

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

March 1, 2021



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www.CommunicationBulletin.com



Management Skills Center

Improve your skills and manage better



Professional Writing Center

Hundreds of tips to get writing right

Build credibility for you and your ideas: 5 steps to better storytelling

Never muddy the message again

As a leader, you always need people to understand what you say and often accept what you propose.

Yet many leaders fail to get their point across and gain quick credibility because they muddy the message.

"Telling a compelling story is how you build credibility for yourself and your ideas," says Jeff Gothelf, a business coach and author of *Forever Employable* and *Sense & Response*. "Whether you need to win over a colleague, a team, an executive, a recruiter or an entire conference audience, effective storytelling is key."

Vivid, true, relatable stories help others see the importance in the message you want to

convey. They also prompt others to respond in ways you need them to.

Gothelf shares these tips for effective storytelling:

1. Gear it to your audience

Think about – or flat out ask – what your audience is interested in, concerned about and motivated by. That way, you can build a story that appeals to them specifically.

For instance, if you need employees to get on board with a new process, you'll want to know if they're more worried about change or the time it'll take to learn the process. Or you might need to figure out if they're more excited

*Please see **Storytelling ...** on Page 2.*

Sharpen Your Judgment

Communication rule breaker or retaliation victim?

"Not again," Supervisor Brenda Swartz sighed to herself when she saw the subject line on Bob Bruno's message: *15 reasons we need to watch our backs*.

Brenda picked up her phone. "Come in my office now, Bob."

When the employee sat across the desk from her, Brenda said, "If you have a gripe with me, tell me. You don't put it in an email to everyone."

"Mass email seems to be the only way to get anyone's attention," Bob said.

"I've told you before, we have communication channels and protocols for issues," Brenda said.

"And if I do it that way, nothing gets done," Bob said. "Case in point: HR wouldn't help with my

health insurance until I emailed the entire building.

"Now, I have to do something about you calling me out for little things like cursing and cc'ing everyone," Bob continued.

"It's obvious you're still hot under the collar because I turned your friend in for stealing."

Enough said and done

"That's it, Bob," Brenda said. "You can't keep disparaging me and violating communication rules, and think you'll keep your job. You're fired."

Bob didn't go easily. He sued, claiming he was fired in retaliation for blowing the whistle on a thief.

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.

Storytelling ...

(continued from Page 1)

about using new technology or the ability to finish a task faster.

Keep in mind: If your message affects different groups of people – employees, colleagues, customers – you might need to create stories focused toward each.

2. Paint with broader strokes

Most people's first reaction to any message is, "What's in it for me?" But they can't fully understand the effects on them if they don't also see the broader effects on team structure, department goals or the company's future.

Add that context – why it's important and where it's coming from – to help people believe and accept.

So in the example of changing processes, you'd want to include background on why you do it as you do now and the vision for the better future.

3. Humanize the story

Even when you focus on the audience and the big picture, many people will still only hear the business side (and dislike it because of that).

So you want to include a personal element that stirs emotions and makes the bridge between people and policy.

Share a personal story about a time you faced a strange new situation, your fears and the outcome. If you can infuse humor, even better. For instance, Gothelf says he gets a laugh every time he tells about his six-month stint in the circus, where he had to build relationships with a human cannonball and learn and integrate into a new, strange culture.

4. Call for action

Leaders sometimes get excited about a good message or overwhelmed by a bad one. They might make it too big, talking about vast improvements, sweeping changes or major hurdles. Then people get overwhelmed or excited and have no idea where to start.

Instead, ask for specific, immediate actions and give people practical advice. For example, tell them when training on the new process will be and ask them to read pretraining materials and take the assessment test by Friday.

5. Stay humble

Tell the audience about a past fail, your role and what you learned.

"Nothing creates a tighter connection between you and your audience than acknowledging that you're standing on others' shoulders, and you're not going to get everything right all the time," Gothelf says.

Source: HBR, tinyurl.com/storytelling495

TECH CORNER

Protect yourself and your email with these tips

Some tech experts and scholars predicted email would be dead by 2020.

It's 2021, and the number of users has increased and email is still the most popular professional communication tool.

It also has the most potential for security and scam issues.

Avoid the hassle

Skirt those issues with these tips from IT expert Scott Hanselman:

- Assume your email is *never* private.

- Avoid cc'ing more than 10 people on a message. Many don't want their email address going to others.
- Check for scams or potential security breaches before forwarding emails. Confirm you know the email address of the original sender.
- Never click on a link that asks you to "verify." Instead, open a browser and navigate to your account on the site in question to be certain it's legitimate.
- Avoid sending personal details such as credit card or Social Security numbers via email.

Source: tinyurl.com/emailstats495 and hanselman.com

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

5 tips to curb – or avoid – Zoom disasters

Zoom – and all of its pros, cons and potential disasters – is here to stay.

So to make the most of online meetings, you want to take steps to minimize the potential for disasters. Angela DeFinis, a speech coach and presentation/virtual video trainer, offers these tips:

- **Plan for the worst.** Don't wing it. Create a meeting agenda with goals, so you can at least go back to it if there's a major distraction.
- **Double down on what you can control** – appearance (wear solid colors), lighting (in front of you), setup (computer camera stable and at eye level) and time (be early).
- **Distinguish between distraction and disaster.** Only the latter needs to draw attention from the meeting.
- **Leave it at the door.** When you work from home, the stress of home life can more easily creep into meetings. Leave it behind before you get on Zoom with this acting technique: Imagine a famous person you admire sitting next to you in the meeting – and act as if she or he actually is there.
- **Have a backup.** If there's potential for a disaster – technical, child or otherwise – ask a colleague to be ready to take over your role in the meeting if it strikes.

Source: definiscommunications.com

How to handle 9 tricky words

Whether you speak or write, you want to get your words right.

Here are nine that can trick even some of the best communicators:

All right vs. alright. Despite Matthew McConaughey's best efforts, alright (alright, alright) is not a word. It's always all right.

Can vs. may. Can implies ability. May implies permission. *Can you fix the computer? May I have your password?*

Forwards, backwards, towards, outwards, onwards. That's Queen's English. Skip the S in the U.S.

Source: tinyurl.com/words495

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 Helped departments connect, collaborate

People often worked in silos. They were focused on what they needed to accomplish and how to help their departments meet goals.

That's not a terrible thing, of course. We all want employees focused on tasks and goals.

But some missed the bigger picture – how they could collaborate with other people and departments to do their jobs better and hit even higher goals.

Started, continued conversation

To help employees collaborate better, I arranged for two departments to meet once a week at an exact time

and location. They could discuss how their work flowed, overlapped and/or affected each other's work.

From there, I'd set them up to continue the conversations on a business communication app, such as Slack. That way, they could stay in sync until they met again.

It's helped tear down silos and improve collaboration and engagement. We're working better than ever as a team.

(Engelo Rumora, Founder and CEO, List'n Sell Realty, Toldedo, OH, shared his success with the SmartBrief Young Entrepreneur Council)

2 Got the right mix of work and socializing

Even before the pandemic, our employees worked remotely. It was – and is – an effective formula for our organization.

But working remotely did create a barrier to the benefits of workplace socialization. No one caught up on the weekend at the coffee pot. People didn't just meet in the hallway, chat and get the ball rolling on a great new business idea.

We needed to help set up business and socializing opportunities.

Here's the spot for everyone

For one, we created a Water Cooler channel on Slack where team members could share things about themselves, such as photos of things they love – dogs, beach, snow, etc. And they often post jokes, news and GIFs.

We also made a point to celebrate personal and professional victories in virtual meetings and through the app. People can share good news and cheer each other's accomplishments, too.

Employees feel part of a community.
(Thibaud Clement, CEO, Loomly, Los Angeles)

3 Missed the health connection: Filled void

Our employees enjoyed more than just professional collaboration while at work. Most liked the social time together, too.

So when many employees started working remotely, they missed those formal and informal opportunities to be together and share interests.

One of their favorite ways to connect socially was through exercise – lunchtime walks, prework yoga or after-hour road race training.

Endless opportunities

So we focused on that kind of well being to bring them together socially again. We got subscriptions to virtual fitness classes.

Employees could participate in training sessions on a Zoom call, essentially working out together. They could also stay active with a library of recorded sessions.

It's given employees ways to beat stress and endless opportunities for remote team building.

(Marygrace Sexton, CEO, Natalie's Orchid Island Juices, Fort Pierce, FL)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Can we mandate employees get vaccinated?

Question: Now that a coronavirus vaccine is available, can – and should – we mandate employees get it?

Answer: You can, but consider these points from the employment law firm Ogletree Deakins before doing so:

- Is a mandatory policy necessary or would you be better off to “strongly encourage” employees to vaccinate?
- Would it be better to confine mandatory vaccinations to high risk locales, departments or worksites?
- Are you prepared to review many accommodation requests?
- Will you need to negotiate with unions regarding a policy?
- Are you prepared to review and share workers' comp laws and your insurance policy regarding ramifications if there are adverse physical reactions to the vaccine?
- Will you be able keep up to date on new laws, regs and guidelines from government authorities?

Source: ogletree.com/insights

LIGHTER SIDE

■ Seems like everyone's got an excuse for being late

We've all been late. Many of us have stretched the truth to cover it. Here are classics from *Reader's Digest* readers:

- A man was late for a sleep-disorder consultation. Why? He overslept.
- A tenant was late with rent. His reason: He only had half the rent, so he went to the casino to try to double his money.
- An employee was unusually late, so her boss questioned the delay. Her response: The train that gets her to work 10 minutes late was 10 minutes late today.
- A North Dakota oil rigger told his boss he'd be late coming back from lunch. He needed a warmer coat from home. Days later, he let the boss know he was finally home ... in warm Texas.

COMMUNICATION NEWS

3 reasons we can't work from home forever

More than half of employees who work from home want to keep it that way. Forever!

Is it possible? Maybe, but researchers have found it might not be ideal.

Try a hybrid approach

Here are three reasons remote work all the time might fail. It's:

- **less productive.** Most leaders in one study admitted they're about 80% as effective as they were on-site. And managers in another study said they see major drops in employee productivity on Mondays and Fridays.

- **slow and uncomfortable.** Most don't have the level of technology – such as broadband and video quality – they had on-site. More than half share working space.
- **widening gaps.** More educated, higher paid employees can continue to work remotely and get paid. Less educated, lower paid employees end up unemployed – and left behind. Similarly, most people worked in diverse workplaces. Their homes aren't as diverse, so exposure to diversity drops.

Try a hybrid model where employees can work some days at home, some days on-site.

Source: *HRMorning.com, tinyurl.com/homeforever495*

What makes employees productive? Happiness!

If you want to help employees be more productive, try injecting more happiness into their work.

Nearly all employees in a recent Snappy survey said time away from work has altered their happiness. And 85% said happiness is very important to their work productivity.

2 fun ideas

So leaders want to do more to help boost employees' moods – regardless of where they work. Two ideas from the Snappy study:

- **Try "Wellness Breaks."** One company offers daily sessions through Zoom: Mindfulness Mondays, Movement Break Tuesdays, Social Well-being Wednesdays, Thankfulness Thursdays and Foodie Fridays.
- **Host a "Coffee Talk."** Invite employees to participate in video chats. To make it more interesting, ask them to jump on calls with colleagues they might not have met on site. And discourage them from talking about work when they chat!

Source: *Snappy, tinyurl.com/happiness495*

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

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Yes, the company won when the court dismissed the lawsuit.

The employee's attorney claimed he was the victim of a whistleblower retaliation case. First, his boss was upset with him for turning in her friend for wrongdoing. Then she targeted him for small, senseless infractions, such as cursing and sending emails to everyone. The attorney said the boss finally fired him in retaliation.

The company's attorney argued the manager let the employee go for repeatedly violating company rules. He was asked not to send disparaging "broadcast emails," yet he continued to do it. He was asked not to swear, and yet he continued to do it. Those were the reasons

he was fired, and the whistleblowing incident had nothing to do with it.

The court agreed: There was no evidence the two were related.

Documentation key to win

The company won this lawsuit because it documented communication expectations – specifically protocols on broadcast emails – and the employee's repeated behavioral problems.

Managers never want to skip an opportunity to document.

(Based on *Markosyan v. Citizens Financial Group Inc.* Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

Start unknown, finish unforgettable.

– Misty Copeland

Fear is forward. No one is afraid of yesterday.

– Renata Adler

The cat sat on the mat is not a story. The cat sat on the other cat's mat is a story.

– John le Carré

Joy is not made to be a crumb.

– Mary Oliver

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