

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

December 15, 2020



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www.CommunicationBulletin.com



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5 power phrases: Stay calm and in control of difficult situations

Being positive and helpful benefits everyone

As a leader, you'd like to have the right words at the right time all the time. But you know it's impossible.

However having a few "power phrases" ready for difficult conversations or uncomfortable situations will have you hitting the right chord more often than not.

"People who communicate with confidence are calm and in control," says Liz Uram, author of *Communicate Like a Boss: Every Day Leadership Skills That Produce Real Results*.

"They strive to be positive and helpful in order to get a good result that benefits everyone. However, it can be hard to keep your cool if you aren't equipped with the right tools."

So, yes, a few canned phrases – and the sincere sentiment behind them – can help reduce frustrations, calm anger and show empathy.

The better part, they work regardless of the reason for the difficult conversation.

Uram suggests using these phrases:

'That sounds really hard'

Some employees and colleagues might come to you saying they want help, and they vent for quite a while.

But pay attention: If you offer a solution to the issue and they give reasons why it won't

Please see Phrases ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Is disabled worker's accommodation reasonable?

"I can't take this anymore," said Peg Carter, barging into HR Director Len Pauley's office.

"Good afternoon, Peg," Len said, trying to keep a smile on his face. "What's wrong?"

"You know what's wrong," said Peg. "We talked about it before. When are you going to do something about Dale? I can't work under him."

"We can't punish Dale because you think he's being a little hard on you," said Len.

Accommodation required?

"I have a disability, and you know that stress triggers my epileptic seizures," said Peg. "That means you have to give me an accommodation."

"So either get him to lighten up, or transfer me."

"We only have to give you an accommodation if it's reasonable for us to do so," Len said. "And it's not reasonable for us to move you right now – or somehow get Dale to change his personality."

"Besides, we've already given you plenty of accommodations," Len added. "You take extra breaks to relieve stress, and we moved your desk to a quieter place."

"It's not enough," Peg said. "Dale's harder on me because of my condition. If you won't do anything about it, I'll sue."

Len's company fought Peg's ADA lawsuit, saying her accommodation request was unreasonable. 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.

Phrases ...

(continued from Page 1)

work, it's likely they actually don't want your advice.

"They aren't telling you about their problem because they want a solution. They just want you to listen. They are looking for empathy," states Uram.

Say, "That sounds really hard," to validate their feelings, give them room to say their piece and hopefully move on!

'I agree'

These two words are surprisingly effective at stopping arguments and quieting irrational behavior.

They can stop aggression in its tracks and eliminate arguments.

Even better, you don't have to agree with everything they say. Just find a nugget to agree with.

For instance, "I agree this is frustrating" or "I agree we need to do something." Then you can move toward a resolution.

'I noticed'

When you need to start a conversation to address issues, you want to avoid quantifiers such as, "You always ..." or "You never ..."

Instead, be specific, but take the onus

off the other person.

Try these examples: "I noticed you were late three times this week. Is there something we can work on together to help you get to work on time?"

"I noticed you raised your voice and used angry words with Rich in our last two meetings. Is there something more I should know about?"

'I need your agreement'

Sometimes you need to tell employees things they don't want to hear. Or you need them to do things they're reluctant to do.

Avoid saying, "You need to ..." "You must ..." or "You have to ..."

Instead, gain acceptance to an idea they don't love by saying, "I need your agreement to ..."

'What are you going to do about it?'

Leaders want to show empathy at all times with employees, colleagues and customers. But you can't solve all their problems. Plus, people will put more effort into their own ideas.

So when capable people bring you problems, put them in control. Say, "What are you going to do about it?" And encourage their good ideas.

"The words you use to start off a potentially difficult conversation are the key to a positive or negative outcome," Uram says.

Source: lizuram.com

TECH CORNER

Increase your efficiency at home: Give Wi-Fi a boost

Working from home has its good and bad points.

If you want to increase the good side of the situation, try these tips:

Boost Wi-Fi

- A slow internet connection can affect your Zoom meetings and a lot more. If you're experiencing this, move your router. Make sure it's in an open, central place.
- When was the last time you updated your router's software? Don't know? Experts say you should do

it regularly. Check out the router's software admin page for updates.

- How secure is your network? Increase security by going to the admin page online and choosing security level WPA2. Make sure your password is strong – include uppercase and lowercase letters, numerals and special symbols.
- Got dead zones in your house? It happens sometime with large homes. Consider getting a wireless mesh network, which provides a more stable network by using multiple connection points throughout the house (tinyurl.com/meshnet490).

Source: tinyurl.com/techhacks490

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ 4 criteria for individual work-from-home plans

Half of employees who work from home want to keep it that way, a Gallup survey found. And most managers say it works and they'll allow it more often.

So you want a plan that fits each employee. Here are four critical criteria to include, according to Gallup:

- **Readiness.** Is the employee comfortable with remote protocols?
- **Circumstances.** What kind of personal demands does the employee have that could help or hinder remote work? Is there a well-defined space for remote work?
- **Performance.** Has the employee's performance changed in the shift to remote work?
- **Strengths.** Is the employee naturally a self-starter, motivated and able to work alone?

Source: tinyurl.com/wfh491

■ Avoid the 3 elements of bad decision making

Bad thinking leads to bad decisions, according to management and leadership expert and consultant Michael Hyatt.

Here are three culprits behind bad thinking and how to avoid them:

- **The Rosy Scenario.** You get so wedded to the outcome you want, you only consider what supports it. *Avoid it:* Balance what can be proven with what you think.
- **The Wrong Ingredient.** You attribute a recent success to one component of the project – and it's not necessarily the right one or the thing to hinge the next success on. *Avoid it:* Research more. Ask trusted colleagues for their insight on the key ingredients to success.
- **The Binary Approach.** You think your options for success are either/or – and rule out a third option that reconciles the other two. *Avoid it:* Step back from an either/or situation and look for other options. Even better, ask your team to help you find alternatives.

Source: tinyurl.com/badD490

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 Transformed meetings to engage remote teams

To engage employees, we had daily, weekly and monthly events – and a huge annual retreat. Now we don't even see each other at all.

Like many companies, the pandemic made us move to remote work instantly.

We quickly figured out how to get the work done, but we were losing engagement and motivation.

Made it a priority

We had to make communication and interaction a priority when we moved off site. Here's what's worked:

- Daily group rendezvous on Slack to

check status and discuss concerns.

- Weekly one-on-one video chats between employees and their direct boss to go over projects, check on resources and just keep in the loop.
- Monthly all-hands-on video meeting when leaders share company performance metrics, department highlights and a "show and tell" on something unique we're working on.

So far, these remote meetings haven't overwhelmed employees. Instead, they've been the right mix to keep them engaged, informed and motivated.

(Thibaud Clement, CEO, Loomly, Los Angeles)

2 Accommodated staff to work at home

In March, we made a plan to close our four locations. We had a week to prepare 40% of our staff to work full-time from home.

We immediately got our order in for laptops, computer bags and headsets. Coordination between teams, hands-on laptop configuration and drive-thru pickup got everyone geared up fast.

To make sure managers were ready, we created guidelines for accountability and performance measures.

Asked what they needed

Now we continually ask our employees what they need and deliver a wide variety of resources via our internal website.

In addition, company leaders provide daily information inspiring and unifying us. We emphasize treating everyone with grace and empathy.

Of course, we'll continue adjusting our processes. What won't change is our dedication to our employees. After all, people are the "why" of everything we do.

(David Mele, President, Homes.com, Norfolk, VA)

3 Figured out new way to boost engagement

We relied on gift cards to recognize and reward great work. IRS guidelines changed, mandating we find new ways to do that.

One idea from management was to give a gift to all staff. But we realized our budget could do more and have a bigger impact if we deployed a targeted recognition system.

Recognition platform

Working with a vendor, we consolidated our recognition initiatives onto a single platform.

Performance incentives and service awards that we'd been giving as taxable bonuses were converted to points staff could redeem for jewelry, electronics, leisure items and more.

But it went beyond material rewards. We saw a dramatic increase in night shift employee engagement, in part because of appreciation notes the day shift workers post on our recognition wall.

Tying recognition to our core values helps people understand our mission.

(Jeremy Stephens, Associate VP of HR, Tideland Health, Charleston, SC)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Can COVID-19-positive employee sue us for illness?

Question: Despite all of our safety precautions, we ended up with few cases of COVID-19 in the workplace. Can an employee, who claims she got it here, sue us over this?

Answer: She can, but it's not likely she'll be successful, says Lindsay Burke, co-chair of the employment practice at Covington & Burling LLP.

Just like other work-related injuries and illnesses, you should be protected from legal claims under the workers' compensation system.

The only way you might be on the hook is if your company blatantly neglected to protect employees – say, you refused to provide protective equipment when employees were regularly exposed to confirmed COVID-19 cases, says Burke.

Maintain health and safety protocols and keep communicating those with employees.

Source: Wall Street Journal, [tinyurl.com/WSH490](https://www.tinyurl.com/WSH490) and [tinyurl.com/Burke490](https://www.tinyurl.com/Burke490)

LIGHTER SIDE

■ Can you answer these outlandish questions?

Every manager wants to hire the best possible person for the job.

That sometimes leads them to ask outlandish questions that get candidates to prove unique problem-solving skills. *Glassdoor.com* got hiring managers to share some of their best:

- How many cows are in Canada?
- How would you move Mount Fuji?
- Would you rather fight one horse-sized duck or 100 duck-sized horses and why?
- What do you think of garden gnomes?
- Can you spell "diverticulitis" for me?
- In what ways are your parents disappointed with your career aspirations?

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

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Motivating during change: 4 main strategies

Communication skills are most critical – and most valuable – when navigating changes.

And right now, there are a lot of changes happening, thanks to the pandemic.

Don't wait

Here are four strategies to rally the troops:

1. **Get ready for friction.** Brainstorm questions or concerns employees might have and how to answer them. Have a cheat sheet ready.
2. **Expect diverse reactions.** Some employees will be on board right away and some will push back. But most won't have a strong opinion either way. Focus near-term

communication efforts on the swing group. Then let them help you win over the rest.

3. **Set a clear goal.** People are more motivated to work through change if they have an end target in mind. Find out the changes they want and goals they'd find worthwhile.
4. **Be honest about problems.** Explain there will be bumps in the road. Employees will be less likely to despair when issues come up.

The most important thing to do: Don't wait to communicate, says expert David Grossman. Give your team what it wants – to be in the loop. Doing this will get them on board faster.

Source: bit.ly/bigchange560

Want more from virtual meetings? Take notes from the deaf

Anyone who regularly participates in virtual meetings can learn a lot from the deaf.

Zoom meetings lop off nonverbal cues – something the deaf population hones in on.

3 tips help

Here are three of their best strategies for communicating through barriers:

1. **Pace it, don't race it.** Follow participants' eyes in virtual meetings. Slow down if you see eyes moving from you to another spot – perhaps note-taking or a distraction – so

attendees have time to soak it all in.

2. **Seek cooperation, not competition.** Audio cues fail when people try to speak at the same time. Assign a facilitator who monitors who puts up a virtual hand, in what order, and who speaks next.

3. **Clarify with chat.** Admit if you don't understand or missed a point. Just make note of it in the chat feature, requesting a repeat, clarification or more information immediately or after the call.

Source: tinyurl.com/videos491

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes, the company won when the judge threw out Peg's ADA lawsuit.

Peg asked for a number of accommodations to prevent her stress-induced epileptic seizures – with the most extreme request being that her manager provide her with “calm, fair, non-confrontational treatment.”

The court said the company had a right to draw the line at that request. It said an employee's ability to handle stress and work reasonably well with others are essential functions of any position.

As a result, a “demand for a supervisor to adopt a less-overbearing management style is generally held to be unreasonable.”

The court also said Peg offered little proof her manager treated her differently than other employees simply because she had epilepsy.

Interactive process is a must

While this court said managing stress is an essential part of any job, it also said specific stressors could be targets for accommodations.

So don't outright deny accommodations to disabled employees looking to reduce stress. Courts want to see you've entered the interactive process to seek out reasonable accommodations.

(Based on *Hargett v. Florida Atlantic Board of Trustees*. Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

Be the hardest working person you know. If you're not, someone else will be.

– Ian Brennan

All you need is love. But a little chocolate now and then doesn't hurt.

– Charles M. Schulz

Sometimes, just carrying on, is the superhuman achievement.

– Albert Camus

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