

Communication

Bulletin TM for Managers & Supervisors

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

May 2, 2022



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9 ways to communicate and build trust and understanding

Employees need authenticity and support more than ever

How you communicate matters so much more than the words and ideas you convey.

At work, communication is critical to trust. In fact, more than 55% of employees have left jobs because they didn't have a sense of trust, according to a ResumeLab survey.

So when you communicate with employees you want to gain and build their trust. That leads to quick clarity and understanding. Here are nine principles to communicate like that.

Lead with empathy

Create a sense of togetherness when you share information, showing how it affects all of you in similar ways. You can also show

compassion by recognizing how it will affect the team or individuals in different ways.

Be transparent, accountable

Employees want to trust what their bosses say. It's important to treat workers as adults and be direct and truthful, especially when it's bad news. Be transparent, explaining what you know, how you know it and how and when you'll share more.

Commit to well-being

When you talk about difficult situations or share information that affects employees in negative ways, recognize their well-being as

Please see Communicate ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Boss said, 'Wait'; Employee said, 'Discrimination!'

"We are trying to normalize mental well-being in the workplace," said Manager Dennis Dixon, reciting almost verbatim what he recently learned in training.

"In fact, the company has made great strides to help employees with mental well-being since the onset of the pandemic," Dennis continued. "You now have access to telehealth, counseling, yoga, meditation ..."

"I'm well aware of all that," said employee June Walters. "Intimately aware, actually."

"And that's why I'm ready to come back to work," June continued. "I've tapped those resources and more. You know my physician discharged me with permission to return to work. And I feel mentally fit to be back on-site. Of

course, that's with the comfort of knowing I can take intermittent leave if any issues arise."

The problem with coming back

"And therein lies an issue," said Dennis. "I want you to be healthy and at your best, but I can't sit on pins and needles every day, wondering if you're coming in. We can't cover the work for your unpredictable mental whims."

"I think it's best you wait to come back," he said.

That didn't sit well with June. She pursued the issue with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which filed suit, claiming an Americans with Disabilities (ADA) violation.

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.

Communicate ...

(continued from Page 1)

well. Remind them of organizational support and resources – perhaps formal channels such as counseling or informal channels such as talking privately with you. They will almost always remember how you made them feel more than they'll remember how the information affected them.

Stay situationally aware

Stay aware of how the information will unfold and affect employees and team dynamics.

Be open to feedback on how to go forward as circumstances evolve.

Communicate regularly

Managers can't just drop information on employees and let it sit. You want to make sure employees don't feel ignored after you've shared critical information. The best way to maintain trust and employee engagement is to communicate relevant information often. Try "Ask Me Anything" discussions or daily email updates.

Make it a two-way talk

As much as you share information, you want to get input and insight. Use employee voices to communicate up the line of command, sharing their concerns

TECH CORNER

Step away from tech to be more productive with tech

Ever feel drowsy staring at your monitor? Or do you zone out and aimlessly scroll, forgetting what you were looking for?

Technology causes us to lose focus on what matters at work.

And the best way to regain focus and momentum is to get away from technology.

3 strategies to try and share

Here are three ways to take – and encourage – sensible tech breaks:

- Designate time away from screens.

and expectations. Even better, schedule time when employees can communicate directly with executives for productive exchanges (not gripe sessions).

Help employees share experiences

Great managers make it easier for employees to communicate effectively about their cares and concerns, too.

Invite them to create discussion groups to safely share personal dilemmas, challenges and needs. Then give them opportunities to take collective ideas to management for support or guidance.

Remember the big picture

Most communication efforts – especially in a crisis or uncharted territory – aren't one-and-done. Recognize how the information or situation will affect the bigger picture of your organization or employees' future – and speak to that.

Look ahead

Communication after the current situation – whether it's an organization crisis or a major team project – is just as critical as in-the-moment communication. Follow up to find out how employees feel about how well you communicated during the event. Get feedback on what could be done better.

Source: The Conference Board, tinyurl.com/communicate523; ResumeLab, tinyurl.com/trust523

When possible, encourage everyone to break free at the same time to walk, work on a puzzle, play a board game or read a book. Even better, if you have space, designate a room for non-tech activities.

- **Host lunch.** Make the meal a phone- and screen-free time. Encourage conversations and team-building.
- **Draw lines.** Set times when you and employees can send messages so no one feels the need to check on those outside of normal business. Also ask everyone to turn off alerts in the office so no one is distracted.

Source: Work Partners Blog, tinyurl.com/techbreak523

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ How to make your language more inclusive

Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) aren't just buzzwords today. They're a critical part of organizational culture and companies' ability to attract and maintain top talent.

And one way to improve DEI is to make sure your company's language is inclusive. Three critical areas:

- **Job postings.** Skip the edgy stuff – such as ninja or hacker – and stick to gender neutral language – such as engineer or programmer. You can find gender-neutral language alternatives to gendered terms in most Google searches.
- **Product development.** Researchers suggest creating a list of forbidden words that play into stereotypes and move through the development process. Examples: the elderly, man hours and crazy.
- **Everyday language.** Create a team to build internal guidelines on inclusive vocabulary with straightforward tools, such as the "inclusive language" feature available in Microsoft Office, which suggests neutral alternatives to biased language used in professional communications.

Source: HBR, tinyurl.com/language523

■ How to squash the 'Us v. Them' thinking

No matter where people work – on-site or remotely – there's almost always been some Us v. Them thinking. And it almost always gets in the way of morale and productivity.

That's why leaders want to squash it. Dan Rockwell, founder of Leadership Freak, suggests these strategies:

- Acknowledge Us v. Them thinking is unfair, irrational and adversarial.
- Agree on shared meaningful goals. Work for mutual benefit.
- Establish cross-functional teams. When one loses, we all lose.
- Promote people who practice "we" behaviors.

Source: tinyurl.com/UsThem523

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 Training is key to detoxify a workplace

Did you know 70% of employees tolerate toxic behavior at work? We were surprised to know that stat, too.

Like most companies, we didn't want toxic behaviors in our workplace, and we certainly didn't want employees tolerating it.

2 conversations

So we took toxicity head-on, giving employees training on how to handle it.

The initial tool was a "Feedback Conversation." We trained employees to have and accept healthy conversations where one person can objectively call out "observed

behaviors" – such as exact instances of shouting or belittling – instead of generalizations such as, "You're miserable."

If that doesn't work, the next tool is a "Confront Conversation." They bring up what's at stake. For instance, an employee might say, "I held up my part of the bargain and here's what's at stake now. If you don't change the behavior we discussed, I won't be able to work with you to meet our goal."

That's helped us resolve issues and avoid a toxic workplace.

(Ed Beltran, CEO, Fierce Inc., Laguna Beach, CA)

2 'Superdays' rebuild engagement and more

When we moved to mostly remote work, we gained a lot – time, flexibility and employee loyalty. We lost quite a bit, too – engagement, collaboration and camaraderie.

To regain some of that, we designed "Superdays" – meetings with nearly everyone on-site at a rented space.

3 values guide focus

On that day each month, we focus on three values to set the agenda:

- **Health**, which includes discussions and information on flexible office choices, commute limits, team-building and employee wellness.
- **Wealth**, which includes cross-functional meetings, sprint-like work sessions, team lunches and fun events, and
- **Growth**, which is the time spent on personal and professional development.

This has helped us build an effective, engaging ritual.

(Reuben Daniels, Founder and CEO, EA Markets, New York, shared this success in Harvard Business Review)

3 Important to lead with kindness

As a leader, I often found myself focused on productivity, results and hitting high goals.

That kind of laser focus on business made me less focused on the people – and that's not the kind of leader most employees like or want to work for.

Fortunately, I took a step back and thought about the softer side of leadership.

3 commitments

To that, I committed to:

- **more humility:** Talent, time and dedication are important, but I decided to put others before myself
- **ditch jerks fast:** I decided in life and business it was critical to cut jerks before their badness spread, and
- **more candor:** As long as we have polite, direct and transparent conversations, they'll save time and relationships.

These principles of putting kindness first have helped me be a better leader.

(Jim VandeHei, Co-founder and CEO, Axios, Arlington, VA, shared this success in the Axios blog)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Staffer requests severance: Is that a resignation?

Question: An employee who has caused some internal issues recently asked us to put together a "compelling severance package." We can treat this as a resignation, offer a package and part ways, right?

Answer: Not so fast, says employment attorney Fiona Ong, a partner at Shawe Rosenthal LLC.

A request for a severance package isn't the same as a resignation, according to a recent court ruling.

Case in point

In *Forsythe v. Wayfair Inc.*, an employee told a manager she was interested in a severance package. When the company said it accepted her resignation and offered a severance agreement, she sued, alleging she'd been involuntarily terminated. The court agreed.

Bottom line: Don't assume that a request to see a severance package is a resignation, Ong says.

Source: tinyurl.com/severance523

LIGHTER SIDE

■ Planning some vacay? Let others know with wit

Planning some time off this Spring or Summer?

Make sure you let others know you'll be Out Of Office (OOO).

Don't expect a response!

Make them laugh while you're at it with messages like these collected by TikTok user @loewhaley:

- "I will be deleting all emails upon my return. If it's urgent, email me again."
- "I will be social distancing from my emails until Dec. 4th."
- "I'm OOO and I promise you I'm not important enough for you to contact me until I'm back," and
- "Leave me alone until 11/30."

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Pandemic changes employees want to keep

Some things that uprooted employees at work and in life because of the pandemic are worth keeping.

That's what researchers at Qualtrics found. Employees liked some of the changes, and want employers to keep them. Of course, there are things they'd like to get rid of, too.

Here's what employees want to keep – and they're not too surprising:

- flexible schedules
- fully remote work, and
- hybrid work.

Here's what they're ready to let go of:

- mask requirements

- social distancing, and
- vaccine requirements.

Nix the language too

Here's the vocabulary they'd like to get rid of:

- the new normal
- quarantine
- burnout
- social distance
- the Great Resignation
- remote work, and
- virtual happy hour.

Source: *Qualtrics*, tinyurl.com/2p8un7ms

Who doesn't feel authentic at work – and how to help them

The good news: 71% of employees feel they can be authentic at work. So they're confident, engaged and generally happier.

The bad news: Minority groups are more likely to experience bias and fear being their true selves, often jeopardizing their careers.

Encourage and support

"In order to do their best work and to feel like their best selves, employees need to feel that their differences are encouraged and supported," says Angeles Valenciano, CEO of

the National Diversity Council (NDC).

To help, Valenciano suggests leaders:

- **Implement unconscious bias training.** If it's not something you can do in-house, consider a consultant to ensure all employees understand how to treat colleagues with dignity and respect.
- **Reduce stigmas**, especially those associated with mental health. Invite employees to talk about struggles, if they're comfortable, and remind them of your existing resources.

Source: *HRMorning*, tinyurl.com/authentic523

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

No, the company agreed to a settlement rather than fight the suit further in court.

The employee's EEOC attorney claimed she suffered from a psychiatric medical condition under the ADA. But she was willing to work with a reasonable accommodation – intermittent leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Instead of welcoming her back, the company made it difficult for her to come back with reasonable accommodations, violating both rules.

Before the company agreed to a settlement, its attorney argued the employee wasn't fit to come to work and intermittent leave put an undue burden on her boss, team and company.

Eventually, the company settled the suit and

was ordered to pay the employee \$125,000, sign a consent decree, implement an accommodation policy for disabled employees and provide ADA compliance training.

Use your resources

A manager almost never can decide alone if an employee is fit to work.

Instead, you want to manage accommodations, requests and any health and well-being matters with HR and other healthcare professionals the employee agrees to.

(Based on *EEOC v. TrueBlue Inc. and PeopleReady Inc.* Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

To be agreeable while disagreeing – that's an art.

– *Malcolm Forbes*

Positive anything is better than negative nothing.

– *Elbert Hubbard*

You're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.

– *A.A. Milne*

Every day may not be good, but there's something good in every day.

– *Alice Morse Earle*

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