

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 15, 2020



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Distanced working: 4 ways to motivate, reward employees

Times have changed, but your people's needs haven't

Remember when a stocked fridge and pool table in the break room were the coolest perks for employees?

Now it's a different game when it comes to motivating, incentivizing and rewarding employees. What kind of perks and benefits can excite employees – who either work remotely or socially distanced?

"High fives and kudos around the water cooler just don't work any more," says Jeff Cates, CEO of Achievers. "But remember, people want to feel safe and secure, according to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. After that, people need support."

And those are things leaders can still offer. It's especially important now that working

from home can feel more like living at work!

Here are four proven ways leaders can motivate, reward and incentivize employees in this new era of distanced working.

Recognize the environment, reward to it

Most employees have powered through the pandemic in unprecedented circumstances. They've worked in conditions no one ever imagined – perhaps surrounded by needy kids, noisy neighbors and meandering pets. Or maybe they've been masked among socially distanced co-workers worried all the time about health, safety and normalcy.

So, the perk that stands out now: flexibility.

Please see Motivate ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Worker on FMLA fired, wouldn't give return date

Gabrielle Motes, a director at her company, was laughing at a TikTok video her daughter had sent when Company Attorney Blake Toner knocked on her door.

"Got a second?" asked Blake.

"Sure, what's up?" asked Gabrielle.

"Gary Brown is what's up," said Blake.

"Don't you mean who's up?" asked Gabrielle, laughing at her dumb joke.

"What? Oh," said Blake, rolling his eyes.

"Sorry. Just in a goofy mood," said Gabrielle.

"Well, I'm about to kill your goofy mood," said Blake. "Gary just filed an ADA lawsuit against us."

"What? He took FMLA leave for surgery, said he'd be out for 16 weeks and then requested more time," said Gabrielle.

Gave others additional time

"But we've given additional time to other employees when they needed it," said Blake.

"But they gave us a return date," said Gabrielle. "I communicated with Gary several times about when he'd be back, and he never gave me a date. Our department needed help, so I let him go."

Gary sued the company under the Americans with Disabilities Act for failing to accommodate his disability. The company tried to get the case dismissed based on the fact it was an undue hardship. 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.

Motivate ...

(continued from Page 1)

“Recognize the environment they have to be in,” Cates says. “Measure on output, not input at a certain time. Let them do what works.”

Then recognize good work with fitting rewards, such as Uber Eats credit.

Remind, encourage time off

Similarly, leaders want to remind employees of the perks they’ve always had but may not be using: time off, vacation, opportunities to socialize with colleagues.

“Initially, employees just pored themselves into work with no commute, no water cooler talk,” Cates says. “It’s not sustainable.”

Yet, nearly a third of employees said they’ll take fewer days off this year or will postpone vacations, a Robert Half survey found.

Too much work, and no play, hurts morale and productivity.

Encourage employees to step away and take days off. Offer time off – when possible – as a perk.

Tweak current benefits, perks

Adjust benefits and teambuilding activities you already offered.

For instance, Teampay, a Manhattan software company, had a popular healthy snack bar, and a more popular unhealthy snack bar on-site, plus free coffee and cool hangouts. They brought in lunch and guest speakers, and hosted weekly “demos and drinks” for fun.

When they couldn’t offer those perks and benefits, they adjusted, moving the speakers and demos online and giving employees a \$20-a-week delivery stipend to order food and/or drinks.

Include the fam

Most perks and benefits were aimed to motivate employees at work (because, after all, you wanted an engaged, productive team on-site).

Now companies have had success in offering benefits and perks that involve families, so employees can take the benefit home or use it on-site.

For instance, one provider – Burnalong – offers group and one-on-one fitness and wellness classes employees and their family members can tap into from home. They’ve also offered summer virtual camps and pet workouts.

Even better, these family-focused perks feed the employees’ top needs Cates mentioned: safety, security and support.

Sources: grin.co, Fast Company, tinyurl.com/benefits480, and Robert Half, tinyurl.com/timeoffsurvey

TECH CORNER

5 tips for fixing keyboards when they act up

In today’s new remote work environment, having a functioning computer is essential.

But just as important is having a functioning keyboard. After all, without a keyboard, there won’t be a lot of communicating going on.

Try these fixes

A few ways to fix keyboard issues:

1. Restart your PC. It sounds simple, but it often does the trick.
2. Update/reinstall keyboard drivers. If this isn’t done automatically, go to

Device Manager, then Keyboards. Right click and choose Update driver.

3. Double-check keyboard settings. Some keyboard settings can go haywire when there’s a malfunction. Turn them off by typing “Control Panel” in the search bar and choosing the first option. Then search for “keyboard” in the top left corner. Click the first option where you can adjust character repeat and blink rate.
4. Clean the keyboard. It could just be crumbs or debris between the keys. You can try spraying compressed air.
5. Enlist IT. If all else fails, pick up the phone and call IT.

Source: tinyurl.com/keyboardfixes484

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ Stop masking your smile: 3 tips to show emotions

Face masks reduce the spread of COVID-19 but increase confusion, miscommunication and misinterpretation.

It’s difficult to convey and read facial cues – especially a smile that’s critical for showing many positive emotions – when colleagues, employees and customers are behind masks.

But you can still connect better with others using these tips:

- **Smile broader** to “stretch” it to your eyes.
- **Wear your smile elsewhere.** Some healthcare workers have pasted smiling photos of themselves to their lab coats, so patients can get a better image of their usual demeanor.
- **Get creative.** You can purchase novel masks that have silly smiles or use markers to draw smiles on your disposable masks.

Source: tinyurl.com/smile484

■ The one phrase that will make you more effective

No matter how you communicate with others – in person, online, through email or a communication app – one phrase will help you find out more.

“Tell me ...”

Alexandra Carter, the negotiation trainer for the United Nations, says this simple phrase helps leaders get answers that are wholly from the other person’s point of view.

It also gives you a deeper insight into what employees, customers and colleagues think and prioritize.

Try some of these prompts:

- *Tell me what you need.*
- *Tell me what you think the problem is and how we might contain it.*
- *Tell me more about how you came to that conclusion.*
- *Tell me how you’d approach this situation.*

Source: tinyurl.com/onephrase484

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 Re-engaged with our team during pandemic

As the lines between at-work and at-home lives blurred, we prioritized meeting employee needs.

We've followed these three steps: Plan for the transition, safely re-engage our teams and progress with purpose.

"Remotians," our business resource group for remote employees, are available via office hours to provide expertise for folks navigating working from home for the first time.

Virtual check-ins

In addition, senior leaders conduct virtual check-ins with their teams more regularly to ensure all is well. Employee

engagement is more important than ever and the emotional impact of this pandemic can't be overlooked.

We've broadened our reimbursement policy to include wellness apps and home office equipment. We have virtual happy hours and wellness activities, and we explore ways to enhance mental health and engagement programs.

Employees are encouraged to share best practices for working remotely and lean on each other's experiences, so we can all come together as one company.

(Naveen Bhateja, EVP, Chief People Officer, Medidata, a Dassault Systèmes, company, New York)

2 Remote staff no longer drowning in email

Our entire team (85 remote workers) was become increasingly frustrated. We used a suite of tools to help consumer brands effectively reach their customers via social media and we were drowning in email.

We needed a platform that would allow us to be inclusive across time zones and help save time on tasks that required transparency.

What we were using was good for remote messaging but cumbersome for thoughtful decision making.

More in-depth conversations

We needed a way to have in-depth conversations and store longer-form communications. Plus, we wanted searchable discussions, customizable notifications, a do-not-disturb function and the ability to create a to-do list.

Research lead us to Threads, a social media work collaboration platform. In five days, we had our entire team on it.

We were able to cut emails sent during a workweek by 50%, and it no longer feels like a black hole.

(Courtney Seiter, Director of People, Buffer, Nashville, TN)

3 For now, replace 'To do' with 'What if'

Like most organizations, ours is in what we call the neutral zone. We've left behind what used to be – in how we work and live. And we aren't yet near the new normal.

It's a difficult place to be with all the uncertainty. I've encouraged my leaders and employees to not just think about what's now but what's next.

One tactic that helped us move in that direction was to change agendas from just "To do" to "What if?"

Propose the questions

So when we meet to do our work, we also propose questions like these:

- What if we started X from scratch? How would we do it?
- What if we stopped doing Y? What would happen?
- What if we had to do this for a long time? What would change?

There's a lot to do to keep our business going. Adding the "What if?" element helps us all prepare for the new ways of work.

(Scott Eblin, Founder, Eblin Group, Los Angeles, shared this success on his blog)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

Employee posts racist remarks: Can we fire her?

Question: We have an employee who's had a lot to say on social media lately – and some of it's blatantly racist. Can we fire her for posting like that?

Answer: Yes, says Jason M. Knott, Partner at Zuckerman Spaeder LLP.

Employers typically have the power to fire an employee for expressing racist views because The First Amendment – freedom of speech – doesn't generally protect employees from being fired.

One caveat: Controversial opinions such as extreme political or religious views may be protected by state or federal discrimination laws. You'll need to be careful not to violate those if you decide to terminate, Knott says.

A better route is to "be proactive by adopting social media policies that make it clear employees can be held accountable for content they post on the Internet, even on their own time," Knott says.

Source: tinyurl.com/posts484

LIGHTER SIDE

New, enlightening insight on communication

For all the merits of our many means of communication, they do have their faults.

Here's some insight *Reddit.com* readers had to share about some of our communication gadgets:

- Alexander Graham Bell's first telephone was absolutely useless until he made his second one.
- When I was a kid, my parents taught me to not believe everything I saw on the television. Now I have to teach them to not believe everything they see on Facebook.
- Humans – compared to cell phones – are really bad at recharging: It takes them about eight hours to charge for 16 hours of use.

Source: *RD.com*

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Sharing your mistakes helps staff grow

It's normal for leaders to want to look and act like they have it all together – and most probably do the majority of the time. But guess what? Showing you make mistakes can help your employees improve and grow.

A recent study showed “people overlook the information in failure,” when there is actual value in sharing failures.

Commands attention

Science has proved negative information:

- commands more attention than positive information
- is processed more deeply, and

- is remembered longer.

So, if you want your people to retain information faster and longer, tell them about a time you messed up.

Remember: Mistakes don't make you weak. They make you human. By sharing, your staff will respect you more, learn from your mistakes and avoid making the same ones.

Another important step is to explain how you figured out what went wrong and what you did to make sure it didn't happen again.

Sharing cautionary tales may not be pleasant for you, but it does have its benefits.

Source: tinyurl.com/sharefailures484

And your least productive, bad employees are ...

Whether you're hiring or trying to help a poor performer rise up, you'll want to know who a recent study identified as the least productive, disruptive employees.

It's the people who are easily offended, according to San Diego State University researchers whose study was published in the *Journal of Business Research*.

They complain and worry more than most

These employees have a “tendency to be sensitive to customarily innocuous societal

events and traditions.” Basically, they're easily triggered by anything, researchers said.

They're less productive because they complain a lot and worry about how their employer is “less fair” than everyone else's. They're also less helpful to others at work.

Hiring managers will want to watch out for negative, easily offended reactions. And if you manage an employee who leans that way, recognize he or she might thrive doing more individual, less collaborative, work.

Source: tinyurl.com/offended484

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

No, the company lost.

The employee's attorney argued he had undergone surgery that rendered him disabled, and the company had a responsibility to accommodate him under the ADA.

But the company said it didn't have an obligation to accommodate him with unpaid leave beyond his 16 weeks because he didn't provide assurance on his leave end date.

However, an accommodation that fails to guarantee a return-to-work date isn't unreasonable, the court said. As long as the extended leave doesn't pose “an undue hardship” on the firm, it needs to grant the accommodation.

The employee was able to show he communicated with the firm about his condition. The company was unable to prove the accommodation was an undue hardship.

Keep lines of communication open

Firing folks after FMLA leave is over isn't wise because it could trigger an ADA suit, especially if they're keeping the lines of communication open.

Key: Keep documented proof of the impact and “undue hardship” an employee's continued absence has on the business.

(Based on *Kachur v. NAV-LVH*. Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

Never interrupt your enemy when he is making a mistake.

– Napoleon Bonaparte

Success looks a lot like failure up until the moment you break through the finish line.

– Dan Waldschmidt

When you're good at something, you'll tell everyone. When you're great at something, they'll tell you.

– Walter Payton

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