Communication Bulletin *for Managers & Supervisors* ™

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

4 critical leadership factors to your team's 'health' and success

Focus on social, emotional and collaborative aspects

Is your team healthy?

It's an important question for managers and supervisors to ask themselves regularly. That's because a healthy team is a productive team.

But we aren't talking about physical health here. Teams that are healthy in social, emotional and collaborative ways perform at peak levels.

On the flip side, employees on teams that are unhealthy are less productive, don't think well of their companies or leaders, and are more likely to quit, according to research from Skynova.

Researchers looked at what makes healthy teams.

Here's what they found, plus tips on getting there.

Share a positive attitude

The leader's positive attitude is the top predictor of a successful team. It might be difficult to keep a chin up if one person isn't performing up to par or is generally miserable. But you still set the tone for even the most reluctant. A few tips:

- **Celebrate progress.** Don't wait to just recognize and reward successes. Those don't happen as often as positive progress toward the bigger goal.
- **Lighten up.** Share funny or inspiring stories

Sharpen Your Judgment
Employee threatens, is fired, then sues

"I only want what's best for you, and being here every day doesn't seem to be that right now," said Manager Bernie London.

"That's why I have to let you go immediately," he continued.

"I don't understand, Bernie," said Julie Estes. "You know I didn't mean those things."

"I'm sure you wouldn't kill yourself or your son," Bernie said. "And I know it's not in you to hurt any of the bosses. But you said you'd do all that. Loudly. In the lunchroom."

"Come on, man," Julie said. "You know it's the major depressive disorder talking. Or maybe the meds for it. It's not the real me."

"Of course, I know about your struggles, and

we've worked to help as you've sought treatment over time.

"But we have a zero tolerance policy on violence," Bernie said. "Now let's go. I can help you clear out your things and walk you out."

Makes her point

"I don't need your help," Julie said. "I don't need anyone's help, except an attorney's."

She left quietly, but made her point clear a few weeks later when she filed a lawsuit, claiming her firing was in violation of 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.

Success …

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and messages at least weekly with your team. You might explain how it relates to them. Ask team members to share similar ideas.

Confer for decision-making

Leaders who involve the group in decisions that affect them build better, healthier teams.

That doesn't mean you need to get consensus or let majority rule every time you're at a crossroads.

Instead, leaders of healthy teams:

- **Talk early.** Let employees know about potential changes well ahead of implementation.
- **Explain how they can influence decisions** and give them time to offer insight and feedback.
- **Confirm quickly.** Let employees know about decisions they were involved in and those that affect them as quickly as possible. Explain what could and couldn't be done based on their input. And let them share thoughts on the final decision.

Communicate often

While most employees bemoan more meetings, people on healthy teams

Tech Corner

4 tips to get employees to embrace new technology

New technology sounds like a great idea – until people have to learn and adopt it.

Then some people are reluctant to change the way they're used to working.

From inception to completion

Here's help getting employees to embrace new tech:

- **Start with "why."** Leaders often talk mostly about "how" and "when." Explain the benefits and values early and often.
- **Integrate old with new.** As much as

believe part of their success can be contributed to meetings.

But not just any meeting. Leaders who have regular, purpose-driven, efficient meetings get the job done right.

So ask yourself before you meet:

- Can the information be shared or decision made in an email?
- What are three priorities to be achieved for this meeting?
- What do I need to share before we meet so we can accomplish everything within 30 minutes?

Be willing to help

Leaders who are willing to roll up their sleeves and get the work done side-by-side with employees produce healthy teams, researchers found.

Of course, you can't – and shouldn't – do it all the time.

Instead, leaders want to lead and empower. Best ways:

- **Give employees low-risk choices to make when working alone.** You build confidence. They gain autonomy, and
- **Treat failure fairly.** If employees work hard and fall short, turn it into a learning opportunity, with eyes toward the next success.

Source: Skynova, tinyurl.com/teamhealth514

possible, let employees transition over to the new tech, rather than turn one off and the other on.
- **Train multiple times.** Briefly review basics in subsequent sessions so employees who still don't "get it" can try again. Then offer more advanced training for those who want or need it.
- **Create a communication strategy** that includes proactive messages to help people understand the tech, see milestones and know the definition of success. Get feedback and address concerns with lunch-and-learns or town hall meetings.

Source: tinyurl.com/techtips514

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 Making mental well-being easier to discuss, manage

Employees everywhere are more stressed than ever.

Life has been uncertain since the pandemic. That makes work and the demands that come with it overwhelming for many people.

We wanted to do more than tell employees, "We understand. It's tough all around." In our case, we wanted to make it OK to talk about mental well-being and turn to each other for help.

Learn and share

At our company – and many of our clients' companies – we start some meetings with videos or information on well-being topics such as isolation, feeling overwhelmed with caring for others or facing more uncertainty.

Just bringing it up often puts employees more at ease. They see they aren't facing the issues alone.

Sometimes, leaders even say, "I've been dealing with this, too. Does anyone have ideas on how to manage it?"

That gets people talking productively about well-being and sharing helpful ideas.

(Anne Mittag, SVP of Product & Services, LifeSpeak, Toronto)

2 Retention strategy: Learning and growth

The Great Resignation is no joke. Employees are leaving companies at record rates. And employers struggle to hire new, qualified people.

We didn't want to get stuck in that cycle. So we focused even more on employee retention.

The goal was to keep employees engaged with our company, their work and their career with us.

Choose your path

So we increased the learning opportunities for employees to give them room for professional growth. Even when employees worked – or continue to work – remotely, we make training and coaching a top priority for everyone.

We give them choices when it comes to learning and growth. They can choose the area that's best related to their professional journey.

It's paid off big time. We have very little turnover and continue to build a stronger, professional workforce.

(Solomon Thimothy, Founder and CEO, OneMIS, shared this success on SmallBizTrends)

3 New attitude on hiring made it better

To say we were concerned about virtual hiring and onboarding might be a bit of an understatement.

Early in the pandemic, it was the only way we could find new talent. And we were worried we couldn't do it as well as we did in-person – which included a great dose of our company culture and lots of opportunities to get to know candidates.

But when we switched our attitude about virtual hiring, we had success.

Took the best of both worlds

Instead of worrying about what had to be watered down in the new process, we focused on the new opportunities in the virtual reality.

So we focused extra on relaying our company culture to ensure that remained. Then we saw the benefits of being able to attract candidates from a wider geographical area and finding best-fit employees to fill roles.

Now that we can hire in-person and virtually, we've taken the best of both and created an even better process.

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

⚖ YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Employees want to be paid for computer boot-up time

Question: A few employees complained they should get paid for the time it takes their computers to boot up when they come in. Should we do it?

Answer: Most likely, yes, says employment law attorney Fiona Ong, a partner at Shawe Rosenthal.

She cites a U.S. Court of Appeals for the Tenth District as guidance: Call center employees wanted compensation for about two minutes it took to boot up and shut down. The company said those added up to "insubstantial or insignificant periods of time beyond the scheduled working hours" which isn't compensable under the de minimis doctrine.

The court said that could add up to $125 a year – a significant amount to low-wage workers like those in the case.

So, consider the total time and compensation before you make a blanket decision on whether to pay employees to boot up or not, Ong says.

Source: *tinyurl.com/preshift514*

LIGHTER SIDE

■ When forgetfulness comes back to haunt us

Even with all the communication apps we have to act as reminders, very few people can remember everything all the time.

So when you forget something, hopefully it won't come back to haunt you like it did for Caron McBride.

When she filed paperwork to change her name after getting married, she was denied and told to call the district attorney's office. She'd been flagged for felony embezzlement.

She was shocked, having never stolen money or misused funds. She was even more shocked to find out what she was accused of – renting the *Sabrina, The Teenage Witch* DVD 21 years earlier and never returning it.

Source: *tinyurl.com/VHS514*

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Employee well-being declines: How to help

More than 85% of employees said their workplace well-being declined since the start of COVID-19.

Many employees say the problems stem from more job demand, disconnection from others and disengagement with their work.

While all of that has nearly always been an issue in the workplace, the pandemic put employee mental health in the spotlight.

What's worse, managers are hit hardest: They deal with their personal issues *and* their employees' problems.

In many cases, they're put in the position to be counselors, therapists and psychiatrists –

and they aren't equipped to offer that level of help to employees.

Get help

As front-line managers, don't be afraid to ask for training to help you:

- identify when employees are struggling with mental health issues
- initiate and have conversations around mental health care, and
- respond to employees who bring mental health concerns to them.

Source: HRMorning.com

Hiring woes? Here are 2 ways to overcome it in 2022

If you feel the hiring crunch now, beware: Hiring woes won't likely ease up in 2022.

Almost 50% of small businesses have job openings they can't fill, according to the National Federation of Independent Businesses.

Find less-traditional recruits

You might get a leg up on hiring if you broaden recruiting efforts. Consider these two:

- **Recently discharged veterans.** "The hiring and reskilling of veterans can be an extremely viable way to address the skilled

talent shortage," says Sarah Peiker, CEO of Orion Talent. You might partner with Student Veterans of America and Military Transition Centers to find great candidates.

- **Formerly incarcerated.** Fair chance hiring helps eliminate "workplace stigmas and outdated hiring processes that exclude the 77 million formerly incarcerated Americans from even getting considered for positions," says Linda Shaffer, Chief People and Operations Officer at Checkr. Even better, it can help improve diversity and inclusion.

Source: HRMorning.com

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

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Yes, the company won the suit when a court dismissed the case.

The employee's attorney claimed she suffered from a disability covered under the ADA. Her boss knew about it – and her treatment – and was required to accommodate her. Instead, he violated the ADA by firing her.

The company's attorney argued the manager fired the employee for one reason. She threatened violence on several people – including herself, her relative and other employees – in the workplace. She was a threat to safety and violated the zero tolerance on violence policy.

The company was sympathetic to the employee for her mental health struggles, and

even worked to help her through them. But the employer couldn't have her working on-site.

The court agreed. The company didn't violate the ADA.

Keep everyone's safety in mind

Workplace safety always comes first, the court showed. Employers don't have to tolerate threats of violence, even if the reason behind them are a known disability.

No one wants to see any employee suffer. But managers need to put everyone's safety first.

(Based on *Todd v. Fayette County School District.* Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

When you're good at something, you'll tell everyone. When you're great at something, they'll tell you.

– Walter Payton

It's easier to program bias out of a machine than out of a mind.

– Brian Uzzi

Look forward. Turn what has been done into a better path.

– Wilma Mankiller