

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

February 14, 2022



If you haven't been to our website recently, here's exclusive online content you've been missing:

www.CommunicationBulletin.com



Management Skills Center

Improve your skills and manage better



Professional Writing Center

Hundreds of tips to get writing right

Fix most management woes when you improve this one skill

8 tips on how to become a better listener

Listening could be the most under-rated management skill ... ever!

Managers who listen well have a more positive impact on employees, avoiding discontent and turnover. Solid listeners give better instruction and direction, effectively leading teams to success.

And they always seem to say the right thing at the right time (because they heard and understood concerns).

Yet, nearly 80% of business programs call presentation skills a goal and just 11% consider listening one.

"Getting good at active listening is a lifetime endeavor," say Robin Abrahams and Boris Groysberg in their Harvard Business School

research. "However, even minor improvements can make a difference in your listening effectiveness."

To do that, here are the researchers' top tips and strategies to become a better listener in work (and life).

Repeat the last few words

This is the most important of all the tips: Repeat the other person's last few words back to him or her. It serves three purposes:

- makes the other person feel listened to
- keeps everyone on track, and
- provides a pause for both of you to gather

Please see Skill ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Not the right fit or a case of gender bias?

"I'm just getting my bearings," said employee Sonya Yoo. "I'd think there'd be a bigger grace period, considering the learning curve in this role."

"Perhaps," said Manager Joel Lendowski. "But you've been at it for a few weeks now and you haven't hit any kind of stride."

"I would expect anyone who got this promotion to have more of a hang of it by now," Joel continued.

"I'm getting a better hang of things every day," Sonya said. "Ask anyone else on the team."

"I could, but as the manager, it's my call," said Joel. "You're not the right fit here, but I can see that you're a better fit on the C Division Team."

"They're ready for you to start Monday," Joel

said. "I suspect you'll succeed immediately and love the new position."

Not the case

Nothing could be further from the truth.

"I don't like the work. I have less authority. And my advancement opportunities are gone," Sonya told Joel. "And then I learn you gave Adam my old job. He's consistently a sub-par performer."

"I had to fill it with someone," Joel said.

"You mean you had to fill it with a man," Sonya said. "This is flat out gender discrimination."

She followed through on the allegation with a discrimination suit, which 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.

Skill ...

(continued from Page 1)

thoughts or recover from any kind of emotional reaction.

Don't put it in your words

You might have heard before that it's a good idea to rephrase what others say. It actually causes more confusion.

One caveat: If you need to check that you understand what they said, explicitly say, "I'm going to put this in my words to make sure I understand."

Give the nonverbals (or don't)

Make eye contact, stand attentively, nod and give other nonverbal cues – *only* if that comes natural to you!

If you have to think about sending those signals, you won't listen as attentively as you should.

Pay attention to nonverbals

Whether you dish out nonverbals or not, it's important that you pay attention to speakers. Check that their tone, facial expressions and body language are in line with their words.

Minimize distractions

It should go without saying, but it's always worth the reminder: Eliminate

distractions when you talk with others. Put aside devices and turn off alerts.

Also, minimize internal distractions. If you're preoccupied with another issue, re-focus before you chat. If it'll be an emotional conversation, work to get as calm as possible beforehand.

Ask more questions

There can never be too many questions in an important conversation. Ask more than you think you need to.

Questions:

- ensure you fully understand
- act as a prompt to be sure important details aren't overlooked, and
- remind the other person he or she is being heard.

Skip the rehearsal

Don't rehearse your responses while the other person is talking. Instead, pause briefly after he or she is done talking to compose your thoughts.

This will take practice and a conscious effort.

Stay ahead of emotions

If you or the speaker have emotional reactions, slow the pace.

High emotions will take almost anyone right back to poor listening habits such as tuning out, disengagement and preparing responses.

Source: tinyurl.com/listener518

TECH CORNER

4 tactics to avoid cyber threats with remote work

Devices employees use remotely still put your company's network at risk.

Small or large, cyber threats loom with the potential to cost your company time and money.

Be more careful

Here are four tips to help employees avoid cyber threats when working remotely.

- **Protect your work computer.** Don't let family members – or anyone in the household – use a work computer at any time.

- **Do regular housekeeping.** Regularly update software. Install firewalls. Restart the device at least daily. Discontinue unused programs. The more up-to-date, the safer a device is.
- **Log off after work.** Shut down all corporate apps and files at the end of the day to make the computer more secure.
- **Separate professional and personal web traffic.** Bottom line: Personal searches, traffic and action tends to be more vulnerable to cyber threats.

Source: *Forbes Technology Council*, tinyurl.com/safety518

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ 5 ways to build a stronger network

In or out of an office, leaders still need to network to learn, teach and advance their careers.

Here are five tips for networking in today's new work world:

- **Focus on the right people.** A larger network isn't helpful if it isn't full of people who can help you as much as you can help them.
- **Give before you receive.** Offer help first so your networking partner will be grateful before you ever ask for it.
- **Connect others.** Don't consider networking solely as your benefit. Help others who can benefit from each other connect.
- **Use social networks.** In today's virtual workplace, you need to use social networks such as LinkedIn and Facebook to connect professionally. They're valuable tools to reach out and be reached.
- **Reconnect.** Remember and reconnect with those whom you might have lost contact with through the pandemic.

Source: *American Express*, tinyurl.com/network518

■ 3 things top leaders have in common

Nearly every leader strives to be a better leader.

So it's helpful to know what makes the best leaders stand apart.

Here are the top three qualities and tips to master them from Dan Rockwell, consultant and founder of Leadership Freak. The best leaders:

- **Lean toward "Yes."** They're open to ideas and feedback. Then encourage people to move ahead with thought-out ideas.
- **Finish stuff.** They finish something before they take on something else. They don't waste time distracted by too many, less-important things.
- **Learn.** They might know a lot, but they're always willing to learn more. They look for opportunities to learn.

Source: tinyurl.com/common518

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 ‘SAS Sandwich’: 90-minute tool to get more done

When you work in a remote or hybrid setting, it’s more difficult to do partner or group projects effectively.

You don’t see each other face-to-face. You can’t brainstorm as efficiently. And you don’t get ample opportunities to bounce ideas off each other.

In an effort to improve partner and group efforts, I tried a 90-minute work session – what we call the Synchronous, Asynchronous, Synchronous Sandwich.

30-30-30

Here’s how it works: Colleagues meet online for 30 minutes to discuss what we want to accomplish and

ideas for doing it. Then we go offline for asynchronous work – 30 minutes alone, basically putting everything we discussed in writing.

Then we get back together for another 30 minutes to hash out what we each created and where we’ll go from there.

Then we can all drive forward.

This has helped us get great things accomplished in small amounts of time.

(Mary Mesaglio, Distinguished VP of CEO & Digital Future Group, Gartner, in the webinar, “Tips to Pursue & Things to Avoid in The Great Reopening)

2 Add the ‘B’ to improve DEI efforts

Most companies have worked to improve Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in recent years.

The pandemic has even helped in one way, allowing companies with remote capabilities to hire a more diverse, dispersed workforce.

But I’ve found that DEI efforts aren’t effective if employees don’t feel like they belong in their working environment. That’s why I add the “B” to any DEI effort I’m part of.

Feed forward

One of my favorite ways to improve belonging is to get “feed forward” (as opposed to feedback).

I don’t just ask people for their thoughts and opinions on our DEI. I ask them to share feelings on where they fit in it all.

That helps me identify the level of belonging and where I have room for improvement with it.

(Kimberly Reed, Chief Transformation Officer, Reed Development, Cherry Hill, NJ)

3 Help new employees get to know you, too

When new employees start, most managers focus on getting them acclimated to the company and their work. Managers often try to get to know and understand their new hires.

That’s all good and fine, but it doesn’t include acclimation to one key element to an employee’s success: the relationship with the direct boss.

I wanted to add that layer of boss-new employee acclimation to the onboarding process.

Build better relationships

So I took the time to think about and write what makes me tick, including my work style, expectations of myself and my employees, values, motivations and decision-making preferences.

I didn’t necessarily hand the document over to new employees. Instead, I made a point to at least have a chat with them about it all. That helped set up better, more effective working relationships.

(Dennis Yu, Chief of Staff and VP of Program Management, Chime, San Francisco, shared this success in First Round Review)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Can we require booster shots?

Question: We required employees to show proof of COVID-19 vaccination (and accommodated those who couldn’t). As variants rise, we wonder if we should require everyone to show proof of receiving the booster?

Answer: Yes, especially since you required proof of the first vaccinations, says Daniel Schwartz, an employment law attorney at Shipman & Goodwin LLP. That’s because the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the shots and approved them for adults over the age of 18.

But the question is, “Should you require them?” For now, probably not. That’s for the same reasons you can require it: The CDC has not declared “fully vaccinated” to include the booster.

Schwartz recommends a wait-and-see approach. And if you haven’t created a mandatory vaccine policy, and intend to do it, note that booster shots could be required in the future.

Source: tinyurl.com/booster518

LIGHTER SIDE

■ New wave of office mates

Since the pandemic, employees have found new ways to get work done – or get their work noticed. You might be familiar with these colleagues:

- **Jargon Jerry:** He uses jargon and acronyms in most sentences to seem more important.
- **Weekend Wendy:** She asks, “How was your weekend?” then barely listens just so she can ask a favor.
- **Typer Tammy:** She types loudly so everyone knows she works hard.
- **Meeting Matt:** He can’t answer phones, email or Slack messages because he’s always headed to a meeting.
- **Coffee Cathy:** You know which meeting room she’s been in because she leaves behind coffee rings to prove it.

Source: [SocialTalent.com](https://socialtalent.com)

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Relationships: Key to engage employees

To engage and retain employees this year, help them build relationships at work.

That's one of four critical elements to employee satisfaction, according to the Conference Board's study, "Reshaping Employee Experience and Organizational Culture: Lessons From the Tumultuous Events of 2020 and 2021."

The others three keys: communication, flexibility, and culture – and we're focusing on each in this space over four issues.

This pays dividends

Researchers found investing in workplace relationships pays dividends. Employees who

like the people they work with stay loyal longer.

And while friendship is important at work, any meaningful relationship is helpful. That means, employees need mentors, colleagues who kindly challenge them and are positive reinforcers.

To help employees build those kinds of relationships:

- promote mentoring programs with veteran employees who love your culture, and
- plan events that allow employees to network both professionally and socially.

Source: tinyurl.com/now516

The most dangerous place in the office revealed

Be aware, office dwellers: The most dangerous place when it comes to germs probably isn't where you suspect it.

We're all more conscious of germs, illness and its spread, thanks to COVID-19. A new study revealed the germ hot spots.

No. 1: Your mouse! It holds onto the most germs in the office (probably because you hold on to it the most).

Behind that are common areas: the coffee pot and refrigerator. Other communal hot spots: bathroom lock, printer, light switch and

hand sanitizer bottle! So when you're trying to avoid the spread, you could be contacting germs. On a personal level, your computer keyboard and desk phone are still germey.

The fix: Wash hands regularly

The study from Chicopee, a cleaning material manufacturer, points to what's important: regular hand washing in the workplace. To stop the spread of any illness, wash throughout the day.

Source: chicopee.com/en-us/

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

No. The company lost.

The employee's attorney claimed she was the victim of gender discrimination. The boss didn't have a valid reason to remove her from the position with more authority and responsibility. The boss stripped her of the better role in favor of a man. What's more, the man didn't perform as well as her as shown on previous performance reviews.

The company's attorney argued the employee wasn't the "right fit" for the position. And "right fit" is a subjective criteria open to the boss's view. Comparing performance reviews doesn't tell the whole story, the attorney argued. Managers witness more than what's in the records.

The court disagreed, noting that reviews are a proper indication of actual performance. The female employee was moved to a lower position in favor of a male employee who performed worse, and that pointed to gender discrimination.

Rely on documented information

This case is proof that paper doesn't lie. Managers don't want to rely on personal observations over documented proof when making personnel decisions.

If it's important to employment decisions, it's important to document and act on.

(Based on *Sempowich v. Tactile Systems Technology Inc.* Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

You don't have to become something you're not to be better than you were.

– Sidney Poitier

Keep your face always toward the sunshine, and shadows will fall behind you.

– Walt Whitman

The fewer rules a coach has, the fewer rules there are for players to break.

– John Madden

Belief creates the actual fact.

– William James

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