

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

November 2, 2020



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'Words matter': 4 keys to communicate important messages

Take tips from leaders who've communicated well

We aren't over any hump yet. Businesses aren't settled. And leaders still need to help employees adapt through change.

Sure, some fear and uncertainty have passed. But leaders need to communicate increasingly complex information in more ways than ever.

"Words matter, because people are scared and people panic," New York Governor Andrew Cuomo told reporters early in the coronavirus pandemic.

It's advice workplace leaders want to keep in mind now.

Your words matter in helping employees understand and interpret what's going on – and how they'll react.

Here are four keys to communicating well through and beyond a crisis. They come from Carmine Gallo, a Harvard University professor and author of *Five Stars: The Communication Secrets to Get from Good to Great*.

Choose small words with big impact

Almost always, simple words will do the job to convey important information.

In fact, leaders who use long, complex words can lose ground: If people can't follow what's going on, they'll lose focus faster because the crisis already affects their attention spans.

At the onset of restrictions to stop the coronavirus spread, Cuomo tweeted: *Stay*

Please see Words ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Worker at risk: Miscommunication or disregard?

"I never gave them permission to set one little toe in that trench," said Supervisor Ed Blue. "Why would I? I inspected the building and found cracks in the wall. I knew it wasn't safe."

"But did you specifically tell them face to face not to go in the trench?" asked lawyer Bernie Evans. "That's what's vital to fighting this fine."

Asked questions

"Yes! I told Diego, the team leader, they'd have to put the pipes in the trench with a crane, but not to physically go into it," said Ed.

"Are you sure?" asked Bernie. "Because Diego said he had never installed pipes from outside of a trench before."

"You've got to be kidding me!" exclaimed Ed. "I know he hadn't, which is why I explained how to do it step by step. Diego even asked me about a dozen questions, and I answered each one in detail."

"So did they go in the trench?" asked Bernie.

"I assume so, but I was in the office doing paperwork," Ed replied. "But the Occupational Safety and Health Administration inspector said they saw a few men in the trench. When I asked Diego about it, he said he had his team climb in to unhook the pipes for some reason. What more was I supposed to do?"

The company fought the fine for having workers in a trench exposed to cave-in hazards. Was its appeal successful?

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.

Words ...

(continued from Page 1)

Home. Stop the Spread. Save Lives.

He didn't send out a long edict with 10 reasons behind the need to stay home. His 39-character tweet made clear what people needed to do for at least the time being. And they did it.

Leaders want to avoid acronyms and complex industry or situational terms. Stick to the language your people use.

Give short, concise directions. Don't cloud important directives with extra details and wordy explanations.

Personalize all communication

People love stories, especially ones they see themselves in.

When communicating through and beyond a crisis, leaders want to tell short stories relevant to how employees are affected by what's happening.

You might talk about a great struggle the company overcame. Or get even more personal and talk about a struggle and the fears you had when facing it (without bragging about the victory or whining about a loss).

Use analogies

People process what's going on around them best by associating it

with something familiar.

They're comforted in the familiarity of a previous experience.

So, leaders want to give employees mental short cuts.

For instance, can you relate the need to take pay cuts to a short-term sacrifice employees made in the past that had a long-term benefit?

Or can you relate it to something even greater, such as supply sacrifices Americans made in WWII to help the country?

Stick to 3 key points

People like things grouped in threes – and the reason is simple. We can hold only a few items in our short-term memory. Remembering is key to execution.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, head of the National Institutes of Health, is widely considered a strong leader who has followed the three-point rule regularly.

For instance, he stressed we could lower distancing guidelines when three things were in place: “the ability to test, isolate, and do contact tracing.”

When leaders give fewer, concrete instructions, people will more likely accept and act on them.

Source: HBR, tinyurl.com/communicate484

TECH CORNER

A 5-step kick-start plan for more secure file sharing

Cloud-based file sharing makes work life so much easier. But the threat of cyberattacks and hacks is real and in no way can be taken lightly!

Here are five best practices for safe and secure file sharing:

1. **Don't wait until it's too late.** Just because nothing has happened yet doesn't mean it won't. Start talking about it with your team now.
2. **Reassess your system.** It's best if your program is a business-grade cloud system that has visibility and security controls. Consumer grade systems may be tempting, but they leave you susceptible to hackers.
3. **Find a solution that's easy to install so you can hit the ground running.** Again, business-grade cloud systems offer this and ongoing agility.
4. **Ensure longevity.** Ease of use is key to making sure your system has staying power. If the system isn't intuitive to employees, chances are things will slip through the cracks and make your system vulnerable.
5. **Train!** First get everyone on the same page, then provide one-on-one trainings as needed (e.g., for less tech-savvy or newer staffers).

Source: tinyurl.com/filesshare487

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

Why leaders need an alter ego like Beyoncé's

Beyoncé created an alter ego, “Sasha Fierce,” in 2003 to boost her confidence and perform better. She called it a psychological crutch to use until she got a grip on her job, expectations and stardom.

Researchers found embracing an alter ego is a good leadership technique, too. It can cut anxiety and build confidence and determination. How? An alter ego helps people self-distance and think rationally about stressful situations – such as having difficult conversations, handling serious situations or sharing bad news.

One key: Try different personas. For instance, use a trusted mentor – Wise Will – for professional situations, and a favorite family member – Aunt Agatha – for personal situations. Then ask yourself: WWWWD do? Or WWAAD do?

Source: tinyurl.com/alterego487

Ask better questions to gauge engagement

Stop asking employees, “How are you doing?” if you want to really gauge their engagement on-site or remotely.

These questions from self-declared Leadership Freak Dan Rockwell work better at getting employees to open up:

- What's important on your agenda?
- What challenges are you facing?
- What's working for you?
- What are you looking forward to?
- What would you like to get done now?

Source: tinyurl.com/quesitons487

COVID's trend: 4-day week

COVID-19 forced companies into a work-from-home model – and that's increasingly turning into a four-day week.

Many companies found the same amount of high quality work got done when they moved to a three-day weekend (either because they took a pay cut or wanted to boost morale). It might be a model worth trying for a bit.

Source: tinyurl.com/4day487

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 How we solved a ton of COVID-19 issues on the fly

When the pandemic hit, we were faced with a number of challenges.

What was the best way to communicate with remote staff? What could we do with employees who couldn't do their jobs from home but were at risk and couldn't come into the office? How could we cut our budget to stay afloat? It was a lot, but we took it one step at a time.

Constant problem solving

First, we created a schedule, so we could routinely communicate with remote workers. We didn't want anyone falling through the cracks.

Next, we dealt with people who couldn't work remotely and gave them options. Some of them went to work at our less crowded locations. Others took temp positions they could do from home. A few even took leave.

As far as budget issues, we haven't laid off anyone. While we did furlough some people, we're working hard to bring them back.

Since we've been able to alleviate a lot of pandemic headaches, we're confident that with open communication, we can handle anything.

(Heather Britton, Director of Benefits and Wellness, City and County of Denver)

2 Recruitment: Spoke to what women wanted

We've sought to increase the number of women in management roles for more than a decade. So, we stepped up our commitment to recruit, retain and promote women in management ranks.

We did this by adding a new policy: three months of maternity leave at 100% pay.

It came about after a regular review of our policies and market practices, as well as feedback from employees.

This policy positions us now as an attractive employer in the U.S. market.

30% women managers by 2025

We've also committed to increase the number of women in our management ranks to 30% by 2025. The new policy is expected to help us achieve that goal.

Previously, we formed regional Women in Logistics groups that discuss issues relevant to women in the workplace.

If we really want to create a sustained change, it comes down to culture and ensuring everyone is on board, including our male colleagues.

(Meredith Singletary, Senior HR Director, DHL, Spring, TX)

3 'Family & Friends Day' encourages time off

We found our employees were putting in more hours than ever once most of them started working from home.

On the surface, that might seem like a good problem to have, but we didn't see it that way. We worried they neglected their well-being in the pandemic – and burnout would follow.

We wanted to encourage employees to take time off – like they did on-site – to relax and recharge.

Share photos of adventures

To do that, we created Family and Friends Day – a day when we virtually shut down, so everyone could take off. With everyone off, no one feels compelled to look at, initiate or respond to work demands. They're just not there!

Employees share fun photos of the things they've done on the day off in a Slack channel. We hope to continue with one each month, so they remain motivated and avoid burnout.

(Darren Murph, Head of Remote Work, GitLab, San Francisco, shared this success in CNN Business)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

Can we ask sick employee more pressing questions?

Question: We want to keep employees safe and avoid the spread of coronavirus. So, if one employee calls in sick, can we ask more questions to determine if it's coronavirus?

Answer: Yes, says Karin Cogbill, an employment law attorney with Hopkins & Carley.

During a pandemic, it's OK for employers to ask questions to determine if an employee might be affected by the virus.

In fact, you can be specific, Cogbill says: Ask employees if they're experiencing coronavirus symptoms, which include: fever, chills, cough, shortness of breath and sore throat.

You must keep all the information about the employee and his or her illness confidential, but it's important to stay on top of potential cases, so you can keep all of your employees as safe as possible.

Source: HRMorning, tinyurl.com/sick487

LIGHTER SIDE

Working in a fishbowl

Communicating through Zoom meetings can make us feel like we work in a fishbowl instead of a company.

That makes underwater jokes as timely as ever. Try these from Twitter:

- The most judgmental aquatic animal is probably the seal of disapproval – @WheelTod
- Lobsters would be proud of themselves if they knew how expensive they were – @MegsDeAngelis
- I'm jealous of turtles. They can go home whenever they want – @3sunzzz
- People freak out because of sharks in the ocean. News flash: That's where they live. If you see them at Chipolte, then we have a problem – @bigkefd

Source: RD.com

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Unique perks help staff bond, have fun

During these difficult times, it's important for employers to support workers' mental and physical well-being.

Common ways firms do this include greater flexibility and access to counseling. But some companies have taken unique approaches.

Engagement and education

Here are four unusual benefits employers now offer, as found in a recent survey:

1. **Virtual grocery store walk-throughs.** This perk teaches employees about nutrition. Dietitians conduct virtual grocery store tours with employees, pointing out healthy choices and giving tips on reading food

labels and planning healthy snacks and meals.

2. **A Facebook group for topics other than work.** This provides a way for colleagues to connect outside of work and interact. They learn about each other and just have fun.
3. **Pet photo swaps.** Co-workers post pet photos for everyone to enjoy. It's a great way to connect employees, especially those who gravitate more toward animals.
4. **Virtual child care.** To keep kids occupied while parents work, some firms offer virtual crafts and activities kids can do aside from their schooling.

Source: tinyurl.com/uniqueperks487

Here's what employees miss most in post-COVID-19 upheaval

You might think employees who were uprooted from the workplace would miss collaboration and happy hours most.

But they don't. It's the praise they miss, according to research from Achievers: 35% said they need more recognition for the work they've done and continue to do.

"The more recently an individual received recognition, the more likely they are to be engaged," says Dr. Natalie Baumgartner, Chief Workforce Scientist at Achievers.

Employees who aren't on-site and don't

receive enough recognition are at high risk of becoming disengaged and unmotivated.

Crank up recognition

To give effective recognition, be:

- **Timely.** Say something – via email, social media, text, call, Skype, etc. – quickly after the praise-worthy incident.
- **Specific.** Mention the exact action.
- **Based on value.** Explain how the work positively affects a greater good.

Source: tinyurl.com/missmost487

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes and no. The company appealed the fine to the Occupational Safety and Health Review Commission (OSHRC).

The violation stood, but it was downgraded to a lesser fine.

Even though the worker was instructed not to go into the trench, he went in anyway to remove straps from a pipe. That violated the supervisor's orders.

But OSHRC said the supervisor knew how confused the worker was because he asked several questions about the job.

Despite that, the supervisor chose to go inside to do paperwork rather than stick around and make sure the job was done safely.

That showed that while the supervisor did instruct the workers not to go into the trench, he failed to prevent the hazard.

Verbal instructions not always enough

This supervisor was clearly concerned for his workers' safety – that's why he told them not to enter the trench.

But sometimes verbal instructions aren't enough. Watch for signs of confusion or misunderstanding. Those are cues to take a hands-on approach and observe workers carefully.

(Based on *Secretary of Labor v. Piedmont*.
Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

The pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity. The optimist sees opportunity in every difficulty.

– Winston Churchill

The greatest pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do.

– Walter Bagehot

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