Communication Bulletin *for Managers & Supervisors* ™

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

Effective communication lost in pandemic: 3 ways to regain it

Easy isn't the same as effective when it comes to communicating

If it wasn't for technology advancements, many businesses would've failed during the pandemic.

Zoom meetings, Google Chats, email and document sharing apps let people communicate often.

But they aren't the most effective ways to communicate.

"One of the fundamental components to successful teamwork is communication," says Clint Padgett, president and CEO of Project Success Inc. and author of *How Teams Triumph: Managing By Commitment*. "If you can't talk to your team, you can't be successful. And the key to developing communication is face-to-face, eyeball-to-eyeball conversation.

That's how you pass along complex information and build relationships."

Workplaces won't likely leave behind the digital communication everyone has embraced. However, Padgett suggests, leaders want to help employees maintain a balance to be effective.

"Communication and conversation aren't the same thing," Padgett says.

He offers these tips and cautionary advice.

Recognize, overcome tech limits

Technology is good for exchanging information. But many people use as few words as possible to convey important information or

Sharpen Your Judgment

Are his outbursts threats or ADA-protected acts?

"You're nothing but a no-good liar and if I had my way, you'd …" employee Randall McEnteer yelled angrily at a colleague, prompting his manager to jump from her desk chair.

Kelly Rogan hustled down the hall before Randall could say much more.

"In my office, now," Kelly told Randall.

He followed and after they both sat in Kelly's office, she said, "OK, what's going on? Why did I hear another blowup out there?"

Randall leaned in, much more quiet now, and said, "Billy said he was going to help me today, and after lunch he says he's too busy. In my book, that makes you a liar and poor co-worker."

"Did you threaten Billy again?" Kelly asked.

"I don't know," Randall said, slouching now. "You know how it is with my disorder. I get in a funk and don't know what's coming out of my mouth."

Colleagues afraid

"I'm fully aware of your condition, treatment, and the fact that a doctor said you aren't a threat," Kelly said. "But it doesn't feel that way when you explode and threaten others.

"We can't have employees afraid at work," Kelly said. "I need to look into this incident more."

Two employees confirmed what Kelly thought: Randall threatened a colleague. She fired him and he filed a lawsuit claiming an Americans with Disabilities Act violation. 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.

Communication …
(continued from Page 1)

emojis to replace real emotions. That creates unclear messages.

"Be honest, how many times have you misinterpreted the tone of an email or a static document?" Padgett asks.

To communicate better electronically, think before you send: If you received the text or email you've composed, would you understand the content without more explanation?

Be liberal with your response because you might be an expert on the subject, but your recipients aren't. And remember, tone is nearly impossible to convey in digital communication, so consider how yours will be interpreted.

Set up 2-way communication

If leaders don't make asynchronous communication a priority, no one else will. And that will cause more miscommunication, misinterpretation, hard feelings and ineffectiveness.

"It's OK to text or email questions before a conversation takes place or for follow-up responses afterward," Padgett says. "Conversations don't need to be the only form of communication, but they are the most important by far."

If you can't meet personally with people or your team, meet over video.

It has limitations, but it allows everyone to more genuinely share and read emotions and convey information more clearly.

Appreciate technology, value people

It might feel like technology got many teams and companies to work through the pandemic. But it was *the people using the technology* who made remote, hybrid and/or socially distanced working work.

"Technology isn't the answer. It's the tool," Padgett says. "If you choose technology over people, your project

---

Communication and conversation aren't the same thing.

---

won't be successful. While your communication may be fast, you'll sacrifice quality, clarity, accountability, and ultimately, success."

So recognize, celebrate and reward employees for communicating effectively. Ask them to share stories about successful meetings or overcoming problems when they talked through it all – rather than exchange dozens of messages.

Source: clintonmpadgett.com

TECH CORNER

How everyone can help prevent cyberattacks

Anyone with internet access is vulnerable to a cyberattack.

And if one employee is affected, the entire company is likely at risk.

So you want to help employees avoid and prevent cyberattacks.

Best practices

To do that, share these tips:

1. Recognize your supply chains. Potential threats often come via channels you already use regularly.

2. Assume an attacker is always lurking. You want to think about

preventing a cyberattack – with extra caution to what you open and share – and how to mitigate an attacker's ability to exploit your information.

3. Prepare for a breach. In the same sense, work on a plan to recover from a breach. Cyberattack insurance is a good idea, but it can't recover lost intelligence.

4. Focus first on people. Most cyberattackers get in on human error. Work with IT to regularly review cybersecurity practices.

5. Protect your "crown jewels." Add extra layers of security to your most important data.

Source: ChiefExecutive.net

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ Finally seeing others again? How to reconnect

You and your employees have likely missed a lot of interaction – and opportunities to connect in the past year.

Some may have lost the desire or ability to truly connect with others. And those connections are important for a good workplace culture.

Try some of these tips to reconnect:

- **Be brave.** Others may not know how to come out of their shell either. Make the first move. Start the conversation with something other than the coronavirus.
- **Ask about others.** People love to talk about themselves, so ask something deeper than "How are you?" Ask about what they watch, read, do to exercise, etc.
- **Ask for help.** You'll feel less alone and the colleague will likely feel good about lending a hand.
- **Measure the interaction.** Be sure interactions are equal. Take notice of signs your colleague would prefer to be left alone – such as looking past you or not speaking much. If that's the case, connect with other people.

Source: RD.com

■ Should you rehire former employees? Study says ...

In almost all situations, it would be easier to rehire a former employee than a brand new one. After all, the boomerang employee knows the place, job and expectations.

But should you?

Probably not, say Harvard Business School researchers.

Whether the employee left the first time for negative (fired), neutral (personal) or positive (continued education) reasons, they likely won't work out a second time. Researchers found boomerang employees will perform at the same level and are likely to leave again.

On the other hand, new or internal hires tend to get better at the job.

Source: tinyurl.com/rehire499

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 employees with child schooling issues

Many of our employees were affected by school closings throughout the past year.

Whether they worked on-site, hybrid or remotely, they had to handle their usual work and figure out how to educate children when schools were closed.

We heard a lot of them talk about struggles with backup childcare plans and keeping up with academics.

It was our cue to help employees continue to thrive in their work and help their families through difficult times.

We partnered with an established educational service provider. Through that, employees could get teaching or tutoring help for their kids.

Everyone stays focused now

Had we not listened closely to employees' struggles, we might have offered more child care. But it turned out they needed classroom backup.

It helps put them at ease and able to focus on work – a win for all of us.

(Ellyn Shook, Chief Leadership & Human Resources Officer, Accenture, spoke at The Conference Board's Organizational Impact on Social Change Issues online conference)

2 SEW: Employee- and self-assessment tool

I want the best people in leadership positions. And I want leaders – including myself – to stay effective throughout their tenure.

That takes initial and continual assessment. I've used the SEW approach to regularly size up skills, ego and work ethic. I assign SEW scores to wanna-be, new and veteran leaders.

Do a little math

It's a one to five scale. Each criteria gets a number, then I take the "S" score, divide it by "E" score and raise it to the power of the "W" score.

Using myself as an example, I'm a four in skills. I'm a two for ego because I focus on the company's success far more than mine. And if five is a workaholic, I'm a four on "W." So my SEW score is 16 (four divided by two is two, taken to the fourth power is 16).

This is important because if the ego score is too high, it will drown out the other – and I know I don't have a good leader in place.

(Dan Springer, CEO and President, DocuSign, shared this success on Investors.com)

3 Watch for signs staff hit 'Pandemic Wall'

We saw a statistic that 70% of employees say this period in their lives – the pandemic – has been the most stressful ever.

They've missed out on the things that reduced stress – hanging out with co-workers, bouncing ideas off of each other, workday structure and social norms.

Without all that, we recognized that some employees could hit the "Pandemic Wall" – a feeling of complete exhaustion and inability or lack of desire to go forward.

We wanted to help.

Opportunity to open up

We told front-line managers to be on the lookout for symptoms – performance issues, missed deadlines, late to meetings, abrasive behavior.

Then we encouraged them to ask employees, "I've noticed X. Is there anything you want to talk about?"

That gave employees opportunities to open up and find help.

(Terri Patterson, Principal, Control Risks, Washington, D.C.)

COMMUNICATION NEWS

3 surprising new workplace norms

Many things that were once taboo in the workplace are becoming norms.

Here are three changes, according to research from Vyond – and how leaders might need to adapt.

Tolerance increases

- **Politics and religion are fodder for discussion.** Just 20% of employees think talking about these sensitive subjects is a no-no at work. That's down 23% in a year. Managers still want to be sure the conversations don't turn heated or could be considered harassment.

- **Workplace romance on the rise.** Just 20% of employees think finding love at work is wrong. That's down from 52% a year ago. Managers can't control matters of the heart – but you want to be sure employees are familiar with your policies regarding appropriate behavior in and out of work when it comes to relationships.

- **Social media breaks expected and accepted.** Just 23% of employees consider using personal social media during work a form of slacking. That's down from 46% last year. It's critical employees understand and adhere to your social media content policies, though.

Source: Vyond, tinyurl.com/norms499

How to build – or rebuild – trust with your team

Trust in the workplace was on shaky ground before the coronavirus.

Working remotely – when communication was even less direct – hurt it more. Nearly 70% of employees don't trust management in their organizations, a Blind study found.

Now it's critical for leaders to rebuild trust.

"Front-line managers that … can create a safe space where other team members can share will quickly build trust with their employees," says Alla Weinberg, author of *Culture of Safety: Building an environment for people to think, collaborate, and innovate.*

Work to rebuild trust on-site and remotely, focusing on boundaries:

- Ask on-site employees to help establish personal boundaries with two lists: what's OK – and what's not OK – with me.

- Do the same for remote employees. Theirs might include turning off the camera in virtual meetings or refraining from email after 6 p.m.

Sources: tinyurl.com/trust499; tinyurl.com/Weinberg499

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes, the company won.

The employee's attorney claimed he suffered from a disorder and was being treated. The company knew about the disorder – and the doctor's opinion that the employee wasn't a threat to anyone – so it had to accommodate him. Instead, the manager fired him.

The company's attorney recognized the employee had a disability under the ADA. But accommodating or tolerating his outbursts would be harmful to the business and other employees, the attorney argued.

The court agreed, noting that employees who suffer from any disability must still be able to handle the duties of their jobs. In this case, he couldn't handle a duty of the job – working with others without threatening or intimidating them.

Can hold people accountable

Managers want to work to accommodate employees who are ADA-qualified. But managers still need to hold employees accountable to workplace expectations.

The manager in this case did things correctly: gave the employee chances to change, warned him of the consequences for not behaving in line with expectations and fired him for business reasons.

(Based on *Mayo v. PCC Structural Inc.* Dramatized for effect.)