to a person's gender, race or other protected class.

On the other hand, if employees occasionally use a mild swear word, it's OK. Pay attention to how other employees react. If they seem – or tell you they're – bothered, it's likely becoming hostile, and you need to stop it, Shea says.

Source: *HRMorning.com* and *tinyurl.com/Constangy478*

LIGHTER SIDE

'Manager' doesn't sound so bad, now does it?

Manager. Supervisor. VP. Staff. Clerk. Intern.

They're all kind of vanilla, but at least no one questions what you do – like we do with the job titles of people being interviewed on TV.

- Lonnie Johnson, Professional Snuggler
- Ray Wolfe, Director of Sandbags
- Derek Gordan, Ranch Dressing Expert
- James Dunstan, Space Lawyer
- Russell Kleinbach, Bride Kidnapping Expert, and
- Alan Moore, Writer/Wizard/Mall Santa/Rasputin Impersonator.

Source: *tinyurl.com/jobtitles478*

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Improvement plans work – a case study

I've learned through experience over the years at various institutions that putting an employee (whether student, staff or full-time staff) on a performance improvement plan (PIP) can get results.

In the past, I've supervised employees who repeatedly missed administrative deadlines. But I felt they showed potential and were worth the time and effort to be put on a PIP.

With HR's help, we made sure employees knew this wasn't optional. If they didn't adhere to the plan and improve quickly, we'd have no choice but to move forward in the termination process.

That really got their attention. Apparently

they didn't realize how missing deadlines on projects wasn't acceptable at any level.

What can I do better?

One lesson I've learned is if you need to put an employee on a PIP, you've dropped the ball as the supervisor. Either I didn't explain why deadlines aren't optional, or I failed at getting on the same wavelength with the employee.

It's never 100% on the struggling employee. The supervisor needs to ask, "What could I have done better?"

(Denton Sederquist, Assistant Director, Residence Life, Purdue University, Lafayette, IN)

Management trick that makes biggest impact

Focusing on employees' strengths rather than trying to improve weaknesses has a bigger impact.

Gallup researchers found employees who are coached to their strengths more likely:

- feel they're able to do what they do best at work every day,
- are engaged in their work, and
- have an excellent *quality of life*.

Better yet, it affects employees' performance and lives outside work. To coach to employees' strengths:

- **Look at weaknesses differently.** When employees struggle, consider if it's a task or role they must do. When possible, move them toward more work where they excel, rather than try to improve areas that aren't working for them or your organization.
- **Start and continue the conversation.** When you give and get feedback on performance, ask employees what excites them, what they'd like to learn and where they see their future. Look for hidden talents to avoid limiting their potential to the role at hand.

Source: tinyurl.com/trick478

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

No, the company didn't win, and Jennifer was able to continue her lawsuit.

The company claimed Jennifer was taking a vacation because the trip wasn't covered since her mother wasn't seeking medical help.

But the court noted the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) doesn't specify employees must help a family member to seek medical treatment.

Instead, it says employees are "entitled to a certain amount of leave in order to care for a parent of the employee, if such parent has a serious health condition."

On the trip, Jennifer clearly took care of her mother – helping feed and give her medication.

It didn't matter that the trip wasn't for getting her mother medical care.

Analysis: FMLA allows workers leeway

Common sense would say that a vacation wouldn't be covered by FMLA. But this case makes it clear that's not always the case.

As it turns out, it doesn't matter where an employee cares for a family member. What matters is the employee is needed to provide for the family member.

(Based on *Beverly Ballard v. Chicago Park District*. Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

The great thing in this world is not so much where you stand, as in what direction you are moving.

– Oliver Wendell Holmes

Just remember: The people that say, 'your dreams are impossible' have already quit on theirs.

– Grant Cardone

Luck is the residue of design.

– John Milton

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