

# Communication

## Bulletin <sup>TM</sup> for Managers & Supervisors

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

September 1, 2021



If you haven't been to our website recently, here's exclusive online content you've been missing:  
[www.CommunicationBulletin.com](http://www.CommunicationBulletin.com)



### Management Skills Center

Improve your skills and manage better



### Professional Writing Center

Hundreds of tips to get writing right

## 5 new, post-COVID rules for workplace communication

*Change some habits to avoid misunderstandings*

The pandemic changed how we do nearly everything – communicating included.

The old rules of communication in the workplace don't need to be thrown out. But how we interact with employees, bosses and co-workers isn't like it used to be.

"None of us today needs a linguistics degree to know that the ways we communicate meaning today are far more confusing than ever," says Erica Dhawan, in her book, *Digital Body Language: How to Build Trust and Connection, No Matter the Distance*. "Contemporary communication relies more than ever on *how* we say something rather than on *what* we say."

So while you don't need hardcore rules on

communicating, you want to share guidelines that reflect how people go about business now.

Dhawan suggests:

### 1. Make reading top priority

"Reading carefully is the new listening," Dhawan says.

We talk less and write more at work these days. Most communication is through email and messaging apps. Problem is, people tend to skim or search when they read on screens. That can lead to more misunderstanding and miscommunication than in a conversation.

Conscientious reading needs to be a new

*Please see Communication ... on Page 2.*

### Sharpen Your Judgment

## She sues when denied an inconvenient move

"Look here," said Roberta Morgan, an employee. "My desk would fit right back in this corner."

Manager Will Passmore visually scaled the room from where Roberta's desk sat to where she was suggesting it should go. He shook his head.

"It would fit there," Will said. "But it's a solid 25 feet from the door. And a big part of your job is to talk to people when they come in the door."

"That would present a communication issue," Will continued.

"Well, every time that door opens, it presents an asthma issue for me," Roberta said. "I need some relief."

"And we've been happy to work with you on

that," Will said. "Didn't we add the air purifiers when you asked for them?"

"Yes, but ..." Roberta started.

"And didn't we give you breathing breaks when you requested them?" Will said, and Roberta nodded. "Those worked for you and us."

"But it's still essential for someone in your position to be by the door."

### Employee disagrees with assessment

Roberta didn't agree, and sued the company for failing to accommodate her disability.

The company fought the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) 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.

# Communication ...

(continued from Page 1)

priority. You don't want to sacrifice thoroughness for the sake of speed.

Instead, take time to soak in all the relevant points and questions. You might want to consider the follow-up questions, too.

## 2. Make your written words count

On the other side of the thorough reading coin is conscious writing. More messages than ever are relayed via the written word. Make yours count.

A dropped word or forgotten punctuation can doom a message. That's why it's critical to proofread – or use grammar and proofreading programs – before you send.

Also, bold the text or use bullets so people understand what's most important and your expectations.

## 3. Dial for effectiveness

An effective phone call can prevent confusion, miscommunication and time-sucking email exchanges.

Instead of asking one tiny question after another in writing, you can formulate the right questions and answers in a phone call. Call others when you receive a confusing or unclear

message, you need to address a sensitive subject or you want to build goodwill.

## 4. Set a schedule

With so many communication channels buzzing at us all day, it's tempting to respond immediately as you would if you were chatting.

But that's not effective. Most messages don't need immediate responses. You'll likely give more thorough responses if you take time to let information or questions set in. Then you can formulate the right answer.

Schedule time to check and respond to communication so you aren't interrupted and distracted all day. You might even set a standard for communication responses on your team. For instance, phone calls returned within two hours, email responses within 36 hours and Slack responses within a day.

## 5. Find your voice, accept others'

You're communication style will evolve. Just try to stay consistent – and be understanding of others' style.

"There isn't a better or worse way of communicating between emojis and bullet points. The key for leaders is to create a digital environment that encourages a range of communication styles, so that everyone can engage authentically," Dhawan says.

Source: [tinyurl.com/newrules507](http://tinyurl.com/newrules507)

sending messages that are oh-so-close to legitimate. For instance, [BigBoss@CompanyName.com](mailto:BigBoss@CompanyName.com) is [B!gBoss@CompanyName.com](mailto:B!gBoss@CompanyName.com)

- **Be wary of announcements.** Scammers also try to catch people off-guard by exciting them with good news – for instance, a salary boost or free gift card. Same goes for anxiety. They might say a shipment is delayed or an appointment canceled.
- **Tell someone.** If you open a link or give access to your accounts, and think it's a scam, tell IT immediately. They might have time to undo it.

Source: [tinyurl.com/ransom507](http://tinyurl.com/ransom507)

## COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

### ■ 4 ways to build trust with employees

As you get back together more often with your team, it's a good idea to rebuild trust that might have slipped in the time apart. Try these approaches:

- **Be authentic.** Talk about struggles you've had and lessons you've learned when you weren't with the team.
- **Be accountable.** When things go sideways, or your team faces setbacks, be the first to take responsibility – whether it's for the issue or finding a solution.
- **Step back.** Avoid micromanaging. Let employees make mistakes and guide them to find fixes.
- **Get feedback.** Ask employees to help you pinpoint weaknesses and ways to overcome them.

Source: Fast Company, [tinyurl.com/trust507](http://tinyurl.com/trust507)

### ■ When – and how – to speak up in virtual meetings

You don't want to speak over others in any meeting, especially a virtual meeting where it's even more difficult to hear.

But you do need to speak up sometimes. Here's how:

**1. Be prepared.** Let the leader or facilitator know you need to share before the meeting starts.

**2. Use a filler word** – such as "actually" or "so" – when you sense someone finished a thought. That should light up your video on the platform and give people notice you're ready to speak.

**3. Compliment the person who just spoke.** "Thanks for sharing, Ted. Some great insight there." It builds credibility and likability.

**4. Know when to hold back.** Sometimes it's best to follow up with a message rather than speak up. When? If the meeting already ran too long, you don't need a discussion to make a decision or you've already spoken for most of the meeting.

Source: [tinyurl.com/speakup506](http://tinyurl.com/speakup506)

## TECH CORNER

### Don't be that employee! Avoid ransomware attacks

Don't think ransomware attacks only cripple government agencies, utility companies and large corporations.

Any company that has email or internet access is at risk – which is to say every company is at risk!

Most attackers get in through one employee – and you don't want yourself or a team member to be the one.

To avoid ransomware attacks:

- **Watch for one-offs.** Scammers get people to click into danger by

## 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 Communication channel devoted to staff support

Pandemic or not, we wanted employees to feel they were supported.

That's easier when you see them every day. Managers can say, "Hey, what's going on? How are you doing?" if they see employees not acting like themselves. Or when the group is together, managers have lots of opportunities to share important information immediately and quickly.

But if employees are remote or hybrid, that becomes harder.

#### Righted the ship

When we recognized this communication setback, we righted it

by adding a specific channel to the app we use internally to collaborate.

On this channel, leaders post updates so everyone knows what's going on in the company. They explain how it affects employees and give ideas on how to handle it so no one feels overwhelmed.

We also regularly post about resources for employees to help with physical and mental well-being.

It's helped us support employees throughout the pandemic and beyond.

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

### 2 How we recruit company culture fits

In our work environment, we tried to hire culture fits.

So we informally applied the airplane ride test when interviewing candidates: Could you sit and get along with the person for a four-hour plane ride? If so, the candidate should be a good culture fit.

But COVID-19 changed the meaning of culture fits. Most employees didn't work side by side, so the airplane test wasn't the one to use anymore.

#### Changed our questions

For us, it was important to identify self-starters in our candidate search. We needed employees who exhibited an owner-like mindset, leadership skills, self-awareness and accountability.

To find them, we asked candidates to describe a time when they stepped up because teammates weren't doing enough. We also asked them to describe a time when they failed and what they would've done differently.

That gave us a sense of the qualities we need.

*(Anthony Rodio, CEO, YourMechanic.com, Mountain View, CA)*

### 3 Cut screen fatigue: Zoom-free Fridays

In the office or working remotely, our employees continued to put in a 100% effort. That meant a lot of meetings to make sure they were aligned and headed toward goals.

All of those meetings, plus the work that went into preparing for and acting after them, could get overwhelming.

Too many meetings left employees drained and disengaged.

Many had admitted to reaching "Zoom Fatigue."

#### Make a call, if you must

That prompted us to essentially ban internal Zoom meetings on Fridays. The only exception: Employees sometimes still needed to meet with people outside of our company, such as customers and vendors.

If there was an emergency, we suggested phone call meetings.

It's worked well to help employees bounce back from Zoom Fatigue and stay better focused on their work that one day a week.

*(Jane Fraser, CEO, CitiGroup, shared this success in USA Today)*



#### YOUR LEGAL COACH

#### ■ Must we allow emotional support animals on-site?

**Question:** An employee with severe anxiety asked about bringing her emotional support animal to work. Do we have to let her?

**Answer:** You need to consider a few factors before you decide, says Katherine Slye-Griffin, accessibility section chief of the U.S. Health Resources and Service Administration.

First, you must almost always allow **service** animals on-site. **Emotional support** animals could be a reasonable accommodation for an employee. But if that poses an undue hardship on your business, you don't have to allow it.

To determine if it's a true service animal, find out:

- Is the animal required because of a disability?
- What tasks is the animal trained to do that the person can not?

If it's obvious – a seeing eye dog for a blind employee – don't ask.

**Source:** [tinyurl.com/serviceanimal507](https://tinyurl.com/serviceanimal507)

#### LIGHTER SIDE

#### ■ Have a joke? Why it might not work

As a leader, it's a good idea to have a go-to joke.

It might help break the ice, set the mood or cheer up someone.

But you want to make sure it works. You'll see why these don't:

- I have a prune joke, but it's dated.
- I have a Star Wars joke, but it's forced.
- I have a pizza joke, but it's cheesy.
- I have a joke about a broken clock, but it's not the right time.
- I have a joke about cows, but I don't want to milk it.
- I have an epidemiology joke but it hasn't yet gone viral.

**Source:** [thenationalnews.com](https://thenationalnews.com)

COMMUNICATION NEWS

# Stress on the rise: How to help employees

Employees still struggle with stress – despite the supposed return to normal.

In fact, some mental health experts say it's staggering. According to Mental Health America's Mind in the Workplace report:

- 83% of employees experience early signs of burnout
- 25% experience the most severe signs of burnout, which include poorer performance, cynicism toward colleagues and apathy for the workplace, and
- 71% say workplace stress affects their mental health.

“But there is hope because so much of

what is contributing to employee stress can be addressed,” said Paul Gionfriddo, president and CEO of Mental Health America.

### Listen and move

To help:

- **Encourage music.** In one survey, 85% of employees said listening to music while they worked helped them stay sane!
- **Get outside,** which helps reduce stress. Try walking meetings when it's just two or three willing participants. Set up outdoor seating for employees to meet or take breaks.

Source: HRMorning, [tinyurl.com/stress507](http://tinyurl.com/stress507)

## They're back and ready to vacation: Plan for PTO

As more and more employees return to work on-site, they won't be around long.

Managers and supervisors will want to prepare for staffing shortages due to vacations the rest of the year, according to a Korn Ferry survey. Nearly 80% of employees plan to use more paid time off (PTO) in the coming months.

### Making up for lost time

One big reason: They didn't take much – if any – vacation last year. And they intend to focus on vacation: More than 80% said they

won't check in with work at all – or very little – while on vacation.

To help employees enjoy their time away, come back refreshed and stay on track:

- **Create a master schedule.** Ask everyone to request or share their time off with the group so people can plan collaboration and/or backup.
- **Let them be.** Seriously! Encourage employees to totally disconnect. And don't reach out to them during vacay.

Source: [tinyurl.com/vacay507](http://tinyurl.com/vacay507)

## Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes, the company won when the court threw out the case.

The employee's attorney claimed she had a disability the company needed to accommodate. She asked for a reasonable accommodation – to be moved – and was denied because the company wasn't willing to work with her.

The company's attorney argued the manager and firm had already worked with her to find and implement reasonable accommodations. Adding the purifier and allowing breathing breaks were reasonable accommodations, and they were happy to do those for her. But if they moved her desk, she couldn't perform a major function of her job: talking to people who walked in. And that wasn't a reasonable accommodation.

The court agreed: The company did its due diligence in exploring accommodations and supplying any that made sense.

### Make the effort, fulfill duty

You want to work with employees who request accommodations – just like this employer did. But the court made it clear: Employees can't just handpick an accommodation.

As long as a company makes a notable effort to accommodate an employee, it likely fulfills its ADA responsibilities.

(Based on *Rodda v. University of Miami*. Dramatized for effect.)

### Quotes

Kindness enriches our life; with kindness, mysterious things become clear, difficult things become easy and dull things become cheerful.

– Leo Tolstoy

You never really learn much from hearing yourself speak.

– George Clooney

To realize our dreams we must decide to wake up.

– Josephine Baker

EDITOR  
MICHELE MCGOVERN  
[mmcgovern@pbp.com](mailto:mmcgovern@pbp.com)

MANAGING EDITOR:  
RENEE COCCHI  
[rcocchi@pbp.com](mailto:rcocchi@pbp.com)

PRODUCTION EDITOR:  
P.J. FRONZEO

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR:  
CURT BROWN

Subscriptions: 800-220-5000

This publication is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information in regard to the subject matter covered. It is sold with the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting or other professional services. If legal or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought. — From a declaration of principles jointly adopted by a committee of the American Bar Association and a committee of publishers.

♻️ Printed on recycled paper.

Copyright © 2021 Progressive Business Publications. Please respect our copyright: Reproduction of this material is prohibited without prior permission. All rights reserved in all countries.

Communication Bulletin for Managers & Supervisors (ISSN 1523-4290), issue date September 1, 2021, Vol. 23 No. 507, is published semi-monthly, (24 times a year) by Progressive Business Publications, 384 Technology Drive, Malvern, PA 19355; PHONE: 800-220-5000. FAX: 610-647-8089. Periodicals Postage Paid at West Chester, PA 19380. Postmaster: Send address changes to Communication Bulletin for Managers & Supervisors, 384 Technology Drive, Malvern, PA 19355.