

# 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.

January 17, 2022



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## 3 research-proven ways to improve employee engagement

*Researchers dug deep and long to get the answers we need in 2022*

Many leaders believe there's no way to engage every employee.

After all, every department, team and individual is different with nuances of their own. How could you possibly satisfy them all?

With hardcore, deep diving research that seems to have uncovered the absolute three best ways to improve employee engagement.

Harvard Business School researchers created the Employee Engagement Checklist. And to say they were engaged in that work would be an understatement.

They tirelessly reviewed academic literature, compiled a list of the 20 most important drivers of engagement and pulled together data on what engages employees in the COVID-19 era. Then

they compared that to what managers predicted would boost employees' engagement. Finally, they formulated a series of recommendations on how to engage everyone.

And here's what works:

### Help make the connection

Top of the list: Help employees connect what they do to what they care about. More simply put, make their work matter in their lives.

Three tactics:

- **Rethink your mission.** Employees feel better working for companies that want to do more than be the best in the industry. They prefer

*Please see Engagement ... on Page 2.*

### Sharpen Your Judgment

## He's no minority, but says he's victim of bias

"I know it sounds cliché, but this is the best way to express this: It's not you, it's us," said Leslie Snyder, a department VP.

"Let me make sure I'm getting this right," said David McGowen. "I'm doing a good job in this role. I've done everything you've asked of me for the past five years, sometimes even more.

"And you're firing me because ...?" David asked.

"It's no secret that we've been realigning how the company is structured," said Leslie. "We don't see how your role fits in going forward."

David leaned back in his chair, briefly thought and finally said, "This is peculiar timing to fire a good performer – just days before my five year anniversary. That's exactly when I'd get the better

benefits package and a bump in severance. And now there's a campaign to get more diversity in leadership roles like mine."

"That's not it at all," said Leslie. "The restructuring has been going on for a while."

### New hires raise questions

David kept his ear to the ground and found out the company hired two women – one white, one Black – to fulfill his role.

He wasted no time filing a suit, alleging race and sex discrimination.

The company fought the case, claiming it had business reasons for firing the employee.

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.

## Engagement ...

(continued from Page 1)

companies that are at least somewhat focused on a greater good that aligns with their values.

- **Show employees how their work aligns with the mission.** It's not enough to simply create a feel-good mission. Work with employees to revamp job descriptions so they reflect the purpose, not just the duties. For instance, the hospital janitorial staff role could be re-framed as helping sick people rather than just cleaning.
- **Support Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).** Let employees create and thrive together around similar passions, interests and causes.

### Cut stress, add enjoyment

Forget all work and no play makes Jane a dull girl. Work that's not enjoyable makes Jane stressed and disengaged.

To add enjoyment:

- **Help employees find intrinsic (internal) motivation.** The researchers suggested job rotations so employees have opportunities to try different work and find what really makes them happy.

- **Give more autonomy.** Regardless of the position, train employees so well they can make decisions and handle challenges without oversight. Let them choose as much as possible how and when they do their work.
- **Boost confidence.** Give employees opportunities to mentor and be mentored. What they can learn from and teach each other boosts morale and confidence organically.

### Reward with what employees want

In addition to internal motivation, employees still want rewards that are more external – specifically, more time off and financial incentives.

To reward and engage better:

- **Increase time-off incentives.** Make it easier to earn days or hours off. Increase vacation days. Even better, implement company-wide days off so no one is compelled to check in, respond or take on responsibilities.
- **Help them invest in time-saving purchases.** Partner with dry cleaning, grocery delivery, childcare, tax preparation, meal kit, housekeeping, etc., services so employees can make more time for leisure.
- **Discourage after-hour messaging.** Employees need to disconnect every day to stay engaged when they're working.

*Source:* Harvard Business Review, [tinyurl.com/engagement516](https://tinyurl.com/engagement516)

## TECH CORNER

### Best tech for every kind of message you have

Talking face to face is the most effective form of communication – and doesn't require technology.

In the absence of that, you have a variety of communication channels to get the job done.

#### Best use for each

Here are the next most effective communication tools for work:

- **Telephone.** Best when two people can't be together.
- **Video chat.** Best for group interaction and decision making

when teams are dispersed.

- **Email.** Best for routine messages that don't need immediate attention.
- **IM.** Best for short messages that need immediate feedback.
- **Letter.** Best for external messages that need to be formal, cover a sensitive topic or require a documented record.
- **Memo.** Best for in-office information when email isn't practical.
- **Blog.** Best for sharing ideas with a wide audience and collecting feedback.
- **Report.** Best to deliver large amounts of in-depth data and information.

*Source:* [tinyurl.com/comtech516](https://tinyurl.com/comtech516)

## COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

### How to build trust with new and veteran employees

Former General Electric executive Jeff Immelt told a reporter once that he never knew who the CEO was when he was a kid, despite the fact his father worked there. But, Immelt explained, he always knew his *father's boss* because it impacted their home life. A good boss sent home a positive, happy dad. A bad boss sent home a grouchy father who was uncertain about his future.

Point is, as a boss you affect entire families. And don't you want to have a positive impact? To do that, try to:

- **Know that tides turn.** Most days employees will be focused on work. But some days, something in their lives matters more – and you'll need to give them space
- **Treat employees with respect.** Say "please" and "thank you." Ask for permission to interrupt. Be kind with criticism, and
- **Tell them why they're important** members of your team and the company overall.

*Source:* [tinyurl.com/trust516](https://tinyurl.com/trust516)

### How to avoid 3 group presentation pitfalls

You'd think a group presentation would be easier than a one-person show since you split the responsibility.

But that's often the problem: Too many participants create an unorganized presentation. Here are three common pitfalls that lead to troubles – and how to avoid them:

- **Disjointed slides.** When several people create slides, they might not use the same font, size and overall style. *Fix it:* Designate a slide creator.
- **Interruptions.** When teams don't decide in advance who talks when and how they'll transition, they often talk over each other or interrupt. *Fix it:* Plan talk sequence and timing.
- **Zoning out.** Team members might feel so relieved to be done with their part, they forget they're still part of the presentation – and disconnect from it. *Fix it:* Everyone needs to commit to listening to each other.

*Source:* [tinyurl.com/present516](https://tinyurl.com/present516)

# 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 Conflict is inevitable: How to stay ahead of trouble

With so much controversy in the world, you can expect it will spill into the workplace.

And our workplace was no exception. We figured conversations around COVID-19, vaccinations and mask wearing could spark negative reactions and poor behavior.

So we got ahead of it as much as possible by addressing it.

### Many topics to consider

Of course, we didn't just consider COVID-19-related topics. We laid it out that there are certainly ways to address – or avoid – some topics in the

workplace including current, political and societal topics.

Our plan didn't include hard rules on what employees could or should talk about. It was a series of general reminders on the etiquette policies and expectations we had in place. Some of those included the expectation to treat colleagues with respect and accept differing views.

We also reminded them of laws regarding harassment and bias so they understood behaviors that violate company and federal rules.

*(Melissa Gonzalez Boyce, Legal Editor, XpertHR, New York)*

## 2 How we help front-line managers succeed

We saw a study that said 75% of employees felt the most stressful aspect of their job was their immediate boss.

Wow! They felt that way for a variety of reasons, such as the boss didn't manage remote staff well, was a micromanager or didn't give enough direction.

You know why that happens? Because managers often don't get enough training to lead teams.

We wanted to change that.

### Get serious about training

Our solution was to double down on front-line management training.

We went beyond the typical skills training for their individual roles.

We also offered opportunities – in-house, online or at events – to hone soft skills such as emotional intelligence, decision making and empathy. They could access new information at their convenience or pull up saved learning for refreshers.

Now they're prepared for just about anything.

*(Jan Bruce, CEO and Co-founder, MeQuilibrium, Boston)*

## 3 Special efforts help teams stay connected

Teamwork isn't what it used to be. People don't sit down at tables and hash out issues, come up with solutions and execute as much as they used to.

Now, we meet on Zoom more. We collaborate less.

That can cause teams to become so disconnected they're just individuals working in silos.

To help teams stay connected, I made extra efforts recognizing diverse talent and contributions.

### Show my gratitude

For instance, I make a point to express genuine gratitude for anyone's work that makes the team better. I'll profile successes, especially for those employees who tend to work behind the scenes and get the job done.

I also send surveys to team members to get input from different vantage points. Then I have a better idea on the practices and ideas we need to reinforce to keep teams connected and on track toward goals.

*(Teese Murray, CEO, iGrafX, Tualatin, OR, shared this success on the Forbes Technology Council)*



## YOUR LEGAL COACH

### ■ Can we renege an accommodation?

**Question:** We made a reasonable accommodation when an employee requested one some time ago. It doesn't work for us anymore. Can we rescind it?

**Answer:** Yes, says employment law attorney Bernard Jacques of McElroy Deutsch Mulvaney & Carpenter LLP. That's especially true if the accommodation puts the employee, others or the company at a safety risk.

He cites a recent case as evidence. In that case, an employee was granted permission to wear sneakers in a steel toed-required area of the facility because of an existing condition. But OSHA cited the company with a safety violation because of the sneakers. So the company rescinded her accommodation. She sued, and lost when a court said an accommodation that puts anyone in risk of danger is not a reasonable accommodation.

So accommodate as much as you can, but never when safety is at risk.

**Source:** [tinyurl.com/rescind516](https://tinyurl.com/rescind516)

## LIGHTER SIDE

### ■ Manager or Captain Under-Appreciated?

Are you a manager, supervisor, team leader or Captain Under-Appreciated?

That's the title of some mid-level managers, according to Compuclean, which gathered quirky new titles for the same old jobs. Some others:

- **Paranoid in Chief:** Chief Information Security Officer.
- **Beverage Dissemination Officer:** Barista or Bartender.
- **Dream Alchemist:** Head of Creative.
- **Master of Disaster:** Crisis Manager.
- **Director of First Impressions:** Receptionist.
- **Transparency Enhancement Facilitator:** Window Cleaner.

**Source:** [tinyurl.com/titles516](https://tinyurl.com/titles516)

## COMMUNICATION NEWS

## What's important to employees now

If you hope to retain most employees in 2022, you'll want to double down on what's most important to them now.

The keys, according to the Conference Board's study, "Reshaping Employee Experience and Organizational Culture: Lessons From the Tumultuous Events of 2020 and 2021": communication, flexibility, relationships and culture.

We'll focus on each of them in this space over four issues.

### Up first: Communication

Communicating more doesn't mean just putting more information in employees'

### Employees don't feel productive – and don't like it

Fifty-five percent of employees feel productive only half of the work day.

Many of those employees are drained by that feeling of being less productive, according to a Paychex survey.

Low productivity and drained energy are a recipe for disaster.

### Forward moving strategy

This strategy can help give a boost:

**1. Identify your strengths.** Rebecca Newton, author of *Authentic Gravitas: Who Stands*

hands. They don't need more. They need *more personal and authentic information*. Four ways:

- **Town hall meetings** with company leaders talking realistically about business in language employees "get"
- **Regular forums** between departments that rely on each other
- **Skip-level meetings** where people can give upper management their view of the employee experience, and
- **A regular cadence of one-on-one meetings** between managers and direct reports.

Source: [tinyurl.com/now516](https://tinyurl.com/now516)

*Out and Why* suggests you ask yourself, "When are times recently that I have felt energized at work? In these situations, what was I doing?" That's your strength.

**2. Schedule them for the right time.** Instead of just pedaling to keep up, focus on the time you can work on your strengths. For instance, if you recognize you love strategic planning, schedule that for the hour you're generally most productive. Or if you get excited about creating new things, allow your mind to wonder for an hour at the end of each day.

Source: [tinyurl.com/productive516](https://tinyurl.com/productive516)

## Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

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No, the company lost the case in a big way: It had to pay the former employee \$10 million.

An attorney claimed the employee – a white male – was the victim of discrimination because he was fired for no obvious reason, then replaced by women. He had a stellar performance history. While a white male normally wouldn't be the ideal model for this kind of discrimination claim, he was because of the company's efforts to increase diversity at his level.

The company's attorney argued that he was let go for legitimate reasons: They were restructuring and his performance hadn't been as good as it looked on paper.

The court agreed the case cried foul all

over. For one, the company can't claim his performance was an issue after years of documented positive reviews. The timing screamed they wanted him out before it would cost more to fire him. And, finally, he was replaced by, not one, but two minorities.

### Rare or not, discrimination is never OK

While rare, discrimination against white and/or male employees can happen – and it's just as wrong as discrimination against minorities. Any form of discrimination in hiring, firing, promotion or demotion isn't OK.

(Based on *Duvall v. Novant Health Inc.*  
Dramatized for effect.)

### Quotes

**R**eal integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody's going to know whether you did it or not.

– Oprah Winfrey

**N**ever make excuses. Your friends don't need them and your foes don't believe them.

– John Wooden

**A**bsorb what is useful, reject what is useless, add what is specifically your own.

– Bruce Lee

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