

Communication

Bulletin for Managers & Supervisors™

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

December 1, 2020



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www.CommunicationBulletin.com



Management Skills Center

Improve your skills and manage better



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Hundreds of tips to get writing right

Build a confident, connected workforce during COVID-19

You can help make cautious employees feel secure

Whether your employees have returned to work or will soon, they're probably still apprehensive.

In fact, as this unprecedented year wore on, Gallup researchers found employees felt *less*:

- informed on their companies' COVID-19 response plan
 - connected to their supervisors
 - prepared to do their job, and
 - compassion for their overall well-being.
- Ouch!

"These fears are neither surprising nor irrational," says Ron Carucci, co-founder and managing partner at Navalent and author of *Rising to Power*. "Back at the office, if your

brain reaches for the autopilot version of a familiar routine, it will get short-circuited by your new reality. When that happens, you may feel 'lost in the familiar.'"

Here are five things leaders can do to help employees regain confidence, stay connected, and feel comfortable and safe in their new working conditions.

Communicate like never before

The coronavirus and business disruption led to rapid-fire changes and many emotional responses from employees.

Now, managers will want to communicate what's going on – and why – more than ever

Please see Connected ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Job was cut, worker sues for discrimination

"Hi, Reba," said Manager Tia Richards as she stepped into Company Attorney Reba Galia's office. "I know we need to talk about Jill Moon's lawsuit. What's going on?"

"She's suing us for age discrimination. She'd been with the company 40 years, and was a good employee, for the most part, which might help her win her case," said Reba.

Eliminated job

"Yes, but we eliminated her position because her new supervisor noticed she was falling behind in her work," said Tia. "Technically, her skills just weren't as advanced as the others in the department."

"I understand, but now she's claiming her

much younger supervisor made disparaging and discriminatory comments, like 'You're kind of getting up their in years' and 'Aren't you ready to retire?' Do you know about this?" asked Reba.

"Her supervisor said she never uttered such comments. And we have a track record of hiring older employees. In fact, after her supervisor was hired, the number of older employers increased. That should count for something," said Tia.

"Let's hope so," said Reba. "But Jill also claims she failed to get her annual performance review when the new supervisor came on board, as stated in the employee handbook. That's something that shouldn't have happened."

Tia's company fought to get the case dismissed. Did it 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.

Connected ...

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before to help employees rationalize what's going on. Gallup suggests creating a communication task force or a specialized leadership role to share updates, as well as identify bottlenecks, breakdowns and misinformation.

At the same time, the task force or leader can be the sounding board for employees. Ask employees who are less vocal what they think of changes and if they feel safe and confident at work. Ask everyone about the challenges they face – and how leaders can support them differently or better.

Be honest about anxiety

Some leaders may read this and think, “I’m nervous to get back to the office or stay home even longer, too.”

You don’t want to mask anxiety behind feigned confidence or positivity. Let employees know you’re a bit anxious about changes and uncertainty, too. But emphasize that you’re ready to face the challenges and can talk about the situation and emotions it evokes any time.

Be patient, flexible

The protocols that are in place now will likely continue to change – and

you’ll need to guide employees while figuring them out yourself.

That calls for patience and flexibility. Look at – and relay – change as a positive sign your organization is open to learning, adapting and improving the workplace for everyone.

Know and share your limits

Employees who struggle with balancing work and life – whether its on-site or from home – often assume their boss will have all the answers.

And you probably don’t.

The best thing you can do to help anxious or frustrated employees is listen. Then give honest answers, telling them when you don’t know something, and promising to find out all you can or do what’s possible to help.

Be a source of joy

Make the transition – and the struggles that will arise – easier by injecting joy. One manager regularly asks employees to share “work-from-home mishaps” and “unexpected delights” so everyone smiles and feels they aren’t alone in setbacks or wins.

In the workplace, replace high-fives and handshakes with positive notes and congratulatory email messages.

Sources: tinyurl.com/gallup489 and tinyurl.com/HBR489

TECH CORNER

Avoid top pet peeves for better digital experience

While technology has many benefits in the workplace, it can also have its drawbacks.

The *Wall Street Journal* set out to discover employees’ biggest tech pet peeves. And it found their gripes often aren’t with the technology itself – but how people use it.

The top 7

Here are seven of the most common complaints you might want to work to rid your office of:

1. Too many CCs: People CC you on

every email in long threads when it isn’t necessary.

2. No reply: You send a message and get nothing back.

3. Channel hopping: People “hop” from email to chat to Slack, creating a trail that’s hard to follow.

4. “Sound on” devices: You hear their phone and PC constantly ping with notifications and alerts.

5. Tech pushback: People refuse to adapt and use newer channels or tech.

6. Smiley faces: Though these emoticons are well-intended, some people feel they’re unprofessional.

7. Email subject lines: They may be too long, too short or just plain unclear.

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

4 high-potential leaders hiding in your midst

You likely have high-potential leaders hidden behind the big mouths, ladder-climbers and attention-seekers.

Here are potential leaders to take a closer look at and offer opportunities to:

- **Second mate.** Who gives critical, specialized direction? This person always has the right answer, but waits to be asked instead of taking initiative.
- **Philanthropist.** Who downplays her role or always gives a group all the credit? This person gives accolades, but don’t let that fool you. She’s behind the success of others.
- **Sentry.** Who stays the course, never getting excited, distracted or frustrated? This person knows how to stay focused – and can likely lead others through ups and downs.
- **Worker Bee.** Who gets it all done, never losing steam, and is appreciated but not well-noticed? This person can keep others on task, too.

Source: *SmartBriefs*, tinyurl.com/leaders489

Stop virtual meeting hate: 3 reasons they’re better

You might dislike virtual meetings, but there are reasons to applaud them – and maximize their value.

Turns out, they’re better than in-person meetings in these areas:

- **More accurate sentiment.** People are subconsciously inclined to bend to the consensus in person, even when they disagree with the idea. With online polling, people give anonymous, truer feedback.
- **Wider reach.** Some companies included a small group of employees at off-site, multiday events. Now, big business and social events can be spread out over weeks and include more people (and insight).
- **Better brainstorming.** Leaders can create varied groups to brainstorm like never before with breakouts from larger virtual meetings – and monitor with a click of key.

Source: tinyurl.com/meetings489

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 Eased concerns by talking one on one with staff

When I was brought on to manage an established team, I saw right away how wary they were of me.

They thought I was inexperienced and wouldn't be there for long.

I knew part of their wariness was the fear I was going to make a lot of changes. But I couldn't let their skepticism get to me.

I had to change the vibe and get them to see they could count on me.

Individual connections

That meant talking with people all around the office.

I asked questions about current processes and asked for feedback on potential changes, showing I cared and valued their input.

If they had concerns, I made sure they knew that I understood them. And I emphasized my goal was to help make things better for all of us.

When I had these talks with others, I could see their attitudes shifting. It'd been a long time since someone had come in and tried to improve their processes, and in the end, it got a lot of staffers really excited!

(Melisa Garcia, Finance Manager, Acuren Inspection Inc., Danbury, CT)

2 Gave our hiring process a makeover

Our hiring strategies were OK, but we knew we could be more effective in getting the right candidates.

After a lot of brainstorming and research, we put together a three-step plan to streamline hiring.

3-step process

1. Instead of using staffing agencies, HR now places ads on a site that posts openings on multiple job boards.

2. We meet with the managers to form 10 key questions related to the job. These questions are compiled into a written questionnaire for candidates.

3. We put together a spreadsheet with key traits for the position. If the candidate has one, we check it. Those with the most checks are interviewed.

The questionnaires not only give us the ability to see how the applicant fits with the "actuals" of the position, we can also see their writing skill level.

Now, selections are made starting with the applicant's responses to the questionnaire instead of a well-written resume.

(Sonya Mayfield, HR Director, Gaming Partners Int'l, Las Vegas)

3 On-site classroom helps working parents

We had employees with serious work-life burdens. The biggest: How could they work while attending to children who had to learn from home?

We needed them on-site, and many needed to be home since their kids were there. It was a dilemma and a struggle. We found a way to help them.

Teachers included

We converted two conference rooms into on-site classrooms. We socially distanced desks and invited employees to bring their remote learners to the "school" while they worked.

We hired a teacher to keep an eye on the students and help with their different needs – the kids varied in age and attended different school programs.

We even brought in a fitness instructor to help them stay physically healthy.

All the while, employees could do their jobs with peace of mind. It's turned into a great employee benefit.

(Chris Hackett, CEO, i2M, Wilkes-Barre, PA, shared his success in The Scranton Times)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Staff's not sure we're safe on-site: Anything I can do?

Question: It seems like my company is doing everything it can to keep us safe and healthy. But some employees have complained it's not enough. Is there anything I – or they – can do?

Answer: Yes, says Debbie Berkowitz, director of the Worker Health and Safety Program at the National Employment Law Project. If employees have concerns about the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines, such as hand-washing or mask requirements, have them talk to their boss first, she says.

Hopefully, it's just a matter of bringing issues to their attention. If it's more than that, they can file complaints with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

OSHA is required to follow up on complaints and can determine if anyone violated its general-duty clause. However, remember CDC guidelines are recommendations – and companies can't be sanctioned for violating them.

Source: tinyurl.com/WSJ489

LIGHTER SIDE

■ No need to feel bad about communication mistakes

We all make mistakes when communicating.

So we can understand when newspapers need to fix things like these:

- **Correction:** "In yesterday's jazz albums column, we incorrectly referred to Don Rendell as 'terrorist' when it clearly should have been 'tenorist.'"
- **Advertisement:** "One of the greatest gifts you'll ever give your family may be your funeral."
- **Headline:** "City Manager Tapes Head to District Attorney."
- **Headline:** "Netflix Misses Subscriber Mark."

Source: *RD.com*

COMMUNICATION NEWS

How to communicate – even in a mask

The pandemic has brought a lot of new work challenges, and a major one is communicating while wearing a mask.

People can still hear voices through the masks, but they're missing key facial expressions that help convey sincerity and tone.

Keys to get your point across

Here are some *Harvard Business Review* keys to successful masked communication:

1. **Avoid clear masks.** Some think transparent masks are the key here, but they tend to fog up easily, which is more distracting.
2. **Practice your "mask voice."** While speaking

with a face covering, it's important to remember four things: pauses, accentuation, volume and emotion. Give people the chance to jump in, and slightly exaggerate both volume and tone.

3. **Be an active listener.** Nodding or an occasional "Mm-hmm" lets people know you hear them. If they seem upset, confirm this by stating, "So what I'm hearing is ..."
4. **Use body language.** This is so important in conveying tone, though you don't want to overdo it. Experts say to increase your number of gestures by about 10% and smile. They won't see it through your mask, but your eyes will look more friendly.

What employees need from 1-on-1 meetings now

One-on-one meetings may be virtual or behind masks these days, but they're as critical to employee engagement as ever.

What do employees need from undistracted time with you? Direction and connection, say leadership experts David Dye and Karin Hurt.

6 critical things to provide

- To make your one-on-ones effective, give:
- **Clarity.** Help employees see and understand the most important priorities now.
 - **Compassion.** Show employees they matter

as much as their performance.

- **Consistency.** Meet at a regular cadence to show their well-being is important to you.
- **Credibility.** Be honest. Let them know if you're frustrated, worried or excited, too, so they don't feel alone in their emotions.
- **Capacity.** Ask what they can handle – and what they need to succeed.
- **Curiosity.** Ask for their insight and ideas on solutions to issues.

Source: tinyurl.com/1on1489

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

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No. The company lost when a court said the supervisor's comments were direct evidence of age discrimination.

The employee testified her younger boss made a series of disparaging comments about her age and she wasn't told about any performance issues.

The company pointed to its track record of hiring older employees as evidence it didn't discriminate and argued the employee's position would've been eliminated regardless of her age.

The court disagreed. By failing to show evidence of deficient performance and failing to complete a formal evaluation as required by the

company handbook, there was no documentation to back up the firm's actions.

Document all performance concerns

This case shows how vital it is for companies to document performance issues. Shifts in job responsibilities can be a breeding ground for age discrimination claims. To prevent them, communicate and document any performance concerns.

And, most importantly, complete employee evaluations as required by company policies.

(Based on *Lowe v. Walbro LLC*. Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

Just one small positive thought in the morning can change your whole day.

– Dalai Lama

When we strive to become better than we are, everything around us becomes better, too.

– Paulo Coelho

The key to successful leadership today is influence, not authority.

– Ken Blanchard

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