

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

October 2, 2020



If you haven't been to our website recently, here's exclusive online content you've been missing:
www.CommunicationBulletin.com



Management Skills Center

Improve your skills and manage better



Professional Writing Center

Hundreds of tips to get writing right

How to effectively review remote employees: 7 best practices

They were out of sight, but never out of mind

So, you've overcome the working and managing from home hurdle.

The next is just ahead: remote performance reviews.

Performance reviews are stressful for both sides under normal circumstances. Now, leaders have to take stock of people they haven't seen in months and review work they've only witnessed from afar.

Fortunately, leaders can do it effectively and fairly under the circumstances. Here's help from Wesleyan University Lecturer Rebecca Knight.

Consider the purpose

Before COVID-19, performance reviews and conversations often focused on weeding out

bad behavior, improving work and rewarding great performance. But is that the case now?

Probably not. Instead, consider performance reviews as a platform to review the company's short- and long-term goals, and where employees and their remote work fits in. Talk performance in the new norm with an eye on the big picture.

Re-imagine the assessment

Performance is usually a measure of performance against a goal – and that goal was probably set before the coronavirus. So you might need to change what you base the assessment on. For instance, is it realistic for a salesperson to hit goals when the industry

Please see Remote ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Was worker fired for expressing her rights?

Manager Terry Jones adjusted her tablet as her niece's face popped up on her screen.

"Hi, sweetie! It's good to see you, at least virtually," Terry said. "How ya doing?"

"Not good, Aunt Terry! My job let me go," said Veronica. "And not because they were laying people off due to COVID-19! The whole thing is so unfair."

"Oh my goodness," gasped Terry. "What happened?"

"A little while ago, they told us that our checks would be late," said Veronica. "I told them that wasn't fair, and I had the right to be paid on time."

"I keep up with all these rules from when I used to work for dad's company helping with payroll."

"That can't be the reason they let you go," said Terry. "It doesn't make any sense."

Discussed delay

"Actually, I feel like it was," Veronica replied. "I repeated it to my manager a few times. A little while later, we had a meeting to discuss 'performance issues' that came out of nowhere. And then, suddenly, they let me go."

"My performance reviews have always been good with just a few things to work on," added Veronica.

Later, Veronica spoke with a lawyer and filed a lawsuit against her former company, saying she was fired in retaliation for insisting on timely pay. 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.

Remote ...

(continued from Page 1)

she sells to was shut down for three months? Instead, you might want to focus more on employees' growth, learning and adaptability.

Reconsider ratings

Similarly, managers and supervisors might want to reconsider using anything that's numerically rated for performance reviews. Just like many schools went to "pass/fail," you might try something similar when rating the performance of tasks.

Get some different perspective

Experts warn that leaders' biases – positive and negative – can be amplified now. So, in your separation, it may still look like superstars are doing outstanding work and stragglers are just dropping the ball.

To counter potential biases, look for other sources for performance reviews. Request self-evaluations. And ask others how the employee you're reviewing proactively communicates, connects, helps, collaborates, etc.

Meet face to face

Zoom fatigue is real, but it's important to have performance review

conversations face to face, as you would if you worked together on-site. You'll have to watch for body language – and ask specific questions if you suspect they feel differently than what they say. For instance, if they sit cross armed – which indicates resistance – you'll want to ask if there's something they don't agree with.

Show compassion

Recognize and acknowledge the extremely different circumstances employees work under now – such as trying to juggle dependent care with their work and home duties.

Ask how they're doing in this unprecedented situation and if there are ways you can help them thrive and be more successful.

Maintain balance

Leaders can't give passes to employees who have blatant disregard for their performance. But experts suggest giving a little more leeway with poor performers, who you'd demand improvement from under normal circumstances. Find out why they struggle and devise a plan for them to reasonably improve over a longer period than normal.

On the flip side, it's critical to acknowledge and praise hard work, engagement and solid collaboration.

Source: Harvard Business Review, [tinyurl.com/remotely484](https://www.tinyurl.com/remotely484)

TECH CORNER

Make hashtags work for your specific marketing message

Social media is a great marketing tool, if you're using it properly.

And one of the easiest ways to reach even more potential customers is by using hashtags.

Put on your thinking caps

While hashtags are easy to use, you still need to put on your thinking caps to determine what hashtags are right for your company.

Here are some tips for how to pick the best hashtags for your company that'll expand your social media

marketing presence:

- Go with hashtags similar to your products, services and overall brand.
 - Target the right audience by using your daily high-volume hashtags with local or branded hashtags.
 - Don't limit yourself. There are many ways to say the same thing: #growprofit, #profitgrow, #profitgrowth, etc.
 - While hashtags aren't case sensitive, capitalizing certain letters makes it easier to read.
 - Using alliteration helps things stick with readers, like #MegaMonday, #TechTuesday, #FabulousFriday, etc.
- Source:* [tinyurl.com/hashtagtips485](https://www.tinyurl.com/hashtagtips485)

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ What to do about the political banter gone wild

Whether employees are in a room or on a Zoom, talk often turns to politics this time of year.

That kind of talk has the potential to turn nasty. Managers want to stop unhealthy debates and maintain positive team dynamics. Sara Tarca, a well-being strategy consultant at OneDigital, suggests:

- **Rules of Engagement** Make a list of what's OK when it comes to political discussions. Everyone has a right to their views and others should accept differences respectfully.
- **Transparency.** Include your rules in meeting agendas. If tempers fly, you can handle disagreements and ease tension in a way employees expect.
- **Control what you can.** Focus on productivity, a positive environment and tools that encourage diversity of thought, respect and understanding.

Source: [onedigital.com](https://www.onedigital.com)

■ 3 teambuilding ideas for remote teams

Teambuilding can be awkward and boring when the group is together. How can it work when the group is remote?

These roadtested ideas prove you can have effective remote teambuilding:

- **Ice breakers.** Even if your team has been working together forever – and knows each other well – asking quirky questions to open meetings will enlighten. Try: *Who was the last artist you searched for on your music source? What are your parents' best qualities?*
- **Messy or dressy desk photos.** Ask everyone to share a shot of their home work spaces and explain briefly why they keep it that way.
- **Learning circles.** Invite a group – which might include others outside of your work group – to read a book or article, watch a video or listen to a podcast on a work-related subject that interests them. Meet virtually to discuss what you learned and can do with the new information.

Source: [tinyurl.com/teams485](https://www.tinyurl.com/teams485)

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 Provided emotional support during pandemic

The pandemic was taking a toll on our people. We wanted to offer emotional support to keep them healthy.

We started with scheduling changes, so employees had “wobble room” for logging their hours. Then we expanded sick days, so they could take up to three consecutive days without providing documentation.

Virtual concerts allowed employees to forget about the world and just enjoy the moment. And hosting casual video chats, as well as virtual coffee breaks and Friday happy hours, gave them a chance to connect and decrease their feelings of isolation.

2 ‘Employee forums’ led to better biz culture

Many believe you have to build a strong company culture from the top down, but we felt differently.

We believed employees of all titles, departments and ranks should have a hand in creating it. After all, those people can build a culture everyone will want to be a part of.

That led us to create what we call “employee forums.”

Find your fit

We created a bunch of groups, like a social forum, philanthropy forum and work culture forum.

Staff learned about each one and joined those that interested them. And the employees set the agendas.

These forums spurred more employee collaboration and creativity. For instance, the social forum planned happy hours and bowling nights. The philanthropy forum organized a toy drive for the holidays.

All in all, it’s boosted morale and created a culture everyone loves.

(Brian Murray, Director of Talent & Culture, Likable Media, New York)

Finally, we held regular online gaming tournaments and Instagram challenges.

Discuss challenges, successes

Dedicated human resources calls gave employees a chance to discuss their challenges and successes at work.

Not everyone is accustomed to remote work. That’s why we don’t add extra pressure by over-regulating it. Employees need time to find their rhythm.

(Pavel Kaplunou, Marketing Communications Manager, Smart-IT, San Francisco)

3 Found right-fit hires with this approach

Like all companies, ours had a culture, mostly intended and partly organic.

When we found people who we thought would be ideal candidates for jobs, we figured we could mold them to fit our culture.

We quickly found out we couldn’t manage people into a culture. So, some hires didn’t end up being as ideal as we had hoped.

‘Freedom with Responsibility’

To get more right-fit hires in the door, we focused on a major part of the culture most of us loved – our “Freedom with Responsibility.”

When we interviewed, we looked for people who disliked micromanaging and wanted autonomy. We even scored candidates on their approaches to problem-solving.

Focusing on an overriding feature of our culture helped us find people who would excel in – and even improve on – our workplace.

(Howard Spector, CEO, SimplePractice, Santa Monica, CA)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Can we stop employees working at home when sick?

Question: Now that many employees work from home, what if one is sick? Can we stop him from working?

Answer: Yes. But if he does work on the day(s) he’s sick, the Fair Labor Standards Act requires you pay to him for the time spent doing his work. Even if you have a policy that prohibits employees from working from home while sick, you’ll need to pay him, says employment law attorney Renee Manson of Pepper Hamilton LLP.

Bottom line: If the employee is sick and works from home anyway, you must pay him for the day, Manson says.

Now that companies have more people working from home, it’s important to create, share and enforce remote work policies. Spell out when sick employees can and can’t work from home, which positions the policy applies to, the types of duties that can be performed and how work time must be tracked.

Source: tinyurl.com/homesick485

LIGHTER SIDE

■ Does what you say mean what you think it does?

Misnomer: wrong or inaccurate use of a name. And here are a few that we’re all guilty of using:

- **The funny bone** is a nerve.
- **French fries** were invented in Belgium, not France.
- **Koala bears** are marsupials, not bears.
- **A 10-gallon hat** holds three quarts.
- **White chocolate** is cocoa butter and cream, not chocolate.
- **French and English horns** were born in England and Germany, respectively.
- **Starfish and jellyfish** aren’t fish. They’re echinoderms and cnidarians, respectively.

Source: tinyurl.com/minsnomers485

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Help staff deal with remote work stress

Many companies still have the majority, if not all, of their employees working remotely. Some have even committed to doing this through 2020. So, how do you keep staff from succumbing to the stress of it all?

Here are a few ideas:

- **Take breaks.** Encourage your people to take breaks throughout the day and disconnect from all electronics. Whether it's just resting for 10 minutes, taking a short walk or reading a physical book, doing something just for themselves helps them disconnect and refresh.
- **Establish good habits.** Going to bed at a decent hour and waking up rested helps

people be more efficient because they can stick to routines easier. Being tired causes people to be unfocused and spin their wheels, causing personal frustration.

How leaders can help

Not seeing your employees every day makes you less in tune with whether they're feeling burned out.

Be honest and direct with your team and encourage them to do the same. If you're feeling tired and burned out, there's a good chance they are too. Let them know you're always there to listen and help them.

Source: tinyurl.com/workstress485

Double-duty: 1 healthy way to make better decisions

Got a complex problem, big decision or difficult conversation ahead?

Here's a tool that can help you get them right: a purposeful walk.

Wharton Business School researchers say walking:

- promotes cell creation
 - sharpens the mind
 - releases endorphins, and
 - encourages inspiration and creativity.
- Even better, it doesn't matter where you

walk – city sidewalk, office park, nature trail, treadmill – or for how long: Any walk works.

Be open, free

Some keys:

- **Don't go in determined to figure it all out.** The walk doesn't need to be the solution. It's a stimulus to solution finding.
- **Keep it quiet.** Skip headphones and your cell phone. Focus on what's around you to open your mind to new ideas.

Source: tinyurl.com/walking485

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes, the employee's case moved forward. A court decided there was enough evidence for her to proceed with a retaliation claim under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

The employee said she was told her pay would be late. She informed her supervisor of her right to receive timely payment under the law, and shortly after, she was disciplined for her work performance and subsequently terminated.

While her employer argued this was a coincidence and the termination was based solely on her work performance, the court didn't agree.

The court said the timing of the firing was suspicious. Because it happened soon after

the employee engaged in what's considered protected activity under the FLSA, it could be seen as retaliation for speaking out.

Communication's critical

The FLSA doesn't put a specific time frame on when workers should expect timely payment, but some state and local laws do. So, stay informed.

No matter how well you've planned, stuff happens. Here, communication is critical to ensure employees understand the reason for the delay and exactly when they can expect to be paid.

(Based on *Stramaski v. Texas A&M Engineering Experiment Station*. Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

Seems like the light at the end of the tunnel may be you.

– Steven Tyler

Hustle until your haters ask if you're hiring.

– Steve Maraboli

Don't be afraid to give up the good to go for the great.

– John D. Rockefeller

Almost everything will work again if you unplug it for a few minutes, including you.

– Anne Lamott

EDITORS:
RENEE COCCHI
rcocchi@bbp.com

MICHELE MCGOVERN
mmcgovern@bbp.com

PRODUCTION EDITOR:
PATTI JACOBY

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR:
CURT BROWN

Subscriptions: 800-220-5000

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting or other professional services. If legal or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought. — From a declaration of principles jointly adopted by a committee of the American Bar Association and a committee of publishers.

♻️ Printed on recycled paper.

Copyright © 2020 Progressive Business Publications. Please respect our copyright: Reproduction of this material is prohibited without prior permission. All rights reserved in all countries.

Communication Bulletin for Managers & Supervisors (ISSN 1523-4290), issue date October 2, 2020, Vol. 22 No. 485, is published semi-monthly, (24 times a year) by Progressive Business Publications, 370 Technology Drive, Malvern, PA 19355; PHONE: 800-220-5000. FAX: 610-647-8089. Periodicals Postage Paid at West Chester, PA 19380. Postmaster: Send address changes to Communication Bulletin for Managers & Supervisors, 370 Technology Drive, Malvern, PA 19355.