

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

September 1, 2020



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4 ways to take control of office politics at home or on-site

Remote work hasn't lessened the drama

You'd think office politics fell by the wayside when no one was working in the office.

But schmoozing, backstabbing and manipulation live on, albeit less intensely, researchers found.

Regardless of where people work, leaders still need to manage office politics, so everyone thrives, not suffers, through it all.

Why politics continue

Here's how office politics will continue, whether employees are together all the time, sometimes or not at all:

- **Most people have their best interests in mind.** Employees and managers tend to use social skills to advance their interests.

Even when they work on teams and for the good of the company or customers, most people have personal goals – money, status, advancement, etc. – at heart.

- **Employees still interact.** Virtual meetings and online work replicate the real world. Maybe even amplify it. People drop political or personal interest in email. They tout their work in Zoom meetings. They talk negatively about colleagues in side text messages. And they look at and comment on each others' social media.
- **Personalities don't change.** Loudmouths, narcissists and professional climbers don't turn into quiet observers because they were

Please see Office politics ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Contradicting communication leads to lawsuit

Account Manager Bonnie Grossman had just ended her Zoom meeting when her friend Noreen FaceTimed her.

"Hey, Noreen!" said Bonnie, looking at her phone. "It's so good to see you. It feels like I haven't talk to you in months. How's everything?"

"Not good," Noreen replied. "Hope things at home are going better for you!"

"Oh, no," Bonnie said. "What's been going on?"

'Didn't have enough time'

"Well," Noreen began. "I had to take some time off from work a little while ago to care for my mom. She was really sick. Then recently, I took a few more days off because they thought my dad might

need surgery. Thankfully, he didn't.

"But when I got my last paycheck, it was lower than usual. When I asked my supervisor about it, she said I didn't have enough paid time off to take all those days, so they docked my pay."

"That stinks," Bonnie said.

"It does, especially since I got the go-ahead to take the time off from my supervisor," said Noreen.

"If she said it was OK, why did she dock your pay?" asked Bonnie. "You should consult a lawyer."

Noreen did just that and sued her company, saying the company retaliated against her for missing work to care for her parents.

Did her case move forward?

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.

Office politics ...

(continued from Page 1)

sent home. And gossipers find new ways to spread the word. No matter the personality – bad or good – it still shines through online.

- **Some people thrive on politics.** They still have limited talent and retain power or position by relentlessly protecting their interests above the company's or department's. They continue to hide information or tear down colleagues to make themselves seem more valuable. It's just as easy – if not easier – when they work remotely.

Resolve (or at least curb) politics

Fortunately, leaders can still keep an eye on politics, whether it happens remotely or in the office. Try these tactics to resolve or curb it:

- **Use technology.** People who behave badly on-site sometimes get away with it when out of sight. But technology leaves an electronic trail that's quite reliable for finding negative words and actions. If you get complaints or suspect employees are out of line, work with IT to scour their email and other work-related online communication for unethical, objectionable or harassing

exchanges. Punish accordingly.

- **Communicate more.** People sometimes try to get a leg up on others when they can form or taint the message. They can hide a villainous tone in email or negative body language in a phone call. So, use video for meetings. Reach out once a day with company and department information, and invite employees to ask questions in a group format so everyone has the answers.
- **Plan more.** Schedule projects and assign tasks as far out as monthly. Involve employees in planning from the get-go, so everyone has input on assignments and understands why each person is tasked with a specific job. Define leadership roles and reach, so others hopefully don't politicize the process or outcome.
- **Build trust.** It will take time, whether you work side-by-side or towns apart, but building trust between yourself and employees will pay dividends on ceasing office politics. Ask for opinions, and more importantly, consider them in your decisions. Encourage employees to do the same amongst each other. Share information from the top down and follow up on requests for more guidance, details and/or resources.

Sources: Fast Company, [tinyurl.com/politics483](https://www.tinyurl.com/politics483) and FlexJobs, [tinyurl.com/solutions483](https://www.tinyurl.com/solutions483)

TECH CORNER

IRS reveals 'Dirty Dozen' scam list for 2020

Most companies want to help their peers who are struggling. But not everyone has good intentions.

Just ask the IRS, which issued its annual list of "Dirty Dozen" scams:

- **Phishing scams:** These scams use emails, letters, texts and links to trick people into disclosing personal and financial account information.
- **Fake charities:** Scammers often use names similar to real charities. Real charities, however, will provide their Employer Identification Number.
- **Threatening calls:** Be wary of calls

that instill fear and urgency. The IRS won't ask for immediate payment or financial info on the phone.

- **Social media scams:** Look out for criminals who pose as family or friends and send you "interesting links" – which are part of a scam.
- **Payroll and HR scams:** Criminals want W-2 and other tax info. The most common scams are for gift cards and direct deposit.
- **Ransomware:** This targets human and technical weaknesses to infect networks or servers. It often begins with a download, so stay alert for suspicious requests.

Source: [tinyurl.com/IRSDDscams](https://www.tinyurl.com/IRSDDscams)

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ Why nonverbals are important in virtual chats

What *isn't* said in virtual conversations is just as important as what *is* said.

You can have a more effective online meeting if you hone in on nonverbal cues just as you would if you were meeting in person. How? Here's help from Jeff Wolf, author of *Seven Disciplines of a Leader*. Watch for:

- **Repetition.** Whether it's a nod (agreement), shake (disagreement) or glances offscreen (disinterest), repeated movements mean that's what they're thinking, even if they say differently.
- **Eye contact.** If they aren't making "eye" contact (looking into the camera and watching their screen), it's possible they're uncomfortable or being dishonest.
- **Posture.** Slouching indicates they aren't interested. Leaning back or rocking indicates they're bored. Leaning forward, toward the camera proves interest and intrigue.

When you know what the nonverbals indicate, you can respond appropriately.

Source: SmartBriefs, [tinyurl.com/nonverbals483](https://www.tinyurl.com/nonverbals483)

■ Where – and how – to build key professional skills

Now that you got all those back burner projects done during the coronavirus slowdown, it's a good time to improve professional skills. These sites and events will help:

- **edX** offers free courses from 140 top universities on every interest you might imagine for work or life. Search by subject, expertise level, language, teacher, etc.
- **LinkedIn Learning** has 15,000 courses on business, technology and creativity taught by people with real-world experience.
- **Khan Academy** keeps adults engaged with courses to help professionally and personally – such as in economics, history, programming and entrepreneurship.

Source: [tinyurl.com/skills483](https://www.tinyurl.com/skills483)

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 The benefits of transparent communication

When I first started my company, it was founded under these core values: equity, belonging and impact.

I wanted my employees to thrive and feel a sense of ownership in everything they did, and I realized the key to that was transparency.

I began sharing company revenue and business strategies and, in turn, everyone's salary would be known.

Fair compensation model

This was a bit of a radical idea, and I knew if I was going to do this I had to be able to justify salaries. So I came up with a compensation model.

First, there was a guaranteed base pay – the same for everyone in similar positions. Then I added team pay based on collective results for each team. Finally, I added individual rewards based on each employee's personal goals.

Now, all employees have access to their colleagues' job descriptions, goals and salaries. And I have no issues with pay inequity based on gender or race. Everyone knows he or she is compensated fairly.

(Kimberlea Kozachenko, CEO & Founder, Kolmenta, as presented at the ERE Digital 2020 Conference)

2 'All hands on deck' aligns employees

With so many departments, functions and levels in our company, we saw a lot of silos. People didn't have a sense of working toward our mission together.

We helped change that by revamping onboarding and adding a regular companywide initiative.

From training to practice

Here's how it worked: We put every new employee – from VPs to maintenance staff – through customer service boot camp. They all learned how to handle a customer inquiry.

Then a couple of times each week we called an "all hands on deck," when everyone would get a low-level customer inquiry to handle.

It would bring the company together, reminding employees that we must provide the best support and service for our customers.

Everyone learns a little more about our customers' needs, too, which helps them do their jobs better.

(Howard Spector, CEO, SimplePractice, Los Angeles)

3 Keeping our team healthy at home

When we look at our benefits offerings, we think about the four pillars – physical, mental, financial and social/purpose – covering all aspects of employee health.

And that's been our template for sending out various care packages to everyone who's now working at home due to the pandemic.

We want to keep our team healthy, so we share as much info as we can.

But we also know everyone is being bombarded with so much right now, so we're careful not to hit them too frequently or with too much.

Make sure it's helpful, accurate

To keep that from happening, we always double-check that any information we do share is helpful and accurate.

And we remind our teams to take breaks from the news and to be very careful about where they get their information to help reduce stress from inaccurate stories.

(Misty Guinn, Director of Benefits and Wellness, Benefitfocus, Charleston, SC)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Can we take employees' temperatures on arrival?

Question: We want to keep employees as safe as possible as we return to work. One precaution we'd like to try is taking temperatures before they enter. Can we legally do it?

Answer: That can be tricky, says Douglas Spiker, an employment law attorney at Roetzel & Andress.

On the one hand, taking temperatures is considered a medical exam and would be against the Americans with Disabilities Act if it's not job-related, consistent with a business necessity or necessary to protect the health and safety of people.

On the other hand, the coronavirus has been deemed a threat to health and safety, so the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission suggests you look to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for guidance on whether there's a threat to your community at any time, Spiker says.

Check the CDC at [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)

Source: tinyurl.com/temperature483

LIGHTER SIDE

■ 'Hey boss, I love you' – and other texts gone bad

Communicating via text with colleagues or the boss poses danger – especially with an overzealous auto-correct feature. Some examples of texts gone bad:

- **Boss:** "Call me before noon."
Me: "I'll call you for sex."
Boss: "What?"
Me: "Sorry. I meant sec! I'll call you in a sec."
Boss: "Call me when you can."
- **Me:** "Love you, pumpkinbear!"
Well-regarded colleague: "I think you meant to send that to your husband."
- **Me to my wife:** "I'm here at work. Luv you."
Boss, the unintended recipient: "I know. I'm sitting right next to you."

Source: tinyurl.com/text483

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Communication errors can kill messages

Crafting company communications is always a balancing act, and little errors can turn into big miscommunications.

Here are four mistakes you should avoid:

1. Why assume your news is bad?

A few people will always find the negative in any news shared. But most employees will see and understand the positive takeaways. Focus on them instead of crafting your messaging for the few naysayers.

2. Don't ignore the elephant in the room

Never avoid addressing uncomfortable issues. Stick to the obvious issues everyone's

worrying about, and make sure management is ready to respond to any concerns.

3. Don't treat employees like kids

When messages talk down to employees like they're children, expect them to react like children. Give it to them straight, and they'll get it, as long as you explain things clearly.

4. Leave no doubt

Repeat important news, especially if there's a deadline involved. Announce it, remind them about it and then remind them one last time.

Source: tinyurl.com/ComErrors483

Despite the bad rap, meetings and email work (if done right)

We tend to bemoan meetings and email as time-wasters.

Turns out, they're quite effective in the workplace – if they're done right.

High-performing companies have specific protocols for meetings and how to minimize email chains, a Boston Consulting Group study found. Simply put, they keep it simple.

Follow best practices

Try these best practices:

Spend more time meeting in person.

Meetings and calls are more effective than using email or collaborative apps because they minimize misunderstandings and allow people to ask and answer follow-up questions in real time.

Invite fewer people to meetings. "Simple" companies limit people in meetings to those who will do 90% of the decision making and executing. There's no room to get off track.

Email less. When people meet effectively, they message less – and get more work done.

Source: BCG, tinyurl.com/meetemail483

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes, a judge allowed her to sue for state wage law violations and possible retaliation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Noreen claimed she asked for and got paid time off (PTO) on separate occasions to care for a sick parent. Her supervisor approved the time, and no one told her of any issues.

The company argued its policy was to reduce wages if PTO wasn't available, and Noreen's reason for leave didn't prove retaliation.

The court disagreed, saying just because the company had a policy didn't mean its actions weren't discriminatory. Given that the specific reason her pay was docked was that she missed work to care for a relative, the company's steps

could be seen as a violation of the ADA. And the pay deductions may also have violated state laws.

Communication key to avoid disputes

Paid leave laws are complicated. And the new paid leave many workers are entitled to in 2020 under the Families First Coronavirus Response Act complicates it. Add the ADA or Family Medical Leave Act, and it gets more complicated.

To prevent these situations, consider using a system that tracks and communicates leave balances with employees and supervisors.

(Based on *Lawson v. Kansas Public Schools*. Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

The world is not yours for the taking, but for the trying. Try hard.

– Scott Galloway

A party without cake is really just a meeting.

– Julia Child

Action is the foundational key to all success.

– Pablo Picasso

Right is right, even if no one else does it.

– Juliette Gordon Low

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