Communication Bulletin *for Managers & Supervisors* ™

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

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.

Zoom gloom? 5 strategies to hold virtual meetings employees love

How to engage attendees and get everything accomplished

If it was a struggle to get people engaged in meetings before the coronavirus, it's probably a Herculean effort to get them engaged now that many meetings are virtual.

"Most still see online as 'less than,'" says Stephanie Scotti, a communication and presentation advisor at Professionally Speaking and the author of *Talk on Water*.

"It doesn't have to be that way. Virtual events can be as effective, vibrant and engaging as their in-person counterparts."

Aim to connect, not perfect

Here's how to set up a solid virtual meeting and get employees to participate and engage with the content and each other:

Give employees links to apps and platforms – Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, etc. – you'll use, instructions on how to launch them, plus links to other resources. Then be prepared for tech issues … because they almost always happen.

In meetings, move on if you can't share a screen, audio gets clipped, videos don't play, etc. Keep people focused on the meeting objective, not the technology that supports it.

Keep it simple

Virtual meetings that get off track are even more useless than in-person meetings: People are less likely to refocus when things go off the track when sitting at their computers than if

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Sharpen Your Judgment

Other employees got severance, why didn't he?

"How does your company handle severance pay?" asked Manager Eliza to her best friend.

"Must we talk shop at a bar?" said Agatha, a manager at another company. "I'm sick of work. But if you must know, we have a policy, and it's in all new employee contracts."

"'Wish we did that," said Eliza. "Then we wouldn't be getting sued."

"Why are you being sued?" asked Agatha.

"A former employee is claiming we owe him severance, but we don't have an official policy," said Eliza.

"If that's the case, then why is he saying he's owed severance pay?" asked Agatha.

"Our previous president, Mr. Hamilton, used to give severance to workers. But who got it and how much they got was entirely his choice," said Eliza.

Hired by past president

"This guy is saying Mr. Hamilton had a policy, and he was hired by him. Therefore, he should get severance," Eliza said. "But we have a new president now, and he does it differently."

"That sounds tricky," said Agatha.

The ex-employee at Eliza's workplace sued for severance, claiming other employees received it. He also provided a list of people who got severance and the amounts they received.

Did the ex-employee 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.

Virtual …

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they were physically together.

So, set a clear, simple goal for each meeting and leave the complex information and learning for self-study and in-person sessions down the road.

Get employees involved early

In virtual meetings, people can mute themselves, turn off video … and start scrolling social media while it still appears they're "in" the meeting.

To get and keep attendees involved, ask them to interact within the first five minutes. Ask a question when they arrive such as:

- How many of you think X?
- Can you please share what you learned from Y?
- How did you overcome Z?

Or you might try a poll question. Most virtual meeting platforms offer polling features that give real-time results.

As those come in, ask employees to chime in on why they responded to the poll question as they did.

No matter what you ask, Scotti suggest you silently count to 10.

Employees won't likely engage

with you immediately, but someone eventually will break the virtual silence. Once one person shares, others will likely jump in like they do at an in-person meeting.

Add a leader

Ask another person to be a co-moderator during a virtual meeting or training session.

The second person can interact with you and the group – asking and monitoring questions and comments as they come in, "planting" questions if they aren't arising and keeping an eye on time.

The second voice can also serve as the go-to IT pro, responding to tech issues, sharing the right screens, sending the polls or posting questions.

Maintain eye contact

In person, maintaining eye contact with employees helps build engagement and interest.

Virtually, you can at least keep your end of the eye-contact deal which encourages attendees to keep eyes on the screen and ears on the content.

Keep your camera eye level and look at the lens, not your screen.

Talk to the camera like you're talking to a friend – smile, nod, gesture as if you're together.

Source: SmartBriefs, *tinyurl.com/ virtual482*

Tech Corner

Steps to keep your computer uncluttered and work tidy

Every job has its hectic times, whether they occur weekly or take up an entire season. The key to effective leadership is staying organized.

One area that can quickly get cluttered is your desktop page. Make sure this doesn't happen so you can find everything at the drop of a hat.

Key organization steps

- **Figure out what works.** Is it best for you to organize desktop folders by project, department, type (expense reports, presentations, etc.) or something else?

- **Avoid rushing.** No matter how pressed for time you are, make sure you don't save documents to your desktop or clutter will overtake it.

- **Keep it simple.** Experts say you should have a minimum of 10 files in each folder.

- **Clean up on a regular basis.** While following these steps should keep your desktop tidy, there will be days when you don't have a second to spare. Try setting aside 10 minutes each week to tidy up.

- **Allow changes.** When you find something isn't working for you, change it until you find what works.

Source: tinyurl.com/compdesktop482

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 Fostered positive culture through respect

About 25% of Americans say they dread going to work. Reason: They don't feel respected by their company.

Over the past five years, estimated costs from turnover caused by workplace culture dissatisfaction was $223 billion. We wanted to reduce those costs with a positive culture based on respect.

Communication breakdown

Today's workplace features different cultures, genders, ages and education levels. Managers must be careful with what and how they say things.

Communication can break down because the intent of the message may not be the same as what's interpreted. So, we made sure our leadership paid careful attention to:

- who the message was for and how a third party may perceive it
- their tone of voice
- active listening, and
- treating others the way they'd want to be treated.

Allowing others to be seen and heard led to mutual respect and a healthier work environment.

(Cornelia Gamlem, SPHR, President, GEMS Group, as presented during the BambooHR Virutal Summit)

2 Future press releases keep goals in sight

Many teams lose sight of big goals as circumstances bend and shift throughout a project's lifetime.

To avoid some of the struggle, we created "future press releases" at the start of important projects and during major changes. We clarify goals and examine what the project will look like *when it's done*.

4 rules to follow

Future press releases follow rules:

1. Start with the end. Write the release from the time when the project is successful, often after it's launched.

2. Focus on the customer. Explain why it's important to customers and their experiences with our company.

3. Include clear, measurable results you will have achieved with the project.

4. Outline the difficulties, important decisions and design principles to reaching the success.

Projects don't always follow the course we set in the press releases, but they almost always help us hit targets.

(John Rossman, former Amazon executive, shared this success in Think Like Amazon)

3 Communicating plan early built confidence

When we closed our offices due to the pandemic, we had our employees' well-being in mind. That didn't change as our office prepared to reopen.

It wasn't necessary for everyone to return at once. Lots of people were doing fine working from home, and keeping the office less crowded would probably help ease concerns.

Staggered return

We decided to recall workers in staggered groups split by department. That way, workers would still benefit from the immediacy of getting things done right in the office while easily practicing social distancing.

We emailed this plan ahead of time, along with all the safety precautions we'd prepared, like providing PPE and restricting access to high-traffic areas.

Giving workers a chance to look over the return plan beforehand ensured we could address any concerns ahead of time.

(Greg Johnson, Director of Employee Benefits, The Joint Commission, Oakland Terrace, IL)

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Make virtual meetings a success for all

During the pandemic, virtual meetings have been a boon for many companies by allowing their employees to stay connected.

While these meetings have been a great asset, they can also be really annoying when people don't consider what they're doing.

Give it some thought

Are you sitting in front of a window with the sun shining through? Then you're gonna look like a dark shadow.

The light should be shining on your face to provide the best visual image.

Here are a few other things to consider when holding a virtual meeting:

- **Don't be a talking head.** How close are you to the screen? Can you only see your head? If so, back up far enough so your chest and shoulders are visible.
- **Ditch big hand gestures.** If you're gesturing and your hands are off screen, no one knows what you're doing. Keep gestures in the square of your body.
- **Practice good posture.** Don't slouch or lean to the side. Sit up straight with your shoulders back and arms slightly to the side. This shows you're engaged in the meeting.

Source: tinyurl.com/VirtMtg482

This is who needs the most help working remotely

Millennials need to get on site – or could use help working remotely – the most.

They admit they're struggling to get work done, feel less connected to their jobs and are more stressed than their colleagues in other generations, according to research from SHRM. Signs of trouble include:

- loss of sense of humor or desire to interact
- late or incomplete assignments, and
- lack of focus and responsive communication.

Whether you suspect employees have troubles working from home or they admit they do, take these step to help them adapt:

Schedule regular check-in meetings. Talk to them rather than just email or text. Ask about their struggles, and normalize those by sharing one of yours (without complaining).

Ask how the company can help with the challenges. They often have solutions in mind.

Give them access to tools, such as free or low-cost coaching, therapy or healthy diversions, such as online yoga and meditation.

Sources: tinyurl.com/WFH482, tinyurl.com/help482

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

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No, the ex-employee didn't win his case.

While he had proof other workers received severance, it only proved the payments were discretionary – there was no consistent basis on who received severance and how much.

During questioning, the previous president stated he typically gave severance to terminated employees in good standing with the company.

And while the employee was in good standing, he was terminated under a different president.

Since he couldn't prove anyone promised him severance and there was no written company policy, the court ruled in favor of the employer because the case wasn't based on a contractual agreement.

Clear severance communication, policy

Severance pay isn't required by law, but it can be required if it was promised in a worker's contract or the employee handbook. The Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification Act requires employers to pay severance if there are mass layoffs without a 60-day notice period.

Remind managers to communicate any termination as soon as possible.

(Based on *Iljas v. Ripley Entertainment Inc.* This case has been dramatized for effect.)