

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

February 15, 2021



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4 tactics to help underperformers who think they know it all

How to manage big egos and prima donnas

You want to help employees who aren't performing up to par.

But it's difficult to help those who don't recognize they need help. You know who – the ones who say, "I don't see the problem." Or "You're just being picky." Or "No worries, boss, I got this."

You might be tempted to chalk it up to inexperience, a big ego or something you don't want to deal with. But don't!

"A more insidious risk is that the leader will appear to condone substandard work, and competent employees may become demotivated and disengage," says Liz Kislik, a management consultant, executive coach and blogger.

Instead, leaders want to manage

underperformers who think they're doing a great job with a head-on approach.

Here's what Kislik suggests:

Be more clear about expectations

You know it's important to set clear expectations with all employees. But with underperformers who think they're rock stars, you want to be extra clear, extra vigilant.

That's because when you say, "It's OK," they hear, "It's OK!!!!"

Be direct. Be specific. For instance, "You must complete this assignment by Friday at 2 p.m. 'Complete' means X, Y and Z are

Please see Tactics ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Manager says too much, then too little: Gets sued

"All I can say is 'Be careful, Val,'" Manager Jimmy Rose said. "It's the same thing I said to Alyssa."

"I'm guessing Alyssa didn't listen to that prophetic advice," employee Val said.

"It appears that way," Jimmy said.

"When Alyssa got pregnant and had her baby, it left us in a real staffing bind. If you have to take time off, it'd be worse. Even you've felt the crunch so far, right?"

"Sure," Val said. "I've worked more hours, and I haven't complained. So I wouldn't expect you to complain now that I'm telling you I'm pregnant."

"And I can't come in early for at least the next two months. The morning sickness is unbearable."

With that, Jimmy turned and walked toward his office.

Val followed. "I can't believe this. What's your problem? Why aren't you talking to me?"

No answer, limited interaction

Val didn't get an answer then, and Jimmy didn't have much to say when she was in work.

Val interpreted his reaction as "getting tough on me" because she was pregnant.

That prompted her to quit and sue for pregnancy discrimination.

The company fought the suit. 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.

Tactics ...

(continued from Page 1)

done and checked for quality. Your accuracy rate must be 93% or higher. If not, we'll start the Performance Improvement Plan initiation. Do you understand, and do you agree to these terms?"

Offer resources and support

Many underperformers don't recognize they lack skills, knowledge or gumption to do their jobs right.

They often figure if they're in the position, they must be the right person. So they do the job to their (low) expectations.

That's why it's important to offer underperformers extra resources and support until they "get it."

Try weekly progress reports, additional training or an assigned mentor who is experienced in the tasks.

Temper your praise

We know this tip is counterintuitive to almost everything we've ever offered in this space.

But with underperformers who think they're all that and a bag of chips, you want to hold the praise.

Not completely, of course. Praise

great work, but don't let it stand alone. Kislik suggests you link positive comments to other things you want to address. Be clear about the necessary new behavior and why it's critical.

For instance, "Now that you've done X so well, I'd like you to also do Y. It's important because ..."

Recognize limits

Unfortunately, sometimes it's not worth your effort to help an inflated ego.

At some point, you have to consider if you're willing to invest more time and resources to lifting up an underperformer.

If not, it might be time to lower your expectations ... and move the underperformer into a role that better matches his or her legitimate skill level.

Similarly, consider the employee's ability and willingness to see himself or herself in a true professional light.

Underperformers who won't accept advice, help and additional resources, or won't admit faults, won't likely change.

If they still insist they're doing just fine, it might be time to show them the door to other opportunities outside your influence.

Sources: HBR tinyurl.com/performance494 and lizkislik.com

TECH CORNER

Tech tips to make sure 'fake news' doesn't hurt your rap

No company wants to be the victim of a "fake news" attack like Chobani Yogurt was in 2017.

InfoWars circulated fabricated stories that connected Chobani's refugee hires to a sexual assault at its Twin Falls, IA, location.

The "fake news" went viral and the internet was littered with calls to boycott the yogurt. Chobani's president received death threats. But the company won a suit filed against InfoWars and its radio host.

How? A good technology approach

to stay ahead of misinformation.

Some things you can try, too:

- Proactively track online comments and create a process for responding when you spot false reports.
- Build an internal education campaign so all employees understand the impact of false information shared and spotted about your organization. Help them distinguish between fake and real information. Give them guidance on what to do if they see misinformation.

Source: MAPI, tinyurl.com/fakenews494

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ da Vinci to Yoda: Proof in the power of brevity

Leonardo da Vinci said, "I have been impressed with the urgency of doing. Knowing is not enough; we must apply. Being willing is not enough; we must do."

Yoda said, "Do. Or do not. There is no try."

It's the same idea, executed differently, proving the point that brevity gets the job done.

When you write instructions or opinions to employees, reread, looking for ways to make it brief while still communicating clearly.

■ Sick of Zoom happy hours? 4 ideas to engage the team

We'll need virtual meetings going forward, regardless of a coronavirus vaccine.

But Zoom gloom is real – and leaders want to take steps to stop it by relying on different ways to interact for business and fun.

Here are a few new ideas:

- **Start daily prompts** on your company intranet. You might ask people to share favorite playlists, breakfast recipes or ways to relax.
- **Encourage employees to gloat.** Ask them to post photos of themselves doing their favorite hobby, at a dream vacation spot, playing with pets or kids. Social media – where people post about themselves – is popular for a reason!
- **Live up email.** Don't just give the boring details. Send one out of the blue to reward and recognize people who've gone above and beyond. Highlight what they did and how it affects the whole team.
- **Game it up.** Create an online game tournament, where employees and executives alike can compete at trivia or multiplayer apps. Hand out prizes to boost engagement.

Source: SmartBrief on Leadership, tinyurl.com/Happy493

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 ‘Virtual Wellness Week’ helps employees

Our employees were overwhelmed, stressed and perhaps a little stir crazy.

Like most organizations, we’d sent them home to work safely early in the pandemic. Many juggled work, homeschooling, caregiving and worry.

We wanted to help so they could mentally and physically feel better.

Learn and socialize

That led us to create a Virtual Wellness Week for employees.

We offered daily sessions on wellness, mindfulness and meditation. We hired teachers, practitioners

and lecturers to lead the sessions. Employees could choose what they wanted to attend.

To add a more social and informal element, we also invited employees to be part of Donut on our Slack app. It was a place where people would be randomly paired to meet and chat with others in the company. They could virtually connect and talk about the wellness session – or anything. It helped employees de-stress and recharge.

(Amanda Townsend, VP Global People Operations, Fivetran, spoke at The Lattice Resources for Humans Virtual Conference)

2 Overcame remote work challenges

Working from home presented challenges for almost all of our employees. It was the first time most of them had worked from home, so adjustment was the first hurdle.

Some had space issues – they didn’t have a separate area to work. Some had child care and child schooling issues, trying to juggle it all. Some had caregiver issues, having to care for more loved ones than ever. And some had all of those issues.

Relied on what we’d always done

We didn’t want anyone to feel one group was given more leeway than another in adjusting to the issues. For instance, employees without children or extra care giving responsibilities might feel slighted if co-workers with kids got more flexibility.

So we relied on what was already in place: We reminded *everyone* in the remote workforce about our flexible schedule and leave policies. All leave options were for everybody at any time. Employees chose what worked best for them at the right time.

(Karen O’Neill, Director of People Growth, Facebook)

3 No one opened up until we did this ...

All of our employees did an outstanding job, and we were proud of and grateful for that.

But when we wanted feedback about anything, they’d clam up.

Understand, nearly 75% of our employees are “neurodiverse” – they’re on the autism spectrum. We expected we might have a few who weren’t comfortable talking in groups or even directly with a colleague or boss. But not all of them!

We had to take a different approach to getting feedback, so we could respond and act appropriately to their needs.

Made it anonymous

We started Q&A sessions and regular forums where employees could anonymously share frustrations, ask questions and present problems ahead of time or through a chat app. Then we could publicly address issues that, in many cases, more than one person had but all were reluctant to bring up.

(Rajesh Anandan, CEO, Ultranaughts, shared this success in Forbes)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Can we make employees travel again?

Question: Some of our employees traveled quite a bit as part of their job before the pandemic. Business is ramping up again, and so is the need to hit the road. Some employees don’t want to travel. Can we make them?

Answer: Yes, but it’s not advisable, says Daniel Schwartz, an employment law partner at Shipman & Goodwin.

For one, there’s a court ruling that dates back to the Gulf War that indicates it could be illegal for an employer to require an employee to travel to an unsafe place, Schwartz says.

Another point: Employees can do more remote work – even with off-site customers – through technology, which keeps everyone safer, Schwartz says.

Thirdly, employers who offer up ultimatums – such as, travel or lose your job – will spread ill will amongst an already stressed workforce.

Sources: tinyurl.com/travel494 and tinyurl.com/courtrule494

LIGHTER SIDE

■ The new ‘business casual’ revealed in survey

Business casual has taken on new meaning since many companies shifted employees to working remotely most of the time.

And some employees aren’t afraid to reveal they’ve taken to a much more casual look. In a CouponFollow survey, employees admitted to these behaviors:

- 22% put a bra on only for video calls and 9% never put one on.
- Only 82% shower daily (12% only for video calls).
- 10% never change out of their pajamas.
- 17% will only put pants on for video calls.
- 29% have worked at home naked.

Source: tinyurl.com/dress494

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Cut tension: Address high-conflict people

Leaders take note: 85% of employees experience some kind of conflict at work, and 30% say it happens *all the time*.

Why's the percentage so high? Most workplaces have at least one high-conflict person – the one who disagrees with, hates and complains about everything. And that person causes the bulk of conflict.

2 tactics to try

Leaders can help alleviate conflict by trying these tactics with high-conflict people:

- **Avoid labels** such as “bully” and “high-conflict person” (despite us using it here). Instead, focus on specific behaviors

Feel all alone? Most managers do – and need more support

Is it lonely at the top? Many managers feel that way these days.

Nearly 40% of managers in a recent Achievers study said they haven't received training to support their employees.

They aren't as equipped to help and engage direct reports as they'd like to be.

Add remote work – where managers see each other less often to collaborate – and it's only gotten worse.

To get the support you need, you might have to take some matters into your own

when you address issues. Ask yourself, “What is he doing wrong, and what should he do instead?” to determine the behavior you need to address.

- **Acknowledge the elephants in the room.** Don't cringe at, laugh or ignore bad behavior. Call it out – whether it's an off-color joke, an insult or a just a slight. Say, “What's your purpose for telling that kind of joke?” Or “I should've spoken up sooner, but your obvious slights of Sue aren't the collegial behavior we expect here. How can you change this?”

Sources: tinyurl.com/conflict494 and tinyurl.com/conflictstudy494

hands. Here are a few ideas:

- **Call on your network.** Invite same-level managers to meet in person or virtually to share struggles (without griping) and solutions (without bragging).
 - **Get more training.** With remote work, more live and recorded resources became available for leadership training. You can find some at tinyurl.com/webinars494
 - **Talk to your boss.** Ask for help, training or support – so you can do *your job* better.
- Source: *Achievers*, tinyurl.com/alone494

Quotes

Try to learn something about everything and everything about something.

– Thomas Huxley

There's a tremendous power in using the least amount of information to get a point across.

– Rick Rubin

Failures are infinitely more instructive than successes.

– George Clooney

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Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes, the company won when a judge dismissed the case.

Val's attorney claimed she was the victim of pregnancy discrimination because her boss made a negative comment about pregnancy. Then he treated her differently – more specifically, negatively – by displaying a short temper and ignoring her.

The company's attorney argued the manager had just expressed concern about staffing problems that already existed and its effects on business that could be exacerbated by additional leave.

Furthermore, the manager didn't indicate he would treat the employee differently. And he

didn't treat her differently. He just showed some frustration over business difficulties.

The court agree. The manager's comments and reaction may have been prickly, but weren't bias.

Careful about discussion

This case walks the fine line between what's OK and what's not OK to discuss with employees.

You can discuss the business effects caused by a pregnancy – staffing shortages, workload changes, etc. You can *not* discuss whether an employee can or can not get pregnant.

(Based on *Jelsta v. Zogg Dermatology PLC*. Dramatized for effect.)