

Communication

Bulletin *for Managers & Supervisors*™

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

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Employees want autonomy over flexibility: Here's how to give it

Researchers found they want to feel like they're calling the shots

Almost everyone says they want flexibility these days. Some even demand it.

But two researchers found what they say isn't exactly what they want.

"What it seems they really want is autonomy," say Holger Reisinger and Dane Fetterer, researchers at Jabra in their work published in *Harvard Business Review*. "Within the context of hybrid work, this means having the ability to be the primary decision-maker of where and when they do their work."

So it doesn't matter if employees say they want to come into the office two days a week, work from home on Mondays or never step inside company walls. What almost all of them are saying is they want to feel like they call the

shots on how, where and when they work.

The good news: You don't have to hand over total control. Instead, Reisinger and Fetterer suggest these strategies to make autonomy the reality:

4 levels of autonomy, flexibility

First, let's look at different degrees of autonomy and flexibility. Not all employees need the same balance to be happy and productive, so offering what's appropriate for each can add to their job satisfaction.

1. Low autonomy, low flexibility: must be in the office full time.

*Please see **Autonomy ...** on Page 2.*

Sharpen Your Judgment

Celebration turns into a lawsuit

"I'm begging you, Dan," employee Cat Nealon said, "don't have a party for my birthday."

"Don't be a killjoy," said manager Dan Butler. "This is just as much for everyone else as it is to commemorate your milestone birthday."

"We've had a tough couple of years. We need to celebrate the good stuff now."

"Maybe you do. Maybe the team does," said Cat. "But I don't like the attention. I don't like being in groups. I don't like parties. Just talking about this has me anxious."

Promises, promises

"Well then, I promise I won't plan anything," Dan said. "But I can't speak for your teammates."

They just love you. And they love a party."

And party is what they did. When lunchtime erupted into a celebration the next day, it was more than Cat could take. She clenched her fists at the group, stomped out of the break room and spent the hour in her car, trying to control a panic attack. She was so somber and agitated in the afternoon others noticed.

"This kind of behavior has us worried you aren't stable or safe," Dan said.

To that, Dan let Cat go the next day, saying she posed a threat to workplace safety.

Cat immediately sued, claiming she suffered from disability 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.

Autonomy ...

(continued from Page 1)

2. Low autonomy, medium flexibility: work at both home and office, the company choosing which days where.

3. Medium autonomy, medium flexibility: work from different locations with a minimum number of days in office weekly.

4. Medium autonomy, high flexibility: work remotely full time, choosing where to work.

5. High autonomy, high flexibility: work wherever, whenever and with full access to the company office space.

Create principles, not policies

For employees and roles that can be done with some flexibility, try creating principles rather than policies on where and when the work gets done.

The researchers give this example: “In a shift from policies to principles, ‘minimum three days in the office per week’ may become ‘there is inherent value in both the physical office and remote locations. We strongly encourage employees to consider which locations best enable them to most effectively carry out certain tasks.’”

This feels less restrictive. Just making employees feel like they have choices

is more than enough to encourage them to make the best decisions for the company, their team and themselves.

Invest in competence

The more skilled employees are at their tasks, the more autonomous they’ll be.

So invest as much time and resources as you can into helping employees master their job skills. Then empower them to do their jobs without oversight. When you train employees to be better, they will be more confident and thrive no matter where they work.

Build relations

Regardless of where and when employees work, researchers found they still accomplish more when they have a sense of belonging. Hybrid work can diminish that, especially when employees communicate less and worry about career advancement – the old out-of-sight-out-of-mind fear – more.

Researchers suggest you “focus on building a virtual-first, but not virtual-only, culture where employees have a clear line of sight to their role within the organization.”

Invest in tech

Bottom line: Employees must have the same technology capabilities any where they work.

Sources: HBR, tinyurl.com/autonomy524; Jabra, jabra.com

straight from a vendor – before you sign on for the new technology.

- **What’s the continuity plan?** If things go sideways, how will this tech keep us up and running?
- **Will we only pay for what we need?** If you don’t need all the bells and whistles, why pay for them?
- **When something goes wrong, who do we call and how quickly can we expect a response and fix?**
- **How deep is the security?** In what ways do you ensure our data won’t be damaged by things such as cyber attacks or power outages?

Source: *The Business Journals*, tinyurl.com/partner524

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

■ So busy, yet nothing gets done: Here’s the solution

Meeting and collaborating more doesn’t lead to better decisions. And it definitely doesn’t lead to faster decisions!

So why are we so busy with meet-ups in the pursuit of getting things done? One of the biggest problems is leaders and organizations don’t have a protocol for who makes decisions, McKinsey researchers found. That leads to unnecessary collaboration. Instead, you want to:

- **Decide who decides.** For instance, managers at one company talk with each employee to lay out their decision rights and accountability. The role clarity speeds up decisions.
- **Meet with meaning.** When one person isn’t responsible for a decision, spend less time in meetings sharing information. Spend more time making the decision. The group should receive and study the information ahead of time. Researchers also found meetings are often more productive when the boss **doesn’t** attend!

Source: tinyurl.com/sobusy524

■ To improve performance, connect socially more

One odd-ball characteristic of the highest performing teams: They’re socially connected.

That doesn’t mean team members are friends and picnic together on the weekends. But it does mean they form and nurture personal, as well as meaningful professional, connections. To help your team connect, researchers recommend leaders:

- **Allow time to bond over non-work topics.** Let them get distracted with talk about outside passions – sports, books, arts, etc. – to find common interests and share more.
- **Make appreciation the norm.** When leaders recognize good work and thank others for all contributions, others follow suit.
- **Encourage authenticity.** Make it easier for everyone to share positive and negative emotions and feedback.

Source: tinyurl.com/connect524

TECH CORNER

4 questions to ask before you take on new technology

If you’re about to get some new technology, get ready to ask some questions.

Whether it’s a new personal device that will support your work or a software system to handle your department’s growing demands, you’ll want to be sure it’s what you need in the long run. And you can find out if you ask the right questions now.

Ask IT or a vendor

Here are four questions you’ll want to be sure you have the answers to – perhaps from your internal IT folks or

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 What's 'not normal' about you? A great icebreaker

We wanted employees to bring their full selves to work from Day One.

And one of our mantras “Not Normal” – helps us continually do that.

Because we think of our company as unique, we invite employees – and especially new employees – to share something that's seemingly “not normal” about themselves during regular all-hands-on meetings.

Everyone can participate

This way everyone can learn about their fascinating colleagues and the unique things they've experienced.

For instance, one employee talked about falling 20-feet from a tree limb and living to tell the tale. Another employee told colleagues about his famous grandparents. A new employee revealed she'd climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro.

These stories are great icebreakers as well, helping build a greater sense of belonging for employees as they start talking even more about their unique experiences.

(Brad Goldoor, Chief Employee Experience Officer, Phenom, Philadelphia)

2 Activity builds bonds across remote work

It can be difficult for employees to bond when they work remotely. That's even more true when team members are sometimes time zones or continents apart.

Sure, they met online regularly. But those business meet-ups didn't always provide opportunities to learn about each other.

That prompted us to create other, more fun opportunities.

Let's learn, too

We asked employees to share more about themselves in our “Where in the World Are You?” program.

Employees who wanted to participate created videos depicting where they lived and what they liked to do. In videos, some employees shared cooking and holiday traditions from their area.

The looks inside people's lives helped others learn about and appreciate the unique perspectives they brought to the workplace.

(Jonny Oser, Director of Internal Communications, Facebook, Menlo Park, CA)

3 Try 'parallel play' for support, engagement

Whether we work remotely or in the office, people often didn't connect much. They might be isolated in a home office or just keep their heads down at workstations in the office.

Collaboration and socialization took a hit. I missed it. I suspected some of my colleagues missed it.

And that prompted me to try a tactic often used with toddlers – “parallel play.” It's when kids play in the same room, but not with each other. And it's not just for kids.

Get together to collaborate (or not)

I hosted “writing camps,” where several colleagues and I were all on a Zoom call together, muted and cameras off. We'd work on our own writing projects, check in for a little moral support once an hour and go back to work. It's worked the same on-site. We just get together in a room, doing our own work and collaborating when necessary.

(Deborah Grayson Riegel, Instructor, Wharton Business School and Duke Corporate Education, shared this success in the Harvard Business Review)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Could flexibility for working parents cause troubles?

Question: We offer flexible, remote work options to working parents. Some childless employees are up in arms. Are we in danger of being sued for discrimination?

Answer: As long as you create policies that are in line with a recent Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) ruling, you should be OK.

The key: Make sure remote policies don't treat employees differently based on protected characteristics.

A good example: If you give female employees with children more flexibility because you consider them the “primary caregiver,” male employees with children could file a sex discrimination claim.

Keep in mind: You might not violate discrimination laws by offering working parents more flexibility, but you can spark morale issues with childless employees.

For more details on this, see tinyurl.com/EEOCrule

LIGHTER SIDE

■ A foot in the mouth that lasts forever

It's one thing to stick your foot in your mouth at work and blush. But when you do it, and you're famous, the words seem to last forever. Some infamous words:

- “Where's the Cannes Film Festival being held?” – Christina Aguilera
- “Listen, everyone is entitled to my opinion.” – Madonna
- “Every city I go to is an opportunity to paint, whether it's Omaha or Hawaii.” – Tony Bennett
- “If your parents never had children, chances are you won't either.” – Dick Cavett
- “If it weren't for electricity we'd all be watching television by candlelight.” – George Gobel

Source: [quotabulary.com](https://www.quotabulary.com)

COMMUNICATION NEWS

The change that's worth a pay cut

Nearly all of your employees would take a pay cut if you offered this one incentive: the four-day work week.

What's more, three-quarters of those employees know they'd have to work longer hours – and they'd still prefer it over showing up for the traditional five-day-a-week grind.

The company can also reduce turnover and improve productivity with a four-day week: Employees said a shorter week is the No. 1 way to influence their decision to stay at a company, according to the Qualtrics survey.

As a front-line manager, you might not be able to make the decision to change operations from five to four days.

But you likely have some or total control over individual schedules.

Set qualification, expectations

In that case, consider working with HR and employees to determine qualifications and expectations for working a more flexible schedule.

For instance, you might include tenure, accomplishments and self-motivation as qualifications. And expectations might include equivalent or higher goals and new accountability levels.

Source: tinyurl.com/4dayweek524

The surprising task that steals more of your time than ever

Can you get that answer for me quickly? Probably not!

The average employee spends three and a half hours a day searching for information, according to a Coveo report. That's almost an extra hour over the previous year.

What's worse, about 80% say they can't find the information they need in critical moments – such as during presentations or when a colleague or customer asks for help. That even leads many to feel burned out.

What's the biggest issue? Too much

information in too many places, employees claim. It might be online, in a communication or project management app or even in an old paper file.

Purge, create guides

The best way to regain the lost search time may be to invest time in streamlining information. Schedule time quarterly to purge files and create guides on the best places to find information on specific subjects.

Source: tinyurl.com/search524

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

No. The company lost and the court awarded the employee \$450,000 for lost wages and benefits and suffering.

The employee's attorney claimed she had a disability that should've been acknowledged and respected (possibly even accommodated). Instead, and because of her anxiety disorder, the employee worked in a hostile environment and suffered an adverse employment action – the firing.

The company's attorney argued the employer didn't know about a disability, and the employee never filed a formal claim on it. What's more, the employee exhibited behavior that was potentially dangerous to others – clenched fists, stomping around. For those reasons, they let her go.

The court didn't see it that way. The employee made it clear she faced difficulties with the unnecessary situation. She was the victim of an adverse employment action.

Step back, make better decisions

No manager wants to see an employee struggle in their work or personally.

And you never want to make hasty decisions when employees say they aren't comfortable in any situation. Instead, step back and work with HR to determine the best path forward for everyone involved.

(Based on *Berling v. Gravity Diagnostics*. Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

The future happens. No matter how much we scream.

– Derek Walcott

The secret of happiness is not in doing what one likes, but in liking what one does.

– James Barrie

You know you are on the road to success if you would do your job, and not be paid for it.

– Oprah Winfrey

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