

Communication

Bulletin *for Managers & Supervisors*™

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

June 14, 2021



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COVID changed everything – your office included: How to adapt

Business experts give 5 ideas to create new workplace norms

Can work just go back to the way it was before COVID?

In a word, no.

Managers need to lead differently. We all need to communicate differently. And companies need to do business differently.

But different can be good – even better, say Harvard Business School experts.

Here are five keys to creating a workplace where people communicate and collaborate effectively and are engaged and motivated.

Be honest about your needs

Employees will more likely accept and adapt to new workplace norms if they're

part of creating them.

“Leaders need to commit to telling the truth about what the company needs, while engaging people in the hard work of creating solutions together,” says Amy Edmondson, a Harvard leadership and management professor.

Work with employees to identify new goals, expectations and demands. Then explore different ways to get them done that make your workplace the right fit for everyone.

Do hybrid responsibly

Many companies have decided hybrid is the way to go: As long as employees are as productive working from home as they are in

Please see Adapt ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Employee lies, jeopardizes business, is let go

“First of all, we don't take well to lying,” said Supervisor Natalie Povanda. “Secondly, your lie could dramatically affect our business.”

“I wouldn't call it a lie,” said Employee Jenny Richards. “It was a different way of answering a question – and it was true to me.”

“Look right here,” said Natalie, pushing Jenny's job application toward her.

“We ask, ‘Please indicate if you are under a doctor's care or taking any regular medication.’ You said ‘No,’” Natalie said.

“Sure, my doctor keeps tabs on me, but my treatments for Hepatitis C don't prevent me from being able to work,” Jenny said.

“Proof positive: I've been here for a few months

and everyone seems happy with my work, right?” Jenny continued.

Took the issue to authorities

“You're doing OK,” Natalie said. “But you lied, and if our clients found out about all of this, there'd be a mass exodus.”

“Under these circumstances, I have to let you go,” Natalie concluded.

Jenny complained to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which quickly sued the company.

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.

Adapt ...

(continued from Page 1)

the office, then they can split the workweek between the two.

If that's your case, keep in mind "hybrid remote arrangements should be designed to bring teams physically together during periods," says Prithwiraj Choudhury, a Harvard professor who studies how geography affects worker productivity.

Point is, if you choose hybrid, meet when employees are on-site and enhance that interaction with virtual experiences when they're not.

Make face time a priority

Some employees are excited to be back in the office. Some aren't. But most have one thing in common: They like the flexibility they experienced working remotely. You may already accommodate that with hybrid schedules.

So you want to make face time when people are in the office together a priority.

"Make a team schedule, so the days in the office are most meaningful and focused on connections, both scheduled and serendipitous," says Julia Austin, a former senior lecturer at Harvard.

TECH CORNER

Dread your inbox? 3 ways to get off email lists

Drowning in junk email? Or just tired of sifting through promotions to get to what matters?

Then it's time to get off email lists.

Clean up your inbox

Whether you signed up because it was relevant at one time or it's spam, here are three ways to get off lists.

- **Act on the message.** Nearly all email messages have an "unsubscribe" link at the bottom. Hit it and follow the instructions, including identifying it as spam if it is.

Add 'kindness' to the to-do list

Everyone had a tough year. A gentler workplace can help people transition into new norms. Leaders will want to set the stage.

"Managers can exhibit kindness in many ways: actively listen, check in, offer support and understanding, help connect employees to necessary resources, acknowledge their efforts, and thank them generously," says Boris Groysberg, a Harvard professor of business administration.

And remember to be kind to yourself. You endured the pandemic, too, plus the pressure to help your employees through it.

Focus on engagement

Regardless of where work gets done, managers will want to focus on engagement. Employees may need a nudge (or jolt!) to get back to on-site work, demands and norms.

"Leaders should be focused on how to make work inspiring, compelling, and engaging, whether that work is done at the office or not," says Gary Pisano, a Harvard professor of business administration.

Regularly tie each employee's work to bigger company goals, values or missions. Remind them of the positive impact they have on the organization.

Source: Harvard's Working Knowledge, tinyurl.com/change502

- **Act from Gmail.** Open messages, and if Gmail detects that it can unsubscribe, it'll show "Unsubscribe" by the sender's email address. Press it and confirm in the pop-up window that's your intent. Gmail will send the unsubscribe message to the sender.
- **Classify as spam or block.** Open messages and open the options at the top (often found as three dots). Click "Mark as spam," "Spam" or something similar to route future messages to your spam box. Or click "Block" and they won't come at all.

Source: Entrepreneur, tinyurl.com/inbox502

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ 3 kinds of failure: How to help others through them

Every failure is an opportunity to learn and get better.

Leaders can help employees do both when you identify their reaction to the failure and work with them to get beyond it, says leadership expert and consultant Dan Rockwell.

Failure reactions include:

- **Humility.** It's the best reaction. They own the mistake. They're most open to learning and growth. Help them identify the issue and new approaches to try.
- **Manipulation.** They might intend to avoid the failure again but continue to make the same mistakes that led to it. Try repetition and regular check-ins to keep them on track.
- **Arrogance.** This is the worst reaction. They often make excuses, blame or resist change. You'll want to be specific with ways to change – and consequences for not making the changes.

Source: Leadership Freak, tinyurl.com/failure502

■ Replicate 'by the way' moments now

Work from home has eliminated a small, but important, part of working together – the "by the way" moment.

It's those times when people walk out of a meeting and comment late on something that came up – and it's the breakthrough solution. Or when one employee pops her head into a colleague's cubicle and asks for feedback on an idea – and it's the next best idea. Or when a boss notices good work – and it makes the employee feel great for the day.

These are important, says Michael Wade, author of *All I Said Was*. They happen best in-person – hallways, meetings, water coolers, etc.

In the absence of those, managers want to ask employees virtually, "Is there anything else you want to mention?"

Source: tinyurl.com/BTW501

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 Boss at your door – and you’re going to love it!

Like many companies, ours had employees work remotely when the pandemic hit. And then it continued much longer than we anticipated.

But it was working and everyone was safe. So we rolled with it. And our employees were killing it!

We couldn’t give them the same kind of accolades and attention for their success that we did when they were on-site.

Surprised the winner

That is, until we decided to take the accolades and attention to them.

As the CEO, I created the “CEO Values Award” – a monthly trophy and cash reward.

Then, during a company-wide Zoom call when I was about to announce the recipient, I strolled up to the winner’s home. I had contacted the winner’s spouse ahead of time to take over the video shoot when I rang the bell.

It’s shown employees that we care about them, look forward to working together again and, most importantly, value the efforts they’ve put in working remotely.

(Ryan Wuerch, CEO, Dosh, shared this success in The Wall Street Journal)

2 Maintain culture when employees are remote

We hired a lot of people who never stepped foot inside our company offices over the past year.

Some may never do it, as we become increasingly a remote and hybrid employer.

It’s tougher to build and maintain a company culture when people aren’t physically together.

We haven’t figured it out completely yet, but we’ve done some things that have helped.

Let’s meet and join virtually

For one, we created a welcome message channel on our internal workplace app. Leaders and colleagues can send personal welcome messages to new hires in their early days.

We also added several virtual communities that allow employees to get involved with groups that interest them.

For instance, there are cooking, hobby and diversity groups that meet and share information on the app.

(Johnny Oster, Director of Internal Communications, Facebook, Menlo Park, CA)

3 Making mental health care a priority

In our industry, we keep close tabs on employee health needs. Across industries and company sizes, we witnessed a 100% increase in behavioral/mental health requests once the pandemic hit.

More people than ever looked for guidance on accessing mental health benefits – and our company wasn’t an exception.

Even reluctant people tried

To help them get what they needed as quickly as possible, we offered access to virtual tools.

Even if they were available before the pandemic, many employees might not have been familiar with them.

So we communicated more about how to access mental and behavioral health experts, plus stress reducing benefits.

We found that people who might have once been reluctant to get virtual care were open to – and embraced – it during the pandemic.

(Thibaud Clement, CEO, Loomly, Los Angeles)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ We expect face masks – and are getting pushback

Question: An employee refuses to come back to the office because we require everyone to wear face masks. Can we force her to comply?

Answer: Yes, say employment attorneys Ashley Steiner Kelly and Henry Perlowski of Arnall Golden Gregory LLC. You can require employees to wear face coverings, gloves or other protective gear to help avoid spreading COVID-19, as long they comply with OSHA requirements.

You also need to discipline the employee for refusing to follow safety rules, the attorneys say.

A caveat

But if the employee has a disability that prevents her from wearing a mask, you want to work with her to determine if there are reasonable accommodations, such as wearing a different type of face covering or ongoing teleworking.

Source: tinyurl.com/masks502

LIGHTER SIDE

■ Wi-Fi names worth envy or theft

Many of us have “borrowed” Wi-Fi while on the go.

While connectivity may not be great, some of the Wi-Fi names are. Some of the best we’ve seen:

- I Pronounce You Man and Wi-Fi
- Wi-Fi Fo Fum
- Mom, Click Here for Internet
- Click Here for Viruses
- Drop It Like It’s Hotspot
- Thou Shalt Not Covet Thy Neighbor’s Wi-Fi
- I Believe Wi Can Fi
- No More Mister Wi-Fi
- The Promised LAN
- Jump on the Bandwidth, and
- Not the Wi-Fi You’re Looking For.

COMMUNICATION NEWS

4 signs an employee will quit

You'd hate to see a good employee go – especially when it's difficult to fill any position these days.

So you likely want to take steps to get them reengaged with their work and your company before they say they're leaving.

One way: Know the signs someone is thinking about leaving.

Out of sight, out of mind?

The Prodoscore Research Council recently found, in the five weeks before quitting, employees:

- **Do less.** Their productivity rate drops 33%.

- **Clock in less.** On average, they start 16 minutes later and end 24 minutes earlier.
- **Communicate less.** They send 51% fewer email messages and fill their calendars 33% less than normal.
- **Interact less.** They cut the time they meet and talk to – in person and virtually – with colleagues in half.

If you see these signs, you'll want to talk with employees about motivation, work load and anything else that could be affecting engagement.

Source: tinyurl.com/workday502

The difference between wellness and well-being is important

To engage employees and help them be more productive, focus on well-being more than wellness.

The difference is important: Wellness is about a healthy lifestyle, which is often emphasized in corporate wellness plans.

Well-being is more about a well-lived life. Gallup researchers found five well-being elements that affect life in and out of work:

- **Career well-being:** People like what they do every day.
- **Financial well-being:** They know how

to manage their money well.

- **Social well-being:** They have meaningful friendships.
- **Physical well-being:** They have the energy to do what needs to be done.
- **Community well-being:** They like where they live.

Work with HR to offer professional and personal resources and education that improve all these areas to build engagement.

Source: *Gallup*, tinyurl.com/wellness502

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

No. The company lost and had to pay the former employee more than \$20,000.

The EEOC attorneys claimed the employee was a victim under the Americans with Disabilities Act. The supervisor considered her Hepatitis C a disability and fired her because of it. The attorneys said the falsified response on her original job application was just a ruse to cover up the ADA violation.

The company's attorney argued the supervisor had good reason to fire the employee: She lied on her application – a violation of company protocols. That was the only reason she was let go, the company's attorney said.

The court disagreed – for one very specific

reason: The supervisor said they'd lose clients if they knew she had Hepatitis C. That comment showed she believed the employee was significantly restricted in her ability to work.

What you can and can't do

Managers need to find out as much as possible about applicants during the hiring process and beyond. But you can't ask about the existence, nature or severity of a disability. Furthermore, you can require new employees have a medical exam, but you can't single out anyone in that process.

(Based on *EEOC v. Heartway Corp.*
Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

You're off to great places, today is your day. Your mountain is waiting, so get on your way.

– Dr. Seuss

No one is perfect – that's why pencils have erasers.

– Wolfgang Riebe

Winning doesn't always mean being first. Winning means you're doing better than you've done before.

– Bonnie Blair

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