

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

November 15, 2021



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www.CommunicationBulletin.com



Management Skills Center

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Hundreds of tips to get writing right

9 tips for great hybrid meetings (because we still meet like that)

Level the playing field for every session

Whether you and your team are in the office full-time, part-time or none of the time, you'll continue to meet online.

COVID-19 ushered in the Zoom era. No one's sure when this business/social reality will end.

So we might as well get as good at hybrid meetings as we can.

Regardless of how many people are in the room or on the monitor, here are nine tips to make every hybrid meeting better:

Ask 1 question

Before you call a hybrid meeting, find out if you can eliminate the hybrid meeting. Ask yourself (and/or a trusted team member):

Do we need to meet? If it's just to share non-critical information or give an update, then you probably don't. Send an email. Solicit feedback.

Assign a 'Producer'

Get someone who knows how to handle the technology in the meeting room (camera, platforms, audio tools, charts, etc.) to be the Producer. If there's a large video-in crowd, assign a second, remote Producer to handle those same technicalities.

Use chat

Encourage everyone to keep their video meeting app chat feature open and ready to

Please see Hybrid meeting ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

No cozy relationship with boss & fired: Suit filed

"It's no secret our company's bottom line was hit hard from the pandemic," said manager Sherry Haskell. "And it's no secret that we've had to systematically downsize to align with the new business reality."

"I don't think I like where this is going," said employee Bob Genevro.

"I can understand why you'd feel that way," Sherry said and slid an envelope across her desk toward him. "We're laying you off, but I think you'll find this severance package quite generous."

"Keeping my job would be quite generous," said Bob, not bothering to pick up the envelope. "But I'm not into sleeping with the boss to ensure that happens. Brittany, on the other hand, is."

"What are you talking about?" Sherry asked.

"Come on," Bob said. "Everyone knows Brittany and our supervisor Craig have 'a thing.'"

Who's the better performer?

"I, for one, didn't know that," Sherry said. "And even if I did, it would have nothing to do with this decision. We can't afford two of you in the same position, and Brittany has consistently been a better performer."

Bob laughed. "I bet that's exactly the way Craig put it."

Bob sued the company, claiming sex bias.

The company fought to get the case thrown out. 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.

Hybrid meeting ...

(continued from Page 1)

use. It keeps off-siters engaged and invites peer-to-peer comments, learning and sharing. It can even give a written record of great ideas.

'Bring in' remote participants

Use a big screen in the front of the room to keep as many remote attendees on video as possible. If people don't want their talking or listening head up there, ask them to add a photo. It's a great reminder to on-siters that others are participating.

'Push out' presenters, audience

On the flip side of the camera, work with the Producer to make sure the leader or presenter is the main visual remote attendees see.

Even better, set up two cameras so the remote employees also get a view of the in-person audience. That way they can see and feel how others react to what's being said or shown.

Include everyone in everything

Include remote attendees in everything, most especially break out sessions or collaboration activities.

Most platforms – Zoom, WebEx, Skype, Teams – have breakout

functions. Use the app's whiteboard or annotation tools, rather than physical flip charts. Make sure all attendees know how to use these functions before you meet.

Make audio a priority, too

As great as it is to "see" everyone through a hybrid meeting, hearing everyone is far more critical.

This might go back to your Producer again: Ensure the audio in the physical meeting room is top-notch. Ask on-site team members not to talk at once or over each other. Encourage off-site attendees to use headsets and an ancillary microphone when they speak.

Level the Q&A playing field

Let everyone know if you'll take questions throughout or at a designated point in the meeting. That way they can take notes and be prepared to ask questions at a good time.

Either the leader or Producer will want to alternate questions between on-site and remote attendees.

Assess success

You can only get better at hybrid meetings if you know what went well and what didn't. Ask all team members about their engagement and ability to see, hear and participate.

Source: *i4cp*, tinyurl.com/hybridmeet512

TECH CORNER

Employee out, cybercriminal in: How to safely offboard

When employees quit or are fired, you're at a higher risk of a cyberattack.

You'll want to take steps to keep cybercriminals or disgruntled employees at bay.

Take immediate action

Here are five tactics from Ara Aslanian, CEO at Inversellogic, and an advisor at LA CyberLab:

- **Monitor.** Some employees might try to take confidential data. Have IT keep an eye on their online activity the last week of work.

- **Update IT on employment status immediately so they can sync with HR.** Cybercriminals will try to impersonate the employee who's leaving in an email to colleagues so they can get access in the company.
- **Delete old accounts from the domain server.** Hackers will try to get in those if they aren't updated.
- **Recover and update devices.** Have IT return all their company-issued devices to factory settings.
- **Clean up.** Change passwords for everything the employee had access to – network, cloud, vendors, VPN, etc. Deactivate email addresses.

Source: www.inversellogic.com

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ The bigger problem with bad ideas – and how to avoid it

What's worse than a bad idea? Executing a bad idea.

Unfortunately, many leaders execute bad ideas because they can't get out of the "logic box," says Adam Bryant, co-author of *The CEO Test: Master the Challenges That Make or Break All Leaders*.

The "logic box" is that space where you believe you know everything about the situation, found the best way forward and continue to validate your reasoning.

To avoid making a bad idea an ugly reality, take your "no brainer" decision to a trusted colleague who doesn't do any work like you. An outside-your-logic-box view often sheds a clear light on a bad idea.

Source: *Strategy+Business*, tinyurl.com/badidea512

■ Business storytelling 101: How to find your story

We often talk about the importance of storytelling in the workplace, especially for leaders like you.

Stories capture people's attention and get them to act – every leader's hope when they need something done.

But how do you find the right stories to share? Here's help from leadership expert John Millen:

- **Be ready to gather stories.** Jot down inspirational quotes or a few lines about a great experience in a journal or notes app on your phone when they happen.
- **Expand on the idea or experience later,** when you have time to consider if others can visualize it like it happened and if it'll give rise to an important emotion when heard.
- **Consider the takeaway.** If you can associate the story to a professional or appropriate personal takeaway tip or positive inspiration, you likely have a keeper to refine and keep in a caché of sharable stories.

Source: tinyurl.com/story512

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 We're stressed! The boss gets it, helps us

Nearly everyone gets overwhelmed at work from time to time.

Many employees don't want to whine or complain because they don't want to be thought less of. So they suck it up and get extra stressed.

That's not good for anyone.

Fortunately, our leadership recognized that and did something helpful.

Breathe

We call it our "Take Your Breath Day." It's a day off, and it comes at an important time.

People in leadership – from front-line managers to the CEO – pay attention to the feel in the workplace. When it's evident people are tired or disengaged – perhaps after a busy time, over a major project or a big challenge – they call for a "Take Your Breath Day."

It's a day to disconnect and refresh – which almost always works.

Plus, when leaders recognize the fact people need a break, it makes it easier for employees to admit they're overwhelmed or stressed.

(Anna Mittag, SVP of Products and Services, LifeSpeak, Toronto)

2 Levity in the hiring process helps recruit

Looking for a job, sending resumes, hoping for calls and interviewing can be a stressful time for job candidates.

It was obvious to us when many candidates seemed nervous when we went through the process.

We didn't want candidates to be so nervous and stressed. We wanted to put them at ease so we could see their true selves when we met with them.

Coordinate a relaxed process

To help make the process less stressful, we assigned candidates a Candidate Experience Coordinator. They're the first one to make it a more relaxed process. One way is through the first impression: They send a gif of themselves, rather than stilted email.

Then they arrange the logistics for meetings, any necessary testing and screening.

Having a friendly guide through it all helps candidates relax and bring their true selves to the interviews. And that helps us hire right.

(Caitlyn Metteer, Manager of Recruiting, Lever, San Francisco)

3 Connect every day to get connected again

My colleagues and I felt a bit disconnected in the past year and a half. Even when we started to be physically together again, it seemed we lost some of that collegiality and professional connections we once had.

That's no way to get back to work.

So I devised an "email campaign" – and encouraged other leaders to do it.

Put it on the calendar

Here's how it worked:

I made a note on my calendar to send an email every morning. Monday's message goes to a person I admire. On Tuesdays, I connect with someone I haven't spoken to in a long time. On Wednesdays, I message a new personal or professional connection. Thursdays, I send someone an article I think would interest her or him. And on Fridays, I thank someone.

It's a commitment, but it helps people connect again.

(Deborah Grayson Riegel, Instructor, Wharton Business School and Duke Corporate Education, shared this success in the Harvard Business Review)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Marijuana's legal here: Can we still ban our workers?

Question: We don't want our employees using marijuana at all. It seems risky. But medical use is legal in our state now. Can we still ban it?

Answer: You probably shouldn't, say employment law attorneys Christine Gantt Sorenson and Pierce MacLennan of the firm Haynsworth Sinkler Boyd PA.

Banning a legally accepted medical tool could put you at risk of violating the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the attorneys say.

Focus on safety, accommodation

As long as employees can safely complete their jobs' essential functions while using legalized medical marijuana, you essentially can't stop them.

Your best bet: Create a marijuana use policy that mimics your prescription drug policy. Keep the focus on safety and include details about ADA accommodations, the attorneys say.

Source: tinyurl.com/policy512

LIGHTER SIDE

■ We all need co-workers with this kind of humor

Work's more fun working with witty colleagues. These folks post notes:

- **On a printer:** Name is Bob Marley because it's always jammin. *Don't worry 'bout the ink, cuz everything you print is gonna come out white.*
- **On the water cooler:** T-Rex has tiny arms, too tiny to replace the jug when it's empty. What's your excuse?
- **On an office door:** Whomever keeps adding an "og" to the end of my door sign, STOP IT – Mr. Hedgeh
- **In the beverage fridge:**
 - Note 1: "Can you start stocking orange cream soda?"
 - Note 2: "Can we get lime water?"
 - Note 3: "Can you stock the fridge with puppies and gold coins?"
 - Note 4: "Can we get a suggestion box?"

COMMUNICATION NEWS

The importance of ‘concrete language’

When you need to put others at ease, use “concrete language.”

It’s especially important as the pandemic wears on and uncertainty still lingers.

Leaders often speak in abstract ways, according to researchers at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School of Business.

See the difference

For instance, they might say:

- “I’ll look into that.”
- “It’ll get here soon.”
- “We’ll need to do something.”

Employees can’t visualize any of that.

But change to “concrete language” and they can see – and believe – it.

Back to our three examples, concrete language sounds like this:

- “I’ll pull the manuals on the widget after lunch and call you with an answer.”
- “Jack will put the widget on your desk before noon today.”
- “We’ll get together at the picnic table at 10 to decide.”

People can visualize every action there – and that puts them at ease and able to handle the next challenge.

Source: tinyurl.com/language512

Hybrid work won’t work without a plan: Don’t ‘wing it’

More than 60% of employees want to keep working remotely – and another third prefer a hybrid model, researchers found.

If you plan to accommodate those desires, you’ll want a hybrid or remote work plan. Don’t just “wing it.”

3 keys to success

Three keys to creating a plan:

- **Bottom line is the top line:** A remote (or hybrid) work plan won’t succeed if the leadership team doesn’t initiate, support

and follow it. Stick to the hours, model and expectations you set.

- **Equip the team.** If everyone is still making do with what they had when the pandemic started, it’s likely time to assess the technology you need to make the plan work well.
- **Integrate legacy with reality.** The best remote work plans update traditions for the current work reality and integrate them with new best practices.

Source: HRMorning.com

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes, the company won when both a lower and an appeals court dismissed the bias case.

The employee’s attorney claimed he suffered an adverse job action – termination – because he was a victim of sex bias. His supervisor played favorites with a woman who he was in a relationship with. The supervisor had a sex bias for the woman in this situation.

The company’s attorney argued the firing decision was based on two important factors: The company had to make a necessary business decision to downsize. The manager kept the employee who performed better, and let go of the lower performer. That was fair grounds for termination, the attorney argued.

The court agree. The manager kept the better performer – a non-discriminatory reason for firing another employee.

Focus on performance, business needs

Personal relationships between supervisors and employees can create potential issues in any work environment.

But this case went on to prove that if employers base decisions on performance and business needs – and keep any sort of bias out of the equation – they’ll make better, fair decisions.

(Based on *Maner v. Dignity Health*.
Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

A single act of kindness throws out roots in all directions, and the roots spring up and make new trees.

– Amelia Earhart

Too many of us are not living our dreams because we are living our fears.

– Les Brown

The sharpest weapon of all is a kind and gentle spirit.

– Anne Frank

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