

# Communication

## Bulletin *for Managers & Supervisors*™

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

October 1, 2021



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## How to manage work's inevitable conflict as staff comes back

### 2 strategies to prevent or mitigate it

Workplace conflict is bound to rise as employees move back on site.

Unfortunately, employees are more divided than ever. They have differing views about the need to be on-site, vaccinations, leadership decisions and office etiquette.

Even if it's not work related, conflict is brewing. How can leaders possibly prevent or mitigate issues?

Here are two expert-driven strategies to handle conflict now and whenever it arises.

#### Train, practice receptiveness

To prevent conflict, leaders want to practice, preach and teach "conversational receptiveness." And there's a good case for it.

"When we appear receptive to listening to and respecting others' opposing positions, they find our arguments to be more persuasive, our research shows," says Francesca Gino, a behavioral scientist, Harvard Business School professor and author of *Sidetracked: Why Our Decisions Get Derailed, and How We Can Stick to the Plan*.

So when faced with conflict – opposing views on values, tasks or relationships – avoid trying to make others change their minds. Instead, become receptive. The steps:

1. **Recognize the others' perspectives.** Show you're engaged, even interested, by saying, "I understand that ..." or "I believe what

*Please see Conflict ... on Page 2.*

### Sharpen Your Judgment

## Deaf candidate denied job: Sues for bias

"I told him the position had been filled," supervisor Jerry Ford said. "Why do you ask?"

HR Manager Leslie Williams leaned back in her office chair and read from her notes. "The job candidate, Steve Cadden, had his American Sign Language interpreter contact me this morning.

"He was disappointed he wasn't offered the job, and asked if there were other positions available," Leslie said.

"I'm about to fill the other dozen or so positions," Jerry said. "Lots of qualified candidates have been in."

"I understand Mr. Cadden mentioned he'd need an accommodation – a stool at the workstation – and he'd have his interpreter with him on the job,"

Leslie said. "That didn't have any influence on your hiring decision, did it?"

"No," Jerry said. "Like I said, the position is filled."

#### Don't believe it

Mr. Cadden, the candidate, didn't believe it, especially when he found out Jerry hired another dozen people for the same position after his interview and rejection.

So the candidate contacted the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which sued the company, claiming an American with Disabilities Act (ADA) violation.

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.

## Conflict ...

(continued from Page 1)

you're saying is ...." Then add, "Thank you because ...." Explain what you understand, proving you listened and want to talk with purpose, not argue.

2. **Hedge your claims.** You don't need to be overly assertive, or conversely, tentative, with your views. Take the middle road. Avoid soft words, such as "might," and harsh words, such as "must." State your view simply.
3. **Be positive with your argument.** For instance, avoid statements such as, "We should not ..." or "You can not ..." Better: "Let's consider the benefits of ..." or "We might find positive results by considering ...."
4. **Focus on agreement.** In conflict, it's easier to focus on where we disagree – and become defensive. Instead, find a small, shared value and comment. For instance, "I agree we both want this pandemic to end."

### Step into active conflict

When it comes to existing conflict – an active argument or employee complaint – leaders need to step in.

David Dye, president of Let's Grow Leaders and host of the podcast, "Leadership without Losing Your

Soul," suggests these steps:

1. **Reflect to connect.** Remove some intensity and move toward a productive conversation by recognizing emotions without validating or condemning them. Say, "It sounds like you're frustrated. Do I have that right?"
2. **Ask three questions.** 1) What do you want me to know? 2) How might I help here? 3) Should the three (or more) of us talk privately? The answers will reveal how to move forward – or if you even need to do any more than hear the answers.
3. **Assess the situation.** Dye says the situation usually falls into one of these categories: Venting, misunderstanding, opposing priorities, differing goals, personality conflicts and toxic behavior.
4. **Pick your solution.** If the problem is venting, let it be. For misunderstandings, opposing priorities, differing goals and personality conflicts, you'll want to talk and work through them. Get HR involved with toxic behavior.
5. **Schedule the finish.** Set up a time in the future when you all can review what happened, how it was resolved and check everyone followed through on commitments and responsibilities.

Sources: [tinyurl.com/HBR509](http://tinyurl.com/HBR509); [tinyurl.com/LGL509](http://tinyurl.com/LGL509)

## TECH CORNER

### 3 tips to roll out new technology to your team

New technology is exciting and intimidating all rolled into one workplace experience.

So you want to carefully roll out the newest tech to your team.

#### Give it the 'Lazy Guy Test'

These three tips will help:

1. **Consult the users.** Many new tech ideas come from management to supposedly make things faster and easier. But then users don't find it to be either. Give your ideas the "Lazy Guy Test": Ask the least receptive,

most reluctant-to-change employee what he thinks of the tech you're considering. He's often the first to recognize the easiest way to do something (and it may not be the new tech you want)!

- **Pick the early adopters.** For tech that will help, ask those who are most frustrated with the existing tech or those most entrenched in the old system to adopt and champion the new system.
- **Don't underestimate.** New technology almost always costs more money and time to implement than originally planned. Be prepared.

Source: [tinyurl.com/rollout509](http://tinyurl.com/rollout509)

## COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

### 6 questions help employees take on more challenges

As a manager or supervisor, you want to help employees improve.

But you don't want to be a pushy, nagging boss who demands more!

So you need to ask good questions to help them recognize they can do and achieve more. Dan Rockwell, a trainer, consultant and self-proclaimed "Leadership Freak," suggests you ask:

- What would make your goal a little more challenging?
- How might you reach a little higher?
- What's preventing you from taking on this new opportunity?
- What if you're selling yourself short?
- If you reached higher, what might you try?
- What's the bravest thing you can do?

Source: [tinyurl.com/challengeemployees509](http://tinyurl.com/challengeemployees509)

### Let's nip jargon in the bud (excuse the phrase)

Many workplaces have a jargon problem.

People use it too much. Some phrases are outdated. Others are inappropriate. And much of it causes miscommunication and misunderstandings.

To eliminate jargon – or at least the troubles it can cause – try these tips:

- **Separate necessary from superfluous.** Good jargon builds credibility and formality (for instance, salespeople need to know it to be experts in their field). Excessive jargon is anything an entire group doesn't understand or finds complicated.
- **Check yourself.** Do colleagues, employees and bosses use the same jargon? If they don't – or look confused by yours – find more direct ways to relay your message.
- **Start at the top.** New, lower-ranking employees perpetuate jargon because they associate it with status when the top-tier uses it. Eliminate it from companywide communication.

Source: [tinyurl.com/jargon509](http://tinyurl.com/jargon509)

## 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 Back at work and breaking bad pandemic habits

Mention bad pandemic habits, and you might imagine people working in slippers, skipping daily showers and sleeping on Zoom calls.

But that wasn't our case – although, no one knows the truth about the slippers! Many of our employees picked up habits that weren't healthy. They worked longer hours and took on more responsibility than necessary.

#### Applaud dedication

We applaud their dedication, but we didn't want them to burn out. So before we even returned to the office, we implemented a couple of rules to

help everyone step back and regain healthy work habits.

For one, we called Friday afternoon "Quiet Time." No one could schedule meetings or video calls. In an emergency, employees could make a phone call.

We also called for one "Quiet Week" per year. Same rules. That also helped employees take vacations, knowing they wouldn't miss meetings and that others would be out, too.

*(Ann Powell, Executive VP & HR Officer, Bristol Myers Squibb, spoke at The Conference Board's Organizational Impact on Social Change Issues online conference)*

### 2 Skip-level meetings improve 3 levels

At most companies, there's a chain of command and communication – from top leaders to mid-level managers to front-line employees.

The top doesn't get to interact with the front-line much. And a lot of good information can get overlooked in that miss.

That's why I started skip-level meetings.

#### From the bottom up

Top leaders meet with front-line employees once or twice a year. Some prefer it one-on-one while others do it in small groups.

Leaders ask employees for two things they feel managers and leadership could double down on. Then they brainstorm together ways those ideas can happen.

Leaders can take that feedback right to managers to work on improvements and celebrate accomplishments.

Plus, the leaders get great insight on what is and isn't working and get to fixing it!

*(Jeff Cates, CEO, Achievers, Toronto)*

### 3 Fun ways to improve communication

You'd think with all the communication tools we have at our fingertips, people across departments would communicate well.

But they don't.

We needed people to collaborate and share more information across lines.

No one wanted more meetings, protocols or procedures in an attempt to keep communication flowing.

#### Grassroots win

So we tried a more grassroots approach: We organized more social events. We threw happy hours, off-site lunches and beach days that employees could voluntarily attend.

That gave them opportunities to build relationships across the company. And guess what happens when friendships span departments? Communication and collaboration well up naturally.

It's been a fun and effective way to boost communication

*(Adam Mendler, Co-founder, Beverly Hill Chairs, shared this success with the SmartBrief Young Entrepreneur Council)*



#### YOUR LEGAL COACH

#### ■ Fired for COVID-19 vaccine rule: Can they collect?

**Question:** We require proof of COVID-19 vaccination. Employees who refuse to show it were let go. Are they eligible for unemployment benefits?

**Answer:** No, say Diane Seltzer, principal at The Seltzer Law Firm and John Harrington, principal at The Employment Law Group.

In most areas of the U.S., employees who are fired for breaking a company policy are not eligible for unemployment benefits and payments.

People receive unemployment payments when they lose their jobs through no fault of their own, through business closures or mass layoffs. But if people are let go for breaking a company policy – big or small – they can be denied benefits.

For instance, employees can be fired and denied benefits for refusing to follow a dress code. It's insubordination and misconduct, the attorneys say.

**Source:** [tinyurl.com/benefits509](https://tinyurl.com/benefits509)

#### LIGHTER SIDE

#### ■ Adding some spice to work and life

You can add some spice to life – and work – with a few funny words.

Spicy puns and jokes abound ...

- I switched the labels on my wife's spices. I'm not in trouble yet, but the thyme is cumin.
- Which spice graduated with a doctoral degree? Dr. Pepper.
- I took the recent snow warnings with a pinch of salt.
- Spices were first brought to Europe in the Middle Ages and some of them are still in the back of my cupboard!
- The pepper was confused for salt. He was very in-salted.

**Sources:** [livin3.com](https://www.livin3.com) and [RD.com](https://www.rd.com)

## COMMUNICATION NEWS

## What employees would give up to WFH

If employees aren't ready to give up remote work – and you really want them on-site – you might find a happy medium.

Many employees are willing to give up a little – and others will give up a lot – to keep working from home full-time.

In a recent Breeze survey, here's what employees said they'd do for their current or new employer if they had a full-time remote gig:

- 15% would take a 25% pay cut
- 65% would take a 5% pay cut
- 46% would give up 25% of their PTO
- 15% would give up 100% of their PTO

### No return to normal: Stress still an issue

Don't believe a return-to-office means a return-to-normal.

Employees are still stressed, and burnout isn't going away.

#### Long-term ramifications

"While many employees have been inoculated against COVID-19, they're not protected from exhaustion, burnout and the additional stress of returning to the office," says Dr. Andrew Shatté, chief knowledge officer and co-founder at meQuilibrium.

- 39% would give up health insurance benefits, and
- 53% would work an extra 10 hours per week.

#### Work with good employees

You might be able to find a situation that works with employees who are considering a new position in "The Great Resignation."

Let HR know if you have employees who've indicated they're looking for full-time remote work, and see if you can come up with a plan that accommodates both sides.

Source: [tinyurl.com/compromises509](https://tinyurl.com/compromises509)

Employees might overcome stress if you help them build resilience. Shatté suggests you:

- **Give employees opportunities to connect.** Professional and personal support helps them get through difficult times.
- **Share meaning.** Make sure employees know the positive effects they have on the company, customers and community.
- **Emphasize the need to make plans** so they can immediately take action when something goes awry.

Source: [HRMorning.com](https://www.hr-morning.com)

## Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

No, the company settled the suit, agreeing to pay the candidate \$37,500 in damages and initiate overdue anti-discrimination training, monitoring and reporting.

In the suit, the EEOC claimed the hiring supervisor discriminated against the candidate by denying him the job based on his disability and request for an accommodation. Rather than try to work with the candidate – who already had interpreters and didn't request anything unreasonable – the hiring supervisor passed over him for the position.

The company's attorney initially argued the position had been filled, and that was the reason the candidate didn't get the job.

But when another dozen non-disabled candidates were hired for the same position, it was difficult to maintain that argument.

#### Consider all candidates equally

When hiring, supervisors want to consider all candidates equally.

"Employers may not deny an employment opportunity to a qualified person with a disability based on unfounded assumptions," said Darrell Graham, district director of the EEOC's Atlanta office.

(Based on EEOC v. Crothall Healthcare, Inc. Dramatized for effect.)

### Quotes

Once the inspiration comes, that directs where the perspiration goes.

– Carole King

You don't always win your battles, but it's good to know you fought.

– Lauren Bacall

When you ask the best questions of yourself and others, you invite the best answers.

– Angela Bassett

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