

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

April 14, 2021



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Feedback that makes a difference: 4 steps to get it right every time

Positive or negative— you want to make it meaningful

The feedback you give employees often falls on deaf ears.

How can you be heard? Give more *meaningful* feedback – whether it's negative or positive – to make an impact.

Professional trainers Karin Hurt and David Dye ask in their leadership development programs, *If you knew your manager cared about you and had your best interest at heart, would you want meaningful performance feedback – even if it was hard to hear?*

“The answer is always a resounding ‘YES!’” Hurt and Dye said.

Most employees can turn negative feedback into something positive. Even better, most employees can take positive feedback to

a higher level ... as long as you make it meaningful. Here are four steps to achieve that.

1. Review expectations

Before you give feedback, review expectations. It's especially important if an employee missed goals. You want to make sure you both have a shared view of success.

It's only fair to start a feedback conversation when you've agreed on expectations. One sure way is to keep them documented.

2. Plan for a 2-way conversation

Feedback is much more than the leader telling an employee what's right or wrong.

Please see Feedback ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

She has a lot to say, less to do – and sues

“I'm telling you, Veronica, if you walk out of the meeting this afternoon, there will be consequences,” Manager Brandon Reynolds told the employee as they talked in his office.

“And I'm telling you for the fifth time,” Veronica said. “I know what Andy makes. It's a lot more than me. He does the same work as me. I should be paid what he is paid.”

“You've done nothing about my complaints, so I need to take drastic measures to get my point heard and resolved,” Veronica continued.

“I have listened to you every time you've complained, and I have looked into the accusations that your pay is unfair,” Brandon said.

“And I've told you the claim is unfounded. Andy has more experience than you. Your salary fits your experience and role.”

Promises kept

“If you still stand by that, don't expect me and my report at the meeting,” Veronica said.

Veronica did as she promised – didn't show at the meeting. And Brandon did as he promised – invoked consequences. He demoted her for the constant complaining and failing to show up for an important job duty.

Veronica sued, claiming her lower salary and demotion were discriminatory based on gender.

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.

Feedback ...

(continued from Page 1)

You want to INSPIRE during feedback:

- **Initiate** the conversation with something as simple as, “Is now a good time to talk?”
- **Notice** a specific behavior. Refer to actions, not attitudes. For instance, “I noticed you rejected the six suggestions your teammates made.”
- **Support** with objective evidence. Example: “When Dean started to talk about involving IT, you cut him off.”
- **Probe** by getting their perspective. Ask, “What’s going on?” or “Why do you think this is happening?”
- **Invite solutions.** Get employees involved by asking, “What do you think you can do to resolve this?”
- **Review** with a check for understanding. Say something like, “Great. What I hear is you’ll do X going forward. Is that right?”
- **Enforce** by scheduling a mutual followup. You might say, “The team meets two times next week. Let’s chat on Friday to talk about your progress with this commitment.”

3. Agree on understanding

Once you’re ready to move forward with feedback, you’ll want to make

sure you both understand and agree on actions and emotions.

For action, confirm what will happen next. Say, “What’s the first (or most important) thing you’ll do when we leave this meeting?” This way, you’re sure they’ve agreed to what’s been said and will be done.

For emotions, “I’m glad we could meet and get this talked through. How are you feeling now?” You can hear concerns or excitement and address either.

4. Escalate when needed

Wouldn’t it be great if one good conversation was all the feedback you needed to give to be effective?

Unfortunately, it doesn’t always work that way. Hurt and Dye suggest another acronym to escalate feedback to help employees – the ART approach:

- **Action** conversation. Meet again and focus heavily on the behavior that’s not working and how it must change.
- **Repetition** conversation. If the first chat didn’t work, have another focused heavily on the action and *when* it needs to be repeated.
- **Trust** conversation. Finally, appeal to emotions. Focus on how the behaviors break commitments and relationships.

Sources: *Let’s Grow Leaders*, tinyurl.com/feedback498 and Harvard Business Review, tinyurl.com/review498

TECH CORNER

Too much tech: Give your eyes and ears relief

Whether you work from home or on-site, you probably interact with a screen much of the day.

It’s tough on your eyes and ears. They need relief. Here’s how:

For the eyes

- **Practice the 20-20-20 Rule.** Every 20 minutes, look at an object 20 feet from your screen for 20 seconds.
- **Wear blue light glasses.** They’re inexpensive and meant to protect your eyes from glare and reduce damage from screen staring.

- **Enlarge the font size on your phone and laptop.** Click the *View* menu in web browsers; on iPhones, go to *Settings > Accessibility > Display & Text Size*.

For the ears

- **Turn on the speaker.** Take a break from headphones. Try a Bluetooth speaker to pair with your smartphone.
- **Dial up differently.** If you’re already hooked up, you can also make calls with the Amazon Echo, Google Home or Apple HomePod apps.

Source: Wall Street Journal, tinyurl.com/eyesandears498

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ How to move more each workday

No matter where we work these days, experts agree: We don’t move enough.

It’s a good idea to add more movement into the workday for two reasons: It can improve physical health and communication. People speak and listen better when moving, say experts at Duarte, a presentation facilitator.

Three ways to move more:

- **Plan standing or walking meetings.** If just two or three people meet and don’t require a screen, take a socially distanced walk outside or through office hallways.
- **Create a wellness movement.** One company starts all meetings with 60 seconds of self-care. Some may stretch. Some may march in place. Some may meditate.
- **Present standing up.** Even if you’re on a Zoom call, try to stand while you share information.

Source: tinyurl.com/move498

■ 3 remote work challenges – and how to help employees

Remote work continues to be a reality – and a challenge for many. Here are employees’ top challenges, and how you can help them.

- **Distractions.** Life still goes on at home, even when employees work. Encourage them to work in low- or no-traffic areas. And schedule specific time for chores each day so the home to-do list doesn’t distract them from work.
- **Comfort.** Nearly 65% of remote workers say they have pains – including “tech neck” and lower back issues – from working in less-than-ideal conditions. If your people will continue to work from home, try to get them a good ergonomic setup.
- **Isolation.** Many employees still feel lonely and sad working alone all day. Managers want to do regular mental health checks and tell employees about available mental health resources.

Source: *Best Money Moves*, tinyurl.com/challenges498

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 Employee-led ERGs meet great needs

We recognized that Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was a good baseline for how to treat employees in the workplace.

We aimed to meet their needs for:

- Safety – give them a respectfully safe and healthy environment to work
- Recognition – continually recognize and reward them financially for their input, and
- Higher purpose – connect them to a purpose higher than just doing tasks day-in, day-out.

While we did what we could to satisfy their needs, we wanted to

empower employees to be able to do it for themselves, too.

Take the lead

So we invited employees to create and lead their own Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). It gave them a higher purpose connected to something they were passionate about.

Some groups were PRIDE, women in tech and diversity inclusion. Employees' involvement fulfills a big part in all of Maslow's Hierarchy.

(Jeff Cates, CEO, Achievers, San Francisco)

2 How to find the right self-care prescription

We wanted our employees to take good care of themselves so they could perform at their peak on the job – and be their best outside of work.

Of course, we couldn't mandate self-care, especially when that meant different things to different people.

So we steered employees toward some of the best-known ways to practice self-care – regular meditation, time outdoors, a spiritual practice or a gratitude journal – as ways to prevent a downward slide toward burnout.

Just one night!

Many embraced it. But we encouraged this research-proven tactic to help everyone across the board: Completely unplug for one night midweek – just one, folks! Many tried it and found they were more likely to look forward to going to work in the mornings and feel fulfilled at their jobs.

It's also been great modeling tool: Employees feel OK unplugging when the boss does it, too. Now teams stay focused – and don't get burned out.

(Jo Ilfeld, Executive Coach, Jody Michael Associates, Chicago)

3 Before you make benefit decisions, talk

COVID-19 changed how and where we worked. It also changed our employees' personal and professional needs.

Our company needed to respond to those changing needs, especially when it came to the benefits and perks we offered them.

We were about to make changes we thought were good for them. But before we jumped in, we took an important step back.

To make sure we hit the mark on what was important to employees in their new situations, we opened a dialogue to hear what they wanted.

Eyes wide open

For instance, when we got feedback as everyone was working from home, we found Gen Z employees had very different experiences – and needs – than new parents.

That feedback helped us look for and make changes that benefited employees most – and that helped with increased morale and engagement.

(Rob LaHayne, CEO, TouchCare, New York)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Employees travel again: Do we require quarantine?

Question: It's that time of year again – vacation. Some employees are already talking about plans to travel outside of the state. Can we require them to quarantine for two weeks after they return from their trips?

Answer: Probably not, says employment law attorney Todd Scherwin with the firm Fisher Phillips.

Many states prevent employers from restricting employees' personal travel. So you don't want to violate your state's mandates.

Ask for a test

However, you might want to ask – or even require – employees to get a COVID-19 test before returning to the workplace, Scherwin says.

Just be willing to pay for the test if you require it, Scherwin suggests.

Source: tinyurl.com/FisherPhillips498

LIGHTER SIDE

■ 1-star ratings speak volumes

Speaking of travel (*see story above*), you might be interested in what others have to say about some vacation hot spots: our national parks.

Here are one-star review comments from Yelp:

- **Sequoia:** "There are bugs and stuff, and they will bite you in the face."
- **Yosemite:** "Trees block the views, and too many gray rocks."
- **Yellowstone:** "It's like a bigger version of Central Park, only with bears."
- **Denali:** "The bus stops way too much."
- **Isle Royale:** "No cell service and terrible Wi-Fi."
- **The Grand Canyon:** "A hole. A very, very large hole."

COMMUNICATION NEWS

What's good about work? Lots!

Great news for 2021: After a dismal 2020, employees have a lot of positive things to say about work.

Engagement jumped 13%. Two-thirds of employees say they like or love work, the Qualtrics 2020 Employee Experience Trends Report found.

Some like the newfound flexibility. Others found more meaning in their work when they stepped outside of the office walls.

Take engagement higher

Here's what researchers know drives engagement – and how you can take it higher:

- **Belonging.** Let employees take the lead on creating and maintaining social, inclusive, diverse and equitable groups.
- **Adapting to change.** Involve employees at the decision-making level on changes so they're more likely to embrace them.
- **Corporate social responsibility.** Give them time to volunteer for your company's or their social passions.
- **Learning and development.** Now that employees are back in full action, offer opportunities to learn and develop professionally.

Source: tinyurl.com/Qualtrics498

More good news: Loyalty up, and here's how to continue

The good news goes on: 70% of employees intend to stay with their current employer.

Employee loyalty to the boss, company and colleagues is up 19% from two years ago.

Continue the success

To encourage employee loyalty going forward, the Qualtrics researchers suggest:

- **Focus on well-being.** Try to offer mental well-being benefits and perks, such as access to yoga and counseling.

- **Monitor balance.** Regularly check in with employees – especially if they're remote – to see how they're handling the workload and if they need more resources or less stress.
- **Ask for – and act on – employee feedback.** Employees need to feel their opinions matter. Ask for feedback, and most importantly, act on it. Nothing frustrates employees – and hurts loyalty – more than being asked what they think, then never seeing their ideas considered or used.

Source: tinyurl.com/Qualtrics498

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes, the company won the case.

The employee's attorney claimed she was the victim of gender discrimination.

First, the employer paid her less than a male counterpart who was in the same position, doing the same work.

Second, she was demoted for complaining about the disparity.

The company's attorney (and manager) agreed she was paid less than her male colleague – because he had more experience.

Furthermore, she was demoted for failing to show up at a meeting, which was an important part of her work.

The court agreed, recognizing the employee was paid less because she was less qualified. The court also agreed constant complaining and skipping the meeting were unacceptable – and demotion-worthy – behaviors.

Be clear, consistent

This case shows that pay differences can be justified with good, tangible reasoning – such as more experience or training.

Equally important were the manager's clear, consistent answers to the string of complaints.

(Based on *Davis v. Town of Tazewell*.
Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

Don't let yesterday take up too much of today.

– Will Rogers

Growth and comfort do not coexist.

– Ginni Rometty

Start with what is right rather than what is acceptable.

– Frank Kafka

True terror is to wake up one morning and discover that your high school class is running the country.

– Kurt Vonnegut

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