

Communication

Bulletin *for Managers & Supervisors*™

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

August 2, 2021



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Got something important to say? 6 keys to be brief, clear, effective

Never underestimate the power of brevity in communication

Employees are stressed, and you'll likely be surprised by the newest reason.

Nearly 80% are frustrated with ineffective company communication, according to the Dynamic Signal Annual State of Employee Communication and Engagement Study.

They're overwhelmed by too much information some days. Then they're confused by too little information other days.

Is there a happy medium – a way managers and supervisors can communicate clearly and with compassion?

Yes, says Jason Hennessey, author and CEO of Hennessey Digital. It's called brevity.

"If sincerity and passion are at the heart of

authentic leadership, brevity is at the soul," says Hennessey. "Brevity can be seen as the ability to express yourself concisely."

It's not being brutally honest. And it doesn't have to be formal and stiff.

Instead, Hennessey offers these tips on getting brevity right to improve communication effectiveness in the workplace:

1. Be kind, not curt

You want to be brief, but not rude.

That means you need to choose words carefully when you speak or write with brevity.

You can cut the fluff and emotions when

Please see Effective ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Supervisor makes changes; employee sues

"I don't understand why I need to start working in that area of our facility," said Jimmy Holden. "I've been doing a great job where I am for the past five years."

"In my experience, it's better to have all employees prepared to work in a variety of roles," said Karen Snyder, a new supervisor.

"So I want everyone on my team handling duties in different areas," Karen continued.

"Sounds reasonable," said Jimmy, "but I just don't think it's possible for me. With my disability, it would be difficult – probably impossible – for me to work in that area for an extended time."

"So can you accommodate me by keeping my work in just this area?" Jimmy asked.

"I can't promise anything now," Karen said. "But I'll look into possibilities."

Don't see eye to eye

A week later, Karen called Jimmy into her office and said, "Good news. There's a part-time position that'll be perfect for you. It's in the area you want to stay, and you can start tomorrow."

"Hold on," said Jimmy. "I don't want part-time hours. And I like what I do now. This is unfair."

Jimmy took his concerns to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which sued the company under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

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.

Effective ...

(continued from Page 1)

being brief – but leave room and time for those if people need more.

Think of using bullet points when you give information – whether it's personally in a meeting or via email or app. Then be willing to explain more if people want justification or clarity on information or decisions.

2. Slash the details

One of the best ways to be brief – and more clear – is to cut out details.

Your goal is to be the play-by-play commentator at a sports game – the one who says exactly what happens. Don't be the color commentator – the one who gives stats and background to fill a void when there's no action.

3. Know the audience

Consider who you're speaking with or writing to when you practice brevity. You likely need to cater differently to clients, employees and bosses.

In any situation, choose the most accurate words possible. For instance, "The idea is bad" doesn't help move anything forward.

But, "The idea is too broad to consider for the immediate fix we need"

is a brief, effective answer.

You want to aim for words that don't shut down progress, but instead push you toward a resolution faster.

4. Be mindful of time

People often get caught in a violent exchange of pleasantries early and late in conversations. While it's OK to ask how others are, you want to get to the heart of the matter quickly and move on when it's over.

So keep the clock in mind. Know when you'll start and end a meeting, chat or email exchange. If something important comes up, set another time to discuss it more in depth.

5. Be concise

Brevity calls for conviction. If you present, speak or write as briefly as possible, the words need to be backed up. Research before deciding, speaking or writing what you think or expect. Then communicate thoroughly.

6. Make time to share more

Being the King or Queen of Brevity presents the risk of also being a cranky co-worker. So make time for levity, too.

Send along appropriate, funny memes and jokes. Join colleagues for after-hours events where you can chat at length on a variety of subjects.

Source: *SmartBrief*, tinyurl.com/brevity505

TECH CORNER

3 old-school tech tools that help with remote work

New technology often helps us work more efficiently and from anywhere.

But it can also exhaust our eyes, ears and mental well-being.

Old technology can come to the rescue. Here are three old-school tech tools that are still handy today, especially when working from home:

- **Speaker phone.** Break free of your AirPods or other earphones and listen full blast to calls, webinars or podcasts. Get a Bluetooth speaker that pairs with your device or hooks onto your existing

smart speaker system.

- **Paper.** Write messages to alert your other housemates to your work situation. For instance, hang notes that say, "QUIET! On a very important call" or "DO NOT DISTURB until 3 p.m."
- **Old gadgets.** Instead of investing in new tech, update unused gadgets. For example, turn an old tablet into a video-chat machine. Mount it and install your most-used video chat apps. Or use the old tablet as a second monitor for a MAC or PC, applying an app to align them.

Source: Wall Street Journal, tinyurl.com/lowtech505

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ Friendships: How to regain what we lost at work

The workplace isn't just where we work – especially not this past year. It's where we make friends and build positive relationships. Much of that was lost during the pandemic.

Dr. Jeffrey Hall, author of *Relating Through Technology*, says it's important to foster relationships because employees who have friends at work are more engaged and motivated.

Managers want to help employees reignite relationships as people come back to physically work together again. Hall suggests you:

- **Make time.** Relationships take time to nurture. Build some free time into required work hours for employees to catch up and share stories.
- **Be consistent.** Try to maintain schedules so people see each other regularly and predictably.
- **Give space.** Make sure employees still have space away from their work areas to interact – whether it's a break room, conference room or outdoors. People still need a friend down the hall and a place to meet.

Source: tinyurl.com/misswork505

■ Staff responsibility up: Time to rethink training

Almost half of all managers say their staff took on different or greater responsibilities throughout the pandemic.

Employees had to find ways to work smarter and harder, whether they worked remotely alone or in a different situation on-site.

Now that the baptism by fire is over, employees likely need proper cross-training or upskilling.

Try this: Pull together a group of managers and peers to assess training needs at least quarterly.

Look at department or job-specific needs and try to uncover what's common so you can maximize effectiveness with cross-training.

Source: tinyurl.com/train505

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 How to face the new mental health crisis

We didn't have to read the statistics that indicate employees are more stressed and have sought mental health care more than ever.

We witnessed it.

Our employees were burning out, too, and we wanted them to get the mental and physical health care they needed.

Change the stigma

The first key was to get rid of any existing stigma that goes with mental health.

We believed in getting away from the

notion that people needed treatment – which can be negative – and moving toward the idea of participating in wellness options – which is positive.

So we worked at repackaging options for the workforce as positive perks and benefits, such as opportunities to participate in mindfulness, social groups, virtual happy hours, cooking lessons and exercise classes.

That's been a positive approach to a growing trend, and our employees are embracing it.

(Terri Patterson, Principal, Control Risks, Washington, DC)

2 COVID necessity is great onboarding tool

Like many companies, we sent most employees home to work when COVID-19 hit.

Fortunately, the pandemic didn't hurt our business terribly, so we still needed to recruit and onboard employees. We adapted, became increasingly flexible and eventually created a good process for finding and bringing in new hires.

Immediate celebration

When it was time to go on-site and resume traditional recruiting and onboarding, we decided to look at our remote process for better practices. We wanted to take the best from both situations to make a great new process.

For instance, one thing stood out with remote onboarding: Our recruiter made Zoom calls to tell prospects they got the job. New employees said they loved this because they had someone to celebrate the win with. Recruiters enjoyed seeing the people's happiness.

So we kept with Zoom, rather than just phone calls – and it's still fun!

(Annie Lin, VP of People, Lever, San Francisco)

3 Happy life starts with happiness at work

We found employees across industries and companies – including ours – struggled with work/life balance.

One study found 42% of employees are less satisfied with their lives. Much of that is because of work.

Employees who work from home feel they spend extra time preparing for work, feel alone working remotely and spend less time with family and friends.

We wanted to help. And we felt one of the most effective ways was through their managers.

What's troubling at work?

To help employees regain happiness in life, we encouraged managers to find out what makes them *unhappy* at work.

So they:

- checked in with direct reports who work remotely at least once a week
- asked what was their biggest work challenge, and
- tried to do something to curb or alleviate it.

(Sara Sutton, Founder and CEO of FlexJobs, Boulder, CO)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ How can we switch from vacation to paid time off?

Question: We want to initiate a paid time off (PTO) policy. With that, we don't intend to pay for "banked" days or pay out if someone is fired or quits before using his or her PTO. Some employees are grumbling that it's illegal to do. Is it?

Answer: Depends where you're located, says Tom Stahl, an employment law attorney at Rodey Law.

Many states require employers to pay out accrued and unused vacation or PTO if you fire an employee. And you can't take away benefits that at-will employees have earned.

However, you can change a policy, Stahl says. And many employers are getting rid of policies that allowed employees to build up excessive PTO (or vacation).

Ideally, and in fairness to employees, you might want to create a sort of bank for previously earned vacation. Then cut off the ability to carry forward newly earned time, Stahl suggests.

Source: jtanddale.com

LIGHTER SIDE

■ Athletes should stick to sports, not talk

Many athletes who are great on the field aren't so good behind the microphone.

Here are five who should've taken our cover story advice and stuck to brevity at the mic:

- *I owe a lot to my parents, especially my mother and father.* – Greg Norman
- *Therapy can be a good thing; it can be therapeutic.* – Alex Rodriguez
- *They shouldn't throw at me. I'm the father of five or six kids.* – Tito Fuentes
- *We're going to turn this team around 360 degrees.* – Jason Kidd
- *Nobody in football should be called a genius. A genius is a guy like Norman Einstein.* – Joe Theismann.

Source: TheSportster.com

COMMUNICATION NEWS

4 scientific reasons for Zoom fatigue

People working remotely often talk about Zoom fatigue anecdotally – like they’re just sick and tired of meeting online.

But a Stanford University researcher recently found out exactly how prolonged video chat meetings can affect you.

Quick fixes, too

Here are the four problems with too much Zoom and how to help employees avoid them:

1. The excessive amount of close-up eye contact and size of faces on video meetings is unnatural. People don’t look at each other’s heads that much in real meetings. *Fix:* Reduce the size of the Zoom window on your screen.

2. People look at themselves too much on video meetings. Normally, we take a few glances in a mirror a day. Too much makes us self-critical and stressed. *Fix:* Try the “hide self-view” button by right clicking your image once you’re framed right for the meeting.

3. People don’t move as much as normal in a video meeting. When you walk, gesture and move around in meetings, you’re more creative. *Fix:* Turn off your screen from time to time and move around while talking.

4. People have to mentally work harder to read others on video. You can’t see nonverbal cues. *Fix:* Ask more questions to clarify meaning.

Source: tinyurl.com/zoom505

Why Diversity, Equity & Inclusion should be a priority

Front-line managers and supervisors will likely need to give Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) more attention this year.

DEI jumped up four spots on HR’s top priorities in the McLean & Company’s 2021 HR Trends Report. Makes sense, too: Nearly every company in the study upped efforts to improve DEI during the pandemic.

A plan to improve

Here’s how HR leaders plan to improve DEI:

- provide inclusion training to managers

and employees

- find diverse groups of job candidates
- track and report DEI metrics
- create employee resource groups geared toward DEI, and
- establish diverse project teams throughout the organization.

It’ll pay off: In a McKinsey & Company study, companies with diverse leadership were more profitable and had greater market value.

Source: tinyurl.com/diversity505

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

No. The company agreed to a settlement, paying the employee more than \$30,000 and implementing manager training on the ADA.

The EEOC attorney claimed the employee was the victim of disability discrimination because the new supervisor:

- denied him a reasonable accommodation, knowing he was disabled under the ADA, and
- demoted him to a job that would pay less.

Before the company settled, its attorney argued the supervisor did find a reasonable accommodation: It was a job the employee could do and it was in an area of the company where the employee wanted to stay.

In the end, though, the EEOC proved the demotion was an adverse action against a disabled employee.

Work with employees

New or veteran supervisors want to work closely with employees when they request a reasonable accommodation.

Most importantly, you don’t want to offer an accommodation that pays less, includes fewer hours or is less desirable in any way, the EEOC notes.

(Based on *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission v. Meijer Inc.* Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

You’ve got to get up every morning with determination if you’re going to go to bed with satisfaction.

– George Lorimer

Things may come to those who wait, but only the things left by those who hustle.

– Abraham Lincoln

Show me a person who has never made a mistake and I’ll show you someone who has never achieved much.

– Joan Collins

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