

Communication

Bulletin *for Managers & Supervisors*™

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

April 1, 2021



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www.CommunicationBulletin.com



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Employees have changed: How to make them happy, content now

Managers make the difference no matter where employees work

No one will argue it's been a tough year at work and in life.

Zoom meetings, socially distanced outings and masked meetups helped. But we all need more happiness.

And when it comes to work, managers and supervisors can do the most good: Bosses have a 70% impact on employees' happiness and engagement, a Gallup study found.

"Employees who don't feel valued and cared for will soon find a way to leave a job that makes them miserable," says Deb Boelkes, author of *Heartfelt Leadership: How to Capture the Top Spot and Keep on Soaring*.

"On the other hand, when they know that you care deeply about their happiness and see

you living those values every day, they will remain loyal and engaged."

Boelkes suggests five strategies front-line managers can use to create more happiness at work – whether employees are on-site or remote.

Focus on individuals

Happiness clearly isn't one-size-fits-all.

What makes each employee tick? What's most important to each one professionally and personally?

While you can't cater to everyone's whims, you want to gain a clear understanding of

Please see Happy ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Employee is mum ... until he sues

"What we've got here is failure to communicate," said Manager Robert Smith, quoting one of his favorite movies.

HR Manager Sheila Cartwright didn't get the reference to *Cool Hand Luke*, but she did get a feel for what he was saying.

"So you're telling me this is the first you've heard that Brandon's injury prevented him from driving into work?" Sheila asked.

"Absolutely," Robert said. "He just kept calling out of work, never said why. I chalked all those absences up to unexcused.

"So I had to fire him," Robert said. "Hated to do it, too. He was a good employee prior to all this."

"In the exit interview, he told me you didn't offer

any kind of accommodation," Sheila said. "That could be a problem."

Can't guess the issue

"Why would I?" Robert said. "He never asked me to accommodate him. In fact, he scarcely talked to me since he was injured. He just left voice or text messages."

"Unfortunately, after talking with Brandon, I see a lawsuit coming," Sheila said. "He already talked to an attorney."

Sheila was right. Brandon sued, claiming Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) violations.

The company tried to get the suit thrown out. 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.

Happy ...

(continued from Page 1)

employees' motivations.

Regularly find out what brings them happiness by asking in one-on-ones what they love about their job and what they'd change. Then do all you can to align their work with their motivations.

Help them succeed

Most people are happiest when they do well. And most employees want to perform well.

Unfortunately, things such as lack of training, resources, encouragement and time can get in their way.

Managers want to look for and eliminate roadblocks to success. Ask employees what gets in their way of:

- getting work done
- doing higher quality work, and
- achieving professional goals.

Then work with them to move around or get rid deterrents to success and happiness.

Create a sense of belonging

Happiness at work is often rooted in the relationships people have with those around them.

You can't make employees become

friends, but you can give them opportunities to build relationships as deeply as they want them to be.

Create time weekly for employees to socialize, perhaps before or after a standing meeting. You might plan a voluntary social event monthly such as a post-work happy hour, a pre-work walk or a catered lunch.

Eliminate negative energy

Jerks in the workplace destroy happiness. Yet, many continue to work – and bring down others – because leaders allow them to behave badly.

You can't allow jerk behavior on your watch, Boelkes says. Make collegiality a behavioral expectation for all employees – and enforce consequences for failure.

Consider your reach

You can be happy. You can plan to spread happiness. But you might not be able to achieve it always (because some people will never be happy).

The Dalai Lama said, "Our prime purpose in this life is to help others. And if you can't help them, at least don't hurt them."

So recognize your happiness reach may be limited, but your "do no harm" reach is close to limitless.

Sources: businessworldrising.com; tinyurl.com/gallupstudy497

TECH CORNER

How to go back in time and reverse 3 digital mistakes

Wish you could take back that "reply all?" Or regain that paragraph you deleted?

You can fix lots of digital mistakes once that "Oh no!" moment hits.

Here are three ways to reverse the most popular digital missteps.

- **Mistake:** Closed the browser tab you needed.
Fix: Ctrl + Shift + T (or Command + Shift + T for Macs) will restore the most recent tab closed.
- **Mistake:** Deleted copy you wanted to keep.

Fix: Ctrl + Z (or Command + Z in Macs). In many programs and apps, this command will undo the last thing you did. In some programs and apps, repeat it several times to undo the last several things.

- **Mistake:** Sent an email you don't want recipient(s) to see.
Fix: Set up Gmail to wait to send: Go to **Settings**, choose **See all settings**. Go to **General**, then to **Undo Send**. Use the drop-down menu to select the number of seconds you'd like to have to undo a sent email – five, 10, 20, or 30. Hit Save Changes at bottom of page.

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ How to prevent meeting zone-out and fatigue

Most people zone out during meetings whether they're in-person or Zoom.

Sometimes the information starts to feel irrelevant. Or it might seem like nothing will be accomplished. So we think about other things we need to do. And next thing we know, we're out-of-touch, ineffective meeting participants.

That's not productive. Instead, Sarah Gershman, president of Green Room, suggests these four ways to stop zoning out and avoid meeting fatigue:

- **Define your value before you step in.** What's your purpose, what information do you have to share and what can you contribute. Focus on making all three full contributions.
- **Reiterate, but don't repeat.** Listen carefully to people's points. State the point you want to add to and then share more or a different perspective.
- **Listen for themes.** When you hear the same idea, emotion or situation several times, connect the dots. Point out the consistencies and get people to work on resolving it.
- **Reel yourself in.** Despite your best efforts, you'll still get distracted from time to time. Recognize it, write a note of the other thing on your mind and get your head back in the meeting.

Source: tinyurl.com/zoneout498

■ Virtual team building? Try the escape route

Here's a double whammy for remote work situations: Virtual escape rooms help with team building and spotting hard and soft skills your group needs.

The online escape rooms, such as Paruzal Games, are hosted over Zoom.

Managers can participate in the fun or just keep an eye out for emerging leaders, analytical thinkers and team builders.

Plus you can pick a theme – such as Java Shop's Perfect Grind or Pizza Makes Anything Possible! – to fit your crew specifically.

Source: paruzal.com

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 Let employees take lead on DEI

We hoped to be an employer known for its Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI).

So our HR leaders helped front-line managers encourage and establish DEI efforts.

In addition, we continued with different team building activities and training to maintain our company culture.

If you build it, they will come

It worked well. But we recognized it was all management-driven.

If we wanted employees to stay

true to our culture and themselves, shouldn't they be empowered, too?

So we encouraged employees to build communities that met their needs and interests.

For instance, they created groups through our internal app where they share ideas, concerns and camaraderie around common interests.

Some COVID-19-related groups are Building Resilience, Mental Well-being, and Support for Parents and Pets.

(Sameer Chowdhri, Global Head, Workplace for HR at Facebook, Menlo Park, CA)

2 Right approach at right time to fix issues

Poor communication is often the root of problems – both big and small – within any organization.

Leaders can't get involved in every little argument that can arise from a miscommunication.

But I believed that you can handle just about any situation with the right communication at the right time.

Milk and cookies, anyone?

If people involved in an issue seem to be at an impasse, I'll step in, asking them to take a look back to find the original communication breakdown. Then we can move forward more effectively.

It can help to add some levity, too: One time, when two employees had been arguing way too much, I laid out milk and cookies in my office. I called them in and said, "If we're going to act like kids, then we're going to take a break here and have milk and cookies!" That put us all in a good place to get to a quick resolution.

(Rick Hendrick, Owner, Hendrick Motorsports, Concord, NC, shared his success in the Don Yaeger podcast)

3 How can I lead if I'm not at my best?

The last year took its toll on employees around the world – whether they were suddenly sent home to work, were safe and stressed on site, or lost their jobs.

It was difficult on managers and supervisors, too. I was concerned that I couldn't keep my team energized and connected if I wasn't at my best.

All-around wellness

So before I let my morale slip, I made my well-being a priority. That would help keep me energized and optimistic for my team members. For me, that meant addressing physical, mental, emotional and spiritual fitness.

For instance, I set alarms for regular walk reminders to keep my body moving. I scheduled phone dates with friends to keep my emotional well-being in check. And I made a point to continue regular team breakfasts to boost morale and gauge all of our mental well-being.

(Cynthia Chen, Senior Vice President for Consumer Health in North America, Reckitt Benckiser, Parsippany, NJ)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Does ex-employee have rights to COBRA insurance?

Question: We fired an employee for stealing, and she expects to be covered under COBRA to continue health care. Is she eligible?

Answer: COBRA ensures almost any employee who's fired can get extended health coverage, says Attorney Tzvia Feiertage, an employment law expert at Epstein Becker & Green P.C. But employees who are fired for "gross misconduct" aren't, Feiertage says.

Theft falls under gross misconduct, so this employee wouldn't qualify for COBRA, she says.

Remember other eligible times

Beyond this situation, you'll want to remember there are other qualifying events for COBRA coverage. Some include hour reductions that result in loss of healthcare coverage, death of a covered employee, divorce and sometimes furloughs, Feiertage says.

Source: tinyurl.com/COBRA496

LIGHTER SIDE

■ Can quirky benefits really attract better talent?

Leaders often struggle to fill job openings with ideal candidates.

So companies come up with perks and benefits that might entice the best candidates to join them. Some of the most quirky, but possibly attractive, are:

- egg freezing for female employees
- on-site Botox injections and tanning
- surfing during lunch breaks
- concierge service that does employees' home chores
- \$50 monthly beauty budget for haircuts, manicures and pedicures
- Beer Cart Friday every week
- wine Bar in middle of office, and
- Tank Top Tuesdays.

Source: Coburg Bank, tinyurl.com/perks498

COMMUNICATION NEWS

2 bright sides to working in a pandemic

Despite the difficulties the pandemic caused, some positive things have emerged.

Employees said their work skills and ability to handle everything that's happened have improved, a recent Skynova survey found.

In response to pandemic layoffs, more than 50% of employees said their abilities to think creatively, work harder, multi-task and produce more has increased.

And while we might think all that would impact them negatively, nearly 60% said their stress reduced or stayed the same, and their mental health and job satisfaction improved or stayed the same. Employees are doing more than getting by. They've started to thrive.

And many of those who were laid off are back at work as the unemployment rate was cut in half from the peak last year.

Reason to communicate candidly

Of course, the upheaval still took a toll on employee morale.

One of the best – and least expensive – ways to positively impact morale is to keep employees informed. Consistent, candid communication from the top eliminates morale-busting gossip and misinformation.

Sources: tinyurl.com/benefits497;
tinyurl.com/unemployment497

Some remote workers don't want to come back: What now?

Nearly 30% of remote workers don't want to come back on site. Ever.

What's more, two-thirds of employees say, going forward, they prefer jobs with companies that offer work-from-home options.

So how can you keep good people and find new employees when many don't want to be on-site?

Experts recommend these strategies:

- **Focus on successes** to highlight benefits of being on site – such as collaboration, fewer

distractions, resources, training, career opportunities, etc.

- **Make it easier to work on-site.** Look for ways to help ease employees' work-life balance burdens. For instance, can you partner with local facilities that offer oversight for children in virtual school?
- **Make it efficient to work on-site.** What meetings and processes can you eliminate so employees can get more done in less time when they're on-site?

Source: [HRMorning.com](https://www.hrmorning.com)

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

No. The company lost and the lawsuit will proceed.

The employee's attorney claimed he had an injury that qualified for protection under the ADA. The company knew he was injured and it affected his ability to get to work. He should've been accommodated. Instead, he was fired.

The company's attorney argued the employee never clearly voiced he had a qualifying injury and needed an accommodation. Instead, he kept quiet and distanced from work. The boss could do nothing more than mark the excessive absences as unexcused – which was a fireable offense.

The court disagreed, saying the boss

should've reached out to get more information about the injury and the reasons he continually called out. The company failed to participate in the interactive process of exploring an ADA accommodation.

Communicate more

Communication – or the failure to communicate – was the downfall in this case.

It's important to keep an open dialogue with employees who are injured and/or continually missing work to be certain you're doing all you can.

(Based on *Hazelett v. Walmart Stores*.
Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

I am not a product of my circumstances. I am a product of my decisions.

– Stephen Covey

Nothing can stop the man with the right mental attitude from achieving his goal; nothing on earth can help the man with the wrong mental attitude.

– Thomas Jefferson

I think it is possible for ordinary people to choose to be extraordinary.

– Elon Musk

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