

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

January 18, 2021



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

Messages fall on deaf ears? 5 tactics to get the team to listen, act

'Communication Bursts' and silent periods will help

Just because you send a mass email or even a message to a few people doesn't guarantee it'll reach its destination.

You'll hear, "I didn't see it," "I never got that," "I don't understand" or "Must've missed that one."

What's the problem?

Communication is often over saturated – too much, too often – and it's especially true as more teams work remote full-time or part-time.

What works?

"Bursts of rapid-fire communications, with longer periods of silence in between, are hallmarks of successful teams," researchers Christoph Riedl and Anita Williams Woolley

recently found. "Those silent periods are when team members often form and develop their ideas – deep work that may generate the next steps in a project or the solution to a challenge faced by the group."

Effective communication takes a lot more than nonstop morning chats and silence the rest of the day. Good team communication takes these best practices, Riedl and Williams Woolley found.

Schedule it

Communication through messaging – email, text, Slack and other apps – isn't as productive as real-time communication.

Please see 5 tactics ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Boss has little to say: Employee says that's bias

"Is it really too much to smile and say, 'Hello,' 'Good morning,' or even 'Go to Hell?'" asked employee Frank Andrews to his supervisor.

"Oh, hi Frank," said Jeannie Martin, not bothering to look up from her computer screen. "Is there something you actually need?"

"Some respect would be nice," Frank said.

That got Jeannie's attention. "What are you talking about?" she said, finally looking at him in her doorway.

"Let's just add this to the list of things that prove you don't care for me because I'm older than the rest of the people who work for you," Frank said. "You can barely speak to me."

"Look, Frank, we might not be as friendly as

I am with others in our group, but I certainly don't treat you any differently."

Said it a dozen times

"Really?" Frank said. "Then why do you keep denying me the training I need to get promoted?"

"You don't have the experience or education to qualify for the training. We barely have the resources to put anyone in that training," Jeannie said. "I've said it a dozen times."

Not long after, Jeannie let Frank go in a round of layoffs. But he felt it was more than cutbacks.

Frank sued, claiming age bias based on how badly Jeannie treated him. The company fought the case. 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.

5 tactics ...

(continued from Page 1)

Instead, Communication Bursts are more effective when done with people together in person, on the phone or over a video conference.

So it's important to actually schedule time to talk with the team regularly, even daily, if possible. It might be difficult with a remote group juggling other responsibilities, but the researchers said many teams find agreeable times early and late in the day.

Earmark purpose, outcome

Because it can be difficult to find the perfect "bursty time," it's critical to waste no time when you're together.

Earmark a purpose and outcome for the conversations, so employees put in and get out as much as possible from the meeting.

When employees come out of well-organized Communication Bursts, they're prepared to use focused work time wisely on top priorities.

Foster silence

Making efforts to communicate more effectively will be useless if employees can't stay focused on their individual work when you aren't being "bursty."

Encourage employees to schedule silent periods so they can take the next steps in the project, stick to their most important tasks and/or develop needed new ideas and solutions.

Temper the video

This could be the most surprising outcome of their research: Teams communicate more effectively using audio over video.

Without visual cues (the limited number of those we see on computer screens), team members speak and listen more evenly during calls.

Plus, the quality of the interaction increases. The group has more "collective intelligence," coming up with more impactful ideas, sharing more useful information and increasing their team effectiveness.

Aim for less content, more quality

Beyond bursty communication, when you use email and other forms of asynchronous communication with your team, create focused messages. Researchers found the fewer ideas in a message, the more likely the message gets the necessary action or response.

For instance, if you have three things to cover, send three separate emails instead of one. It's easier to get in-depth and exchange ideas about each topic.

Source: Harvard Business Review, tinyurl.com/bursts492

TECH CORNER

Know your storage terms and capacity

We use our computers, cellular devices and tablets for *everything* – work, socializing, entertainment, research, shopping, etc.

Most people don't consider how much information their devices can hold and the amount of information they can safely share.

Know your limits

But it's important to understand and know your limits. These tips can help:

- MB means Megabyte. GB is Gigabyte. And 1GB means 1000MB.

- A GB is big – perhaps a whole movie – and not something meant to be emailed.
- One to five MG are reasonable sizes to be shared. Pictures, documents and small videos are usually in this range.

Most importantly, "back up everything," says Scott Hanselman, an IT programmer, teacher and speaker who does a tech blog for nontech people. "Look for backup options like CrashPlan, DropBox, OneDrive, etc. Literally, anything is better than leaving documents on your computer's desktop!"

Source: tinyurl.com/tech492

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ How to help employees adapt to change

The degree and speed of change in business is unprecedented. But now that change is the norm, managers and supervisors will want to help employees more easily adapt.

Dave Coffaro, principal at Strategic Advisory Consulting Group, suggests:

- **Call it like it is** – fluid, dynamic, uncomfortable. Set a tone of honesty while you're still working it out.
- **Reconnect employees with the vision and values** that have always held you together.
- **Share touch points and a vision.** Let them know what you envision and when and how you'll have updates on changes and the evolving vision.
- **Define what success will look like in the short and long term,** recognizing that it can change as conditions change.
- **Encourage adaptability.** Help employees keep the vision and opportunities to progress in sight, but be willing to adapt quickly.

Source: tinyurl.com/change492

■ Avoid seemingly innocent phrases that are snarky

Some seemingly innocent phrases spoken and written at work can be insulting.

You want to avoid:

- **"With all due respect ..."** It almost always precedes an insult.
- **"To be honest ..."** This implies you weren't telling the truth until now.
- **"Quite frankly, ..."** is usually a lead into an insult or suggests you haven't been sincere until now.
- **"My bad."** It trivializes your mistake and makes you sound like you're not taking responsibility for it.
- **"I hear what you're saying, but ..."** It's a roundabout way of saying, "I disagree and am dismissing what you've said."

Source: tinyurl.com/jargon492

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 Training, socialization adapted for the times

We used to have a big multiday event to train leaders, strategize for the future and build camaraderie.

Enter COVID-19 and a mostly remote workforce and we couldn't get together. So like most companies, we tried to replicate the event on Zoom.

It was a fail! Everyone's attention spans on video calls were shorter. We couldn't build off each other's ideas.

Redesign from ground up

We shifted from two long days to several shorter video meetings held over multiple afternoons.

We set clear expectations for what we'd cover and expected to accomplish.

Even better, we included some different kinds of social activities before, during and after the sessions.

Video meetings don't offer the same quality of interaction as face-to-face meetings.

But this approach helped us keep the energy, train and build morale nearly as well as we did when we could meet.

(Chris Murphy, CEO, ThoughtWorks North America, shared this success on Bloomberg Businessweek)

2 Empathy tactics that spread good cheer

If there's one mantra people have adopted through the pandemic, it's "We're all in this together."

We found it even more important with some people working from home, some on-site and all of us facing different struggles. Everyone had a limited understanding of the challenges their colleagues faced no matter where they were.

We believed simple words of empathy and kindness could go a long way in unprecedented times.

3 things to do

So we encouraged employees to practice these empathy tactics:

- Open and close email with a thoughtful message – such as "I hope you're having a good day" and "Stay safe and well."
- Ask others how they prefer to meet, rather than demand a video call.
- Be consistent with preferences, so colleagues know what to expect with your communication.

(Jeniffer Strub, Senior Manager of Human Resources, Vyond, San Bruno, CA)

3 Regained connections with remote team

When most people started working from home because of the pandemic, we missed the daily interaction.

The work got done, but employees couldn't interact as much as they did on-site – where they built friendships, camaraderie and collaborative efforts.

We needed to get some level of that social element back in their workday.

Added a 'FriYay'

First, we added daily "stand ups" – quick video meetings to replicate similar ones we held on-site. It gave managers the opportunity to update employees and measure their engagement and energy levels. And employees had a few minutes to catch up with each other.

Then we started "FriYay," a weekly, short Zoom meeting when managers and employees give shout-outs for great work and accomplishment. We also talk about what's next to get everyone motivated for the following week.

(Morgan Chaney, Senior Director of Marketing and Partnerships, Blueboard Inc., spoke at the Resources for Humans Virtual Conference)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Can we pick and choose who comes back to work?

Question: We asked for volunteers to be the first back onsite, and some older, compromised employees raised their hands. We want to keep everyone as safe as possible. Can we encourage them to stay home?

Answer: You can, but you risk a lawsuit, even with your good intentions, says Employment Law Attorney Angela Walker with Blanchard Walker PLLC.

If you make decisions based on who you perceive is at higher risk, you're likely engaging in illegal discrimination.

Federal guidelines have referred to "elderly" people being vulnerable, but they haven't specified an age. And you often have to trust employees' judgment of whether they're fit to work – and comfortable back in the workplace.

Your best bet is to ask for volunteers and offer opportunities equally to those who've volunteered to come back, Walker says.

Source: tinyurl.com/back2work492

LIGHTER SIDE

■ Some employees find any reason to skip work

Remote work makes missing work a less common occurrence.

But some people will find any reason they can to skip work, such as:

- "I've got a sudden adult-onset banana allergy and need to go home!"
- "The neighbor's cat was sleeping in my car, so I had to turn around."
- "I used spoiled toothpaste."
- "I got a paper cut. The pain is unbearable."
- "I think I've caught a monkey disease from my trip to the zoo."
- "My house is surrounded by a SWAT team."

Source: Business News Daily, tinyurl.com/misswork492

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Employees worried, stressed more than ever

You might have sensed your employees are more worried and stressed than you've ever experienced.

And Gallup researchers have proven your suspicions: They recorded record-setting levels of stress and worry. Remote employees suffer slightly more.

Giver and recipient feel better

Understandably, managers and supervisors are stressed and worried, too.

That's why the Gallup researchers suggested leaders spend a little more time and effort on recognition: Giving it helps both the giver and recipient feel better.

Time to get back in the office? More like 'some of the time'

Working from home isn't what it used to be.

At the start of the coronavirus, many companies reported spikes in creativity.

Now 40% of people who run companies say productivity significantly drops on Mondays and Fridays, according to a recent study from Vocon.

Everyone from CEOs to new employees say they're Zoom fatigued.

Many have admitted they often do other things such as cook, shower or exercise while

You might take this approach:

- **Weekly**, at a group meeting, recognize someone who did exceptional work or reached a goal.
- **On Fridays**, call and thank three people who helped you or the team during the week.
- **Every two weeks**, mail several thank-you notes to employees' homes.
- **Monthly**, meet with your team to share just good news, personal and professional accomplishments, and anything positive people want to pass along.

Source: tinyurl.com/stress492

in virtual brainstorming sessions, another study found.

Survey, be flexible

So is it time to get back to the workplace?

Every company has different needs, but several studies found most organizations are leaning toward a hybrid approach – some days in the office, some working remotely.

Best bet: Survey employees on their interest in remote work and offer flexible schedules.

Source: NPR, tinyurl.com/offices492

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes, the company won. The court dismissed the case.

Frank's attorney claimed his boss didn't like him because he was older than the rest of her team. And she proved it by limiting interaction with him and denying him training opportunities that could've helped him get ahead and keep his job.

The company's attorney argued the supervisor did her job: managed the employee and his capabilities without regard to his age.

He wasn't eligible for training, and the layoffs were necessary.

The court agreed the employee didn't have the education or experience for the training.

The supervisor didn't treat him unfairly or let him go because of a bias.

Be clear, consistent

One key to this case was the manager's consistency. She was clear with the reasons she denied Frank the training. She never wavered.

To avoid lawsuits like this, you want to remain consistent and clear, too. Never let employees wonder about your intentions and fill in the blanks with their own interpretations.

(Based on *Malatesta v. Credit Lyonnais*. Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

One of the greatest victories you can gain over someone is to beat him at politeness.

– Josh Billings

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

When life gives you lemons, squirt someone in the eye.

– Cathy Guisewite

MANAGING EDITOR:
RENEE COCCHI
rcocchi@bbp.com

EDITOR:
MICHELE MCGOVERN
mmcgovern@bbp.com

PRODUCTION EDITOR:
PJ FRONZEO

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 © 2021 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 January 18, 2021, Vol. 22 No. 492, 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.