

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

March 1, 2022



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5 keys to communicate better in uncertain times (or any time)

Here's how the most successful leaders share information

It's important for leaders to communicate clearly, but it's absolutely critical that it happens in uncertain times.

And the uncertainty of the past two years doesn't seem to be letting up any time soon.

So managers and supervisors will want to sharpen their communication skills – especially those used in complex, overwhelming or uncharted situations – to help employees navigate it all.

Researchers recently looked closely at organizations and leaders who communicated well with employees throughout the pandemic.

These leaders continued to gain employee trust even when they didn't have all the answers or the information and protocols changed

rapidly. And that's exactly when they could've just as easily been perceived as evasive or crass.

Here are the five important keys to communication in uncertain times. But don't wait until something goes wrong to use them. Make them everyday rules for communicating clearly in the workplace.

Be upfront

Employees often look to leaders to have all the answers. And that's when it's tempting to bluff with the little information you have.

Instead, be upfront when you don't have all the answers. When you admit you don't know exactly what's next or how things

*Please see **Uncertain times ...** on Page 2.*

Sharpen Your Judgment

Candidate doesn't like the written word, sues

"You have quite the background," said Manager Bernice Worthington. "I see you've led a few teams to reach – even surpass – their goals over the years."

"That's right," said Larry Johnson, a candidate for a team lead in Bernice's group. "I like working with a group and seeing them succeed. It's a great feeling, even after all these years in the industry."

Bernice scribbled in her notebook, then asked, "What's your approach to team development?"

Larry leaned back in his chair and smiled. "I've been blessed with great teams. I'm not in the habit of changing the people or dynamics I'm given. I let the process take care of itself."

"Interesting," said Bernice, making a few

more notes on her pad.

This time Larry leaned in to catch a glimpse of what she was writing. "If you have any concerns about my abilities to perform, I can give you references."

"I'll let you know," Bernice said.

Was the writing on the notepad?

A week later, it wasn't the news Larry wanted. He didn't get the job. Someone much younger did.

"Doesn't surprise me," Larry told Bernice. "I saw what you wrote: 'Looking for a retirement job.' You think I'm too old for the work."

On that, he sued for age discrimination. 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.

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.

Uncertain times ...

(continued from Page 1)

will pan out, you show honesty and authenticity. And you don't set up expectations that you can't deliver on when all the information is in.

Be consistent

This could be the most important tip: Keep your messages consistent in tone and cadence.

Employees may not know what to expect next. But if they know you'll tell them calmly at regular intervals what you know and what they need to do, they'll trust you and the process.

Collaborate with other leaders

You'll want to maintain a consistent and transparent message within your group.

You'll also want to work with the leaders in other areas your team works with to deliver, at least, similar – if not, exact – messages.

And if it's critical information disseminating from the top of your organization, work together so the same (or similar) message goes out to employees at the same time.

Employees will more likely have faith in what's said when they all get

the same story. If not, they'll fill holes with gossip or accusations.

Address difficult decisions head-on

Leaders need to make difficult decisions when figuring out how to get through uncertain times and complex situations. Don't sugarcoat that.

Be upfront about the crisis, the choices you faced and how you sometimes had to pick the "least bad" option to get through it.

If you're honest about difficulties, they'll be more likely to rise up to help the team overcome what's happened.

Direct and seek support

Explain how employees can help each other. Many people overcome difficult situations by helping others through them. They thrive on that "We're all in this together" mantra.

You can't force people to shoulder others' burdens. But give them direction on how they can support solutions and each other – if they choose to.

Researchers suggest you put a message at the end of emails, reminding employees where they can get help online or from a leader if they face mental health issues such as anxiety.

Sources: The Horizon's Tracker, tinyurl.com/communicate519; The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, tinyurl.com/study519

TECH CORNER

3 mistakes to avoid when introducing new technology

Once you get approval for new technology, you don't want to lose steam implementing it.

So you'll want to avoid these mistakes managers often make when they introduce new tech tools.

- **Rely on junior employees to spearhead the change.** MIT researchers found veteran employees feel slighted when managers pick younger, supposedly more tech-savvy staffers to head up training. They usually aren't better, and the resentment slows adaptation.

- **Skip employees completely.** Some managers let IT handle the changes or create a new technology-based role to do it. Researchers said that leaves others behind and delays full implementation.
- **Assume it's installed and ready to go.** Managers often expect IT or the vendor to get the technology up and running and it'll do what was promised. Almost always, you need to work out kinks and make changes to meet your needs. It's important to have regular conversations with the people who implement it.

Source: Wall Street Journal, tinyurl.com/techmistakes519

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

4 common traits of high performers

Whether you want to spot high performers for your team or better your game, here's help. These are the top four common traits of high performers, according to leadership and business expert David Burkus. They:

- **focus on betterment.** They think about the process more than the outcome. They aim to learn and improve skills because if they get better, the outcomes will be better.
- **play to their strengths.** They develop skills, knowledge and experience around what they're good or natural at. They spend less time trying to improve weaknesses.
- **track progress.** To know if their efforts to become better actually work, they keep close tabs on progress. Then they can change direction if it's not working. And when efforts work, they're a powerful motivator to charge ahead.
- **know their purpose.** They know what they're working for – and it's usually about a small group who's positively impacted by what they do.

Source: tinyurl.com/highperform520

Need inspiration or to inspire others? Here's help

If you need some inspiration – or help inspiring others, try this: The 10 most popular TEDx Talks of all time.

Most TEDx Talks are less than 15 minutes (about as long as people's attention spans). They focus on one key idea that's easy to understand and carry for some time.

A list of some of those top talks:

- How great leaders inspire action
- The power of vulnerability
- What makes a good life? Lessons from the longest study on happiness
- The happy secret to better work
- 10 ways to have better conversations, and
- A Saudi, an Indian and an Iranian walk into a Qatari bar ...

Find them at tinyurl.com/TEDxTalks519

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 From off-sites to on-sites, team building at its best

Remember when we did “off sites” – those annual (or more frequent) events meant for team- and morale-building? We also trained employees on anything new in the company, and got to meet new employees and customers.

Those were great ... until COVID-19 when we had to all move home to work and essentially avoid being together.

We tried to replicate them via virtual meetings, but they weren't the same thing.

Same great results

So when we decided to continue to work mostly remotely for longer –

perhaps even forever – we needed to try something else.

That was when we turned the event to our “on site.” We brought everyone together back in the office to meet for a few days and do all the team- and morale-building activities and training again. For companies that downsized or eliminated their office space, I'd recommend renting local hotel space to do the same.

It's worked well to build teams and train the group again.

(Tim Rowley, COO, People Caddie, Chicago)

2 To get people talking, use oldest trick in book

Whether we were in the office or not, it was difficult to get departments communicating as well as they should.

And when people don't share enough information or keep others up to date, things fall through the cracks. We also experience more mistakes because of miscommunication. I wanted to get people talking between departments, not just working and communicating in their silos.

The oldest trick in the book worked!

Come and get it!

I organized company-wide lunches every Friday. I was surprised at how many people showed up – but I guess free food is good enticement.

And it was worth every penny of the investment. People who wouldn't normally interact met at lunch, talked about work and life and started to build bonds. The informal meetings led to much better communication throughout the company.

(Bryce Welker, CEO, Crush Empire, Puerto Rico, shared this success with the SmartBrief Young Entrepreneur Council)

3 The Bucket List: A key to work/life balance

The longer I worked from home full- or part-time, the tougher it became to draw that line between work and life.

It could be overwhelming – that feeling of, “I can get one more thing done today, so I might as well do it.” Then, when I missed something that I should've been attentive to at home, the guilt feeling set in.

I needed a system for balancing.

Everything in its place

For me, I put all my “to-dos” into one of five categories. My buckets ranged from “I'm committed,” to “I'm trying” to “I don't care.” And I'd consider nearly everything that wanted time on my schedule – from lunch dates and meetings to time with my daughter and exercise.

Then, when two or more things competed for my time, I'd just consider which was in the most demanding bucket.

This has really helped me regain work/life balance.

(Max Yoder, CEO, Lessonly, Indianapolis, shared this in The Wall Street Journal)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ When is it time to part ways with poor performer?

Question: I have an employee who doesn't perform up to par. He's been given chances to get better. When's the right time to let him go?

Answer: It's a difficult decision and conversation, so timing is critical, say employment attorneys Robin Burroughs and Thomas Strong of the firm Venable LLP. Ask these questions to know if now is the right time:

- What's your valid reason for the firing? In most states, you don't need a cause because of at-will employment rules. But it's best to have a valid reason – and poor performance is one.
- Did you try “progressive discipline?” Whether you have a policy that requires conversations and plans to improve or not, you should document attempts to do so first.
- What will you tell other employees? Strike a balance between need-to-know and respecting privacy. And give a plan to transfer duties.

Source: tinyurl.com/terminate519

LIGHTER SIDE

■ The big difference one word can make

One word can change the meaning of something dramatically.

So when Jimmy Fallon asked viewers to add a word to a sports team, fierce competitors became quite something else:

- The Los Angeles Toe Clippers
- Golden Girls State Warriors
- Utah Jazz Hands
- Denver Chicken Nuggets
- Buffalo Unpaid Bills
- Sacramento Burger Kings
- Toronto Maple Leafs Blowers
- San Diego Phone Chargers
- The Houston Snot Rockets, and
- The Chicago Care Bears.

Source: tinyurl.com/teams519

COMMUNICATION NEWS

5 best ways to build a better culture

If you hope to keep employees engaged and loyal this year, focus on their newest needs.

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

We covered the first three in previous issues. Now let's look at culture.

Money isn't the end-all

Pay raises and cash bonuses don't increase engagement, says research in *The Harvard Business Review*. Investing in culture does.

Good news: The contagion that will boost morale, well-being

Turn off the TV. Stop talking about bad news. Start looking for – and sharing – good news.

It'll boost morale and well-being at work (and generally make people feel better in life).

Research proves theory

Turns out, good news and happiness are contagious, according to research from Dr. Paola Cecchi-Dimeglio, CEO and founder of People.Culture.Drive. Consulting Group.

And couldn't we all use more of that in our

The most successful investments focus on:

- positive culture and values
- quality senior management
- training that helps employees improve their careers and lives
- creating pathways for employees to build careers, and
- diversity, equity and inclusion.

Those impact the larger population, not just the top performers. When everyone feels the love, they stay engaged and continue to build a better culture where more people want to stay.

Source: tinyurl.com/now516

lives after the last couple of years? A few keys to get the good news vibes going:

- **Start at the top.** Employees copy leaders' behavior. If they're positive, others will be
- **Encourage good news.** In studies, employees who were prompted to watch a positive, uplifting video were more optimistic and less anxious, and
- **Create opportunities to socialize.** Virtual or in-person, getting together boosts moods.

Source: tinyurl.com/happy519

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes, the company won when the case was thrown out of court.

The applicant's attorney claimed he was the victim of age discrimination because the manager distinctly referred to his advanced age in the interview process. "Looking for retirement job" meant she felt he was too old for the work, the attorney claimed. Then she hired a much younger, less qualified candidate.

But the company argued the candidate didn't take into consideration everything the manager wrote in the notebook – the real reasons he wasn't hired. The manager noted his poor interview performance, lack of a plan to develop the team and a general lackadaisical approach to leadership.

The court agreed: The hiring manager noted several valid reasons for not hiring the candidate. While the retirement note wasn't exactly appropriate, it wasn't discrimination.

Balance documentation

We often talk about the importance of documenting everything that's related to personnel. But this case shows balanced documentation – even when it's informal like the manager's notes – is important to do and keep.

(Based on *Reinebold v. Bruce and Norris*, Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

You have to quit confusing a madness with a mission.

– Flannery O'Connor

Persistence is critical. Being creative and persistent is even better.

– Katie Couric

Always be a first-rate version of yourself, instead of a second-rate version of somebody else.

– Judy Garland

EDITOR
MICHELE MCGOVERN
mmcgovern@pbp.com

MANAGING EDITOR:
RENEE COCCHI
rcocchi@pbp.com

PRODUCTION EDITOR:
P.J. FRONZEO

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR:
CURT BROWN

Subscriptions: 800-220-5000

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