

# 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.

October 15, 2021



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## Get difficult conversations right: 6 kinds of words & phrases to avoid

*Oftentimes, the message turns out more crass than intended*

No one likes to have a difficult conversation – and the last thing you want to do is make it worse.

One way to make tough talks less difficult is to avoid certain words and phrases that tend to agitate the situation.

“Difficult conversations are difficult for a reason, and when you’re anxious or stressed out, it’s easy to say the wrong thing,” says Jim Detert, author of *Choosing Courage*. “And it doesn’t matter how prepared you are. Your best laid plans will go to waste if you offend or anger the other person.”

Oftentimes, the words we choose make the message more crass than intended.

The cure: “When navigating a difficult

conversation, you need to craft your message while keeping the other person’s feelings and opinions in mind,” Detert says.

Here are some key words and phrases to avoid during a difficult conversation – and better ways to get the point across.

### Absolutes

*What to avoid:* “Clearly,” “Obviously,” “Beyond a doubt”

*Reason:* They’re absolutes, suggesting you have an objective reality that others – especially those on the other end of the difficult conversation – will easily see, too. Truth is, they aren’t likely to agree with what is so obvious

*Please see Difficult ... on Page 2.*

### Sharpen Your Judgment

## One word can make the difference in ADA claim

“I’m sure Bixby brings you comfort, but I’m not sure we can let your dog into work,” said Manager Barb Limoncelli.

“You don’t want to see what happens when the anxiety gets a hold of me,” said James Halpin. “Fortunately, Bixby can recognize when I’m about to have an anxiety attack and get help.

“I trained him myself,” James continued. “Found a course on YouTube. And the pup got an online certificate to prove his worth.”

“That’s phenomenal,” Barb said. “And I certainly don’t want you in a compromised position here.

“So I think the best thing we can do is get the proper paperwork on record,” Barb continued. “I’ll need a letter from your doctor explaining your

work restrictions, the tasks your service dog is trained to do, and how long you’ll need an accommodation.”

“Sure thing,” James said.

“And we can also look into alternative accommodations once we have it all,” Barb said.

### No diagnosis, explanation or answers

James turned in a note from a nurse practitioner who said he’d “benefit from having a ‘comfort’ dog.”

Barb asked again for a diagnosis and answers, but James just came to work with the dog.

He was let go, and filed an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) suit. The company fought it. 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.

## Difficult ...

(continued from Page 1)

and 100% true to you. Other people might even think you consider their views are stupid or inconsequential.

*What to say instead:* “What I’ve noticed is ...” “I’ve observed that ...”

### Exaggerations

*What to avoid:* “You always” “You never” “All the time, you ...”

*Reason:* Exaggerations undermine your credibility. When you accuse others in difficult conversations of “always” committing an infraction or “never” doing something as expected, they can easily say, “That’s not true.” And they’re probably right, leading to debate on how often something happens or doesn’t.

*What to say instead:* “According to our records, you were late 11 times this month.” “The customer said you didn’t return four of his calls.”

### Judgments

*What to avoid:* “You should ...” “You shouldn’t ...”

*Reason:* Adults tend to turn against “shoulding” statements because they feel judged. They’d rather decide on what to do than be told exactly what

to do. They feel belittled.

*What to say instead:* “You might want to try ...” “Have you considered ...?” “One possibility is ...”

### Blame

*What to avoid:* “You make me so angry/frustrated/confused ...”

*Reason:* People don’t react well to being blamed for how others feel or react. They get defensive because they didn’t intend what you say you feel.

*What to say instead:* “When you do X, it makes me feel Y. Could you please not do that going forward?”

### Challenges

*What to avoid:* “You’re wrong/unprofessional/forgetful ...”

*Reason:* Not surprisingly, other people will take offense to any negative words that refer to their character.

*What to say instead:* X behavior ... “detracts from our mission” or “isn’t aligned with our goals.”

### Personal

*What to avoid:* “It’s not personal”

*Reason:* It is personal to others. You can’t change how they feel.

*What to say instead:* “This is difficult, and I want to make it as comfortable as possible for both of us.”

*Source:* Harvard Business Review, [tinyurl.com/avoid510](http://tinyurl.com/avoid510)

## TECH CORNER

### Write emails that people read – and act on

Make email messages more to the point, and people will read and act on them.

When you simplify the message, you make it easier for them to respond.

#### Unique tips

Here are three unique tips from Ericka Dhawan, author of *Digital Body Language*, to get that accomplished:

- **Break long messages into two parts.** First part: a quick summary at the top. Second part: the details. That lets people decide if they need to

read it all right away – or if they can take time to soak in all the information later.

- **Offer options.** When you need feedback to make a decision, give details and ask, “Would you like to go with A, B or C?” People can pick a favorite, give some feedback and you have your answer.
- **Use acronyms in the subject line** so people know what they’ll have to do with the message. Examples: WINFY – What I need from you. NNTR – No need to respond. ROM – Respond on Monday.

*Source:* Daniel Pink, [tinyurl.com/email510](http://tinyurl.com/email510)

## COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

### ■ Be more interesting, less factual, to be remembered

Most leaders like to share facts when they want their ideas heard and adopted. But creating a vivid memory is more effective.

“What counts – what’s memorable to an audience – is how the information affects us,” says Jezra Kaye, a public speaking consultant and expert.

She gives these examples, which say the same thing:

1. “On October 15, we surveyed existing customers to determine their opinion of our new flavor. While 5.6% of the people we surveyed declined to respond, 43.3% of respondents checked the preference labeled ‘I love it.’ All other responses were either in the ‘like it’ or ‘like it a lot’ columns.”

2. “Last fall, more than two out of five customers said they loved our new flavor – and everyone else who answered the question liked it or liked it a lot!”

No. 2 is easier to understand, visualize and remember. So now when you have facts to share, turn them into a story that comes to life with language such as “two out of five” rather than 40% and “said” rather than “responded.”

*Source:* [tinyurl.com/interesting510](http://tinyurl.com/interesting510)

### ■ Problem with ‘No big deal’: It’ll turn into a big deal

An employee misses a deadline. A colleague disrespects you. The boss ignores you.

And you chalk it all up to “No big deal.” Actually, it is a big deal. And if you don’t change your tune, it’ll be a bigger problem.

*Reason:* You do it once, and the people who disappoint, criticize or belittle you will do it again. And again.

Even if you’re conflict averse, you want to address the issues and slights. You can do it without causing conflict. Here’s how: When your emotions aren’t high, say, “You said (or did) X. Can you explain why?”

*Source:* [tinyurl.com/noproblem510](http://tinyurl.com/noproblem510)

## 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 'Culture Code' helps us hire better

Hiring is a two-way street: You want to bring in top talent who fit your roles and culture.

Candidates want to work at companies that fit their needs, goals and hopes.

But sometimes we found it difficult to be sure candidates and culture would align.

#### Share it early and often

That led us to create a "Culture Code." It was a solid description of the culture we envisioned and worked to build at our company.

Not only would it help us stay the course, it could help candidates figure out early if they would be happy with us, or wanted to self-eliminate.

So we sent candidates our Culture Code – which included some ideals such as kindness, integrity, fairness, clarity, efficiency, data, pragmatism, ownership, progress and positivity – early in the hiring process.

It's helped us hire great people who fit in and enhance our culture as we grow.

*(Thibaud Clement, CEO, Loomly, Los Angeles)*

### 2 Not back in office? New ideas to connect

Many companies thought employees would be back in the office by now.

And at many companies, it's just not happening yet.

So remote employees need to connect and collaborate online again.

We came up with several fun things – in addition to professional sessions – for our virtual annual team meeting.

#### Send in the swag

For one, we got expert advice on how to keep indoor plants healthy.

We also had boxes of swag, coloring books and colored pencils delivered for relaxing activities.

Then we sent a cheese board and s'mores kit with a votive candle. We arranged a "fireside chat" with company updates while employees enjoyed the food.

Some people toughed it out with the votive flame. Others microwaved the marshmallow. But everyone had fun!

*(Heather Whaling, President of Public Relations, Geben Communications, Columbus, OH, shared this success in The Wall Street Journal)*

### 3 Celebrate improvement as much as success

In business, you can't win them all, right? In fact, no business even wins most of the time.

And one problem with that is if you only use wins to celebrate, you might not get to cheer and motivate your team often enough.

That's why I thought it was important to celebrate successes as much as – if not more than – wins.

#### Let's recognize the good stuff

Truth is, recognition often helps fuel friendly competition without burning out people.

So I hold monthly luncheons to celebrate high achievements and improvements.

I want to publicly acknowledge and praise people or teams who've moved the needle just as much as those who managed to surpass goals.

And guess what? That engages and encourages everyone to perform better going forward.

*(Rick Hendrick, Owner, Hendrick Motorsports, Concord, NC, shared his success in the Don Yaeger podcast)*



### YOUR LEGAL COACH

#### ■ We have a bully: How should we handle this?

**Question:** Employees are together again, and we're aware of some conflict already. We don't want it to escalate to bullying. How should we address this?

**Answer:** Start right away with an anti-bullying policy, says employment law attorney LaToya Merritt of Phelps Dunbar LLP. That's especially important because just 3% of companies actually have one!

#### What to include

Make sure you cover bullying on social media, emphasizing that employees aren't permitted to post anything negative about co-workers or customers online, Merritt says.

Include the protocol for filing complaints against colleagues. For example, employees can take them to managers or HR. The manager takes notes and has the employee review and sign the document. Then continue to document the investigation.

**Source:** [tinyurl.com/bully510](http://tinyurl.com/bully510)

### LIGHTER SIDE

#### ■ Funny excuses for missing work

Working on-site or remotely, some employees have creative reasons for missing a day. Managers shared these:

- An employee's wife found out he was cheating, and he had to spend the day retrieving his belongings from the dumpster.
- A worker couldn't come to work because she accidentally got on a plane.
- An employee said that someone glued her doors and windows shut so she couldn't leave the house to come to work.
- An employee was bowling the game of his life and couldn't get to work.
- An employee woke up in a good mood and didn't want to ruin it.

**Source:** [RD.com](http://RD.com)

COMMUNICATION NEWS

# Hiring at a peak: How to get great talent

More than three-quarters of executives plan to increase hiring this quarter.

That means nearly everyone is looking for the same talent you are. In fact, they might even be trying to steal yours!

## Best ways to win

Here are three tips to help you find great talent:

- **Update job postings.** Write a description explaining the expected outcomes in the position rather than the tasks and duties. Candidates will have a good idea if they can succeed at the job. And succeeding is more important than just doing.

- **Get personal.** Respond to all candidates' applications and inquiries. Set up automatic responses that let them know you received what they sent. Even better, give them a time frame on when they can expect to hear more from you.
- **Lower your qualifications.** Review your candidate qualifications – and look for ways to lower the standard. Here's why: Good candidates who have the *potential* to fill a position can be off-put by qualifications that aren't really necessary. You can attract smart, ambitious people this way.

Source: HRMorning.com, tinyurl.com/hiring510

## No one knows about your DEI efforts!

More than 95% of employers say they've introduced new Diversity Equity & Inclusion (DEI) measures this past year.

But just a quarter of employees believe their company has done anything!

## Focus on recruitment

Here are two ideas to improve DEI in ways employees will notice and appreciate:

Create community partnerships to recruit a diverse workforce. Connect with local women's leadership organizations,

minority professional and social groups or neighborhood associations. Or set up a recruitment stand at community events hosted and attended by underrepresented populations.

**Add an Equity Statement** – a simple, prominent message to appeal to *all* applicants. An example (in part) from Fiix Software: "If your experience is close to what you see listed here, please still consider applying. Diversity of experience and skills combined with passion is a key to innovation and excellence."

Source: HRMorning.com, tinyurl.com/inclusion510

# Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

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

The employee's attorney claimed he suffered from anxiety attacks – an ADA qualifying condition – and the appropriate accommodation was a service animal. The company violated the ADA when he was fired, instead of accommodated.

The company's attorney argued the employee didn't have an ADA-qualifying condition and his request wasn't reasonable. The employee didn't provide proof that his disability required work restrictions. Furthermore, his medical provider said he'd benefit from a "comfort animal" – not a "service animal," which is recognized as an ADA accommodation.

The court agreed: The employee's anxiety didn't qualify for ADA protection because he had no work restrictions. Plus, his health care provider didn't even classify the dog as a "service animal."

## Employees must do their part, too

You want to do all you can to help, but employees have to do their part, too. People seeking ADA accommodations need to provide proof they suffer from a condition that *restricts them from doing some element of the job*. They also must be equally willing to explore alternative accommodations.

(Based on *Conlan v. Costco Wholesale Corp.* Dramatized for effect.)

## Quotes

The sun himself is weak when he first rises, and gathers strength and courage as the day gets on.

– Charles Dickens

It always seems impossible until it is done.

– Nelson Mandela

You always pass failure on the way to success.

– Mickey Rooney

Saddle your dreams before you ride 'em.

– Mary Webb

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