

Communication

Bulletin *for Managers & Supervisors*™

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

June 1, 2022



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Management Skills Center

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6 biggest jerks at work – and how to tactfully handle them

It's possible to work in harmony despite the differences

We don't have to tell you this, but we will at least validate it: You work with some jerks!

And you aren't alone. Because there are a variety of jerks, nearly every company and team has one (or some).

"No matter how educated you are or what your job title is, you can fall victim to a jerk at work," says Tessa West, author of *Jerks at Work: Toxic Coworkers and What to Do About Them*. "Spending time in the workplace does not necessarily translate to having better conflict management skills."

West, a social psychologist, is as much a victim to jerks as the rest of us. She once changed her work hours to avoid sharing

a bathroom with one!

So, with professional and practical authority, West defines the six jerks and gives tips on how to handle them.

Bulldozers

They're well-connected and aren't afraid to flex muscles. They take over the processes and group decisions. They also use fear and intimidation to get what they want from colleagues, bosses and direct reports.

Handle them: Practice "holding the floor" when they're involved. Get input and opinions from everyone involved early in any process. Encourage everyone to voice

Please see Jerks ... on Page 2.

Sharpen Your Judgment

Fired for being gay or being absent?

"It's not just one meeting," said Manager Jennifer Grayson. "There's more to it."

"Listen," said Braden, an employee. "Something came up. I missed a meeting that I didn't have anything to contribute to. What's the big deal?"

"It's a pattern of falling short. We've talked about this before," Jennifer said. "You missed an entire shift last week."

"Not to worry," said Braden. "It won't happen again. I have everything taken care of."

"It can't happen again," said Jennifer. "I have to let you go. You haven't been reliable."

"What you mean is I'm not as reliable as the straight guys around here," Braden said. "I'm gay, and it's like wearing the Scarlet Letter G in this

homophobic place."

"Whoa!" said Jennifer. "I make decisions based on performance, nothing else."

Not what he witnessed

"I might believe that if I didn't see you nod in agreement when one of the guys said, 'I needed to man up and act more masculine' if I wanted to keep a job or get a promotion here."

"I didn't," said Jennifer. "And you did get promoted several times."

"Only after I pretended to 'man up,'" Braden said

He sued the company for sex 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.

Jerks ...

(continued from Page 1)

their thoughts throughout a project or process.

Kisser/Kicker

The Kiss Up/Kick Downer wants to climb to the top, treating colleagues as the competition. They aim to gain the approval from higher-ups at any cost.

Handle them: Find other victims to confirm the problem is widespread. Then take evidence – incidents, dates and places – to the boss on how the behavior affects others.

Credit Stealers

These jerks act like a friend, but betray and steal credit for everything good – such as ideas, work and contributions – to better themselves. Even worse, they cover their tracks well.

Handle them: Use your voice and audience to highlight your individual contributions. You don't have to brag. Say what you've done or will do before your thunder is stolen.

Free Riders

They're experts at doing the minimum – or nothing – and getting rewarded for it. They step up for important work that requires more

oversight, less effort. Their secret to the ruse: They're well-liked and friendly, making them difficult to call out.

Handle them: Do a regular fairness check for your workflows – for your team and yourself. Make them public, and the Free Rider will be outed.

Micromanagers

This could be your boss or a manipulative colleague or employee. They're impatient and disrespect your time and space. They monitor time and behavior that's none of their business.

Handle them: If it's your boss, you'll need to confront it. Talk about aligning big picture goals with your duties. For colleagues or employees, put up physical barriers – such as Do Not Disturb signs – and electronic barriers – do not disturb on communication apps. Offer limited – or no – status updates.

Gaslighters

They're grand scale liars. They might isolate their victims and slowly build the altered reality they want believed. They might use victim's vulnerabilities to help them steal or cheat.

Handle them: Find and rely on new allies. The Gaslighter tries to socially isolate victims so they believe the altered reality. Check in with others you trust to decide what's good and true.

Source: Tessa West, tinyurl.com/tessawest525, tinyurl.com/jerks525

TECH CORNER

4 cost-effective tips to upgrade aging technology

New technology is often expensive and difficult to integrate at the speed you need.

So it might be best to upgrade the existing – albeit aging – technology everyone knows.

Be calculated

Try these tips from the Forbes Technology Council:

- **Map what you have and find the pain points.** They can often be fixed with an affordable “as a service” such as

AIaaS (Artificial Intelligence), CaaS (Cloud) or SaaS (Service).

- **See what's free.** You might avoid steep startup costs with a free online solution from Google or Microsoft apps and WolframAlpha.
- **Talk with the original manufacturer about a fast upgrade.** They would rather upgrade their product than see you replace it with a competitor's products.
- **Upgrade in steps.** Try calculated updates rather than a big reveal. It'll make it easier to analyze results and stop when you've accomplished what you hoped.

Source: tinyurl.com/upgrade525

COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

3 questions to help solve problems faster

When you and your team are stuck for an answer to a problem, it's likely time to step back and answer questions before you decide the ultimate solution.

These three questions can help you regain footing, analyze the right issue and come to the right solution, according to business leader and Cambridge Air CEO Marc Braun:

- **How clear is our target?** You want to figure out if what you initially aimed for is still on target – and if it should be.
- **Do we have the right people (or team) on it?** Sometimes, you might have people better suited to address the issue. Is it time to get a different perspective?
- **Do we meet with the right frequency?** Most people don't like more meetings, but when one issue actually causes additional problems, you likely need to meet more frequently and with an intensified purpose.

Source: tinyurl.com/problem525

In the office? Bring back the desks

Desk sharing, hot desking, hoteling or whatever you call it in the hybrid work situation seems great ... until it's not. And it's not so hot now.

Turns out, human nature is still to nest. People like their own space to put their things. So, hail to the desk. Or any kind of permanent workspace.

Researchers who looked at flexible spaces since 2006 found people don't like to find a place to dock every day. Many go in early to grab their favorite spot and leave things behind to mark their territory.

That's why researchers suggest you make collaborative spaces more inviting. Let employees work independently exactly where they want to – at a desk that's always theirs.

Source: tinyurl.com/desk525

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 ‘OperationChillax’ sets the tone for better work

Our employees were rock stars! They worked through the best and worst of times, hitting goals and keeping clients happy.

Don’t get me wrong: We paid and rewarded them well for all they did.

But it wasn’t until we heard about something really special a client did for its employees that we felt we needed to do more.

Put our spin on new idea

We can’t take claim for the idea of a company-wide week off work. But we can take claim for our spin on it. We called ours “OperationChillax.”

We shut down operations for a week, so everyone got time off without any feeling they had to check in. After all, no one else was.

Employees did fun and productive things – zipline rides, full-on family vacations, home projects, new tattoos and lots of good times with friends and cocktails.

We invited them to share photos and stories from their adventures so we could all get glimpses of the fun.

It worked so well to create goodwill and build morale, we have the second one scheduled.

(Pat Kinsel, CEO, Notarize, Boston)

2 The one hire that bridges many gaps

Despite the fact that many of our departments worked together to meet goals, most of them didn’t communicate like they were a team.

In some ways, that’s understandable. When you have one job to do in the grand scheme of things, you might see collaboration as a waste of time and effort. But what team members don’t often see is that if they collaborated and communicated well they could be more effective.

Teams more efficient

That inspired us to create a new, more-encompassing position. We hired for a role split between two critical departments. That person would work with two team leaders and collaborate with both teams.

Guess what that did? Boosted communication and collaboration between groups – and increased the likelihood they’d exceed goals. Now we have more of these cross-functional roles across the organization.

(Joel Butterly, Co-founder and CEO, InGenius Prep, shared this success on the SmartBrief Young Entrepreneur Council)

3 How I came back from the brink of burnout

I found myself in a cycle of fatigue. I was worn out, and I didn’t bring my best self to work.

How could I – and how could my team – reach goals and be happy at work if I wasn’t performing at a level that allowed it?

For myself and my team, I wanted to move on from that position of near burnout.

3 tactics worked

These three strategies helped:

1. I started to do more for others. Sometimes it was a compliment. Other times, I bought coffee or lent a helping hand.

2. I handed out more meaningful work. I gave up control of things to give employees the opportunity to grow their careers.

3. I used more inspirational-based language – positive and promotional talk for colleague and employees.

(Mary Mesaglio, Distinguished VP, Gartner CEO & Digital Group, shared this success on the webinar “Tips to Pursue & Traps to Avoid in The Great Reopening”)



YOUR LEGAL COACH

■ Do we pay for quick tasks done at home?

Question: An hourly employee does a few quick tasks while home – at her convenience and off our clock. Do we need to pay her for it?

Answer: Be very careful, advises attorney Robert Boonin, who specializes in employment law at the firm Dykema.

Know the exception

The Fair Labor Standards Act says you must pay employees for all activities necessary to get their jobs done. That can include “quick tasks.”

Just consider that there is a “de minimus” exception. That means if the intervals are small, scattered and difficult to track, you don’t need to worry about those. But if your employee is – for example, frequently responding to emails or logging in to your systems – off the clock, you need to pay her. She is technically working, Boonin says.

Source: tinyurl.com/FLSA525x

LIGHTER SIDE

■ Working in an office might be like ‘The Office’

The show “The Office” mimics the real world office.

How can we know? You’ve probably felt or heard these lines from the show.

- “Sometimes I’ll start a sentence and I don’t even know where it’s going. I just hope I find it along the way.” – Michael Scott
- “I talk a lot, so I’ve learned to tune myself out.” – Kelly Kapoor
- “I just want to lie on the beach and eat hot dogs. That’s all I’ve ever wanted.” – Kevin Malone
- “And I knew exactly what to do. But in a much more real sense, I had no idea what to do.” – Michael Scott

Source: PasteMagazine.com

COMMUNICATION NEWS

Who's rudest at work? Check the calendars

Who are the rudest people at work? It's those with calendars jam-packed with meetings.

They're less courteous and more harried than their workmates, according to research from Perceptyx.

Even worse, almost 40% of employees spend more time in meetings now even though they spend less time at work.

They're stressed!

While researchers didn't pinpoint exactly why the meeting-burdened were less polite, they suspected what many of us would: They're stressed, overwhelmed and short

3 signs a good employee will be a great manager

Nearly two out of three new managers fail in their first leadership position.

You don't want to set up good employees for failure when you promote them.

Know the skills

Fortunately, you can avoid it by looking for these three skills, which Kellogg School of Business researchers say are signs for success:

Self-awareness. They're clear on what they're good at, stink at, motivated by and susceptible to. Ask would-be managers to

on time to get tasks accomplished effectively.

What's the road back to more civility? Researchers suggested:

- **Fewer meetings.** Obviously. To cut down, only meet if it falls under these categories: brainstorming, decision making, launching. Notice, the biggest time-wasters – such as sharing information or status updates – aren't in this list and should be avoided.
- **Predictability.** Set a schedule and/or rules so meetings are only scheduled on certain days and at certain hours. Then people know when they can focus on doing their work.

Source: tinyurl.com/meanmeetings525

assess strengths, weaknesses and plans to overcome issues.

Enablers. Solo-fliers end up micro-managers who don't relinquish control of work and responsibility. Look for candidates' ability to step back, enable and support others.

Listeners. Good managers ensure employees feel heard. Ask candidates how they'd deal with an employee who refuses to get on board. Ideally, they'd try to dig deeper into the issue.

Sources: tinyurl.com/newmanagers525; and tinyurl.com/Kellogg525

Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes. The company won when a court dismissed the case.

The employee's attorney claimed he suffered discrimination because of his sexuality. First, colleagues teased him about it, suggesting he'd be better off if he acted more manly. His boss didn't do anything to address it and eventually fired him because of it.

The company's attorney argued the manager had – and used – a non-discriminatory reason for firing. He was AWOL and unreliable. His sexuality had nothing to do with the firing. What's more, he'd been promoted in the past – the exact opposite of an adverse employment action. They found him to be a valuable employee until he stopped showing up.

The court agreed, noting the comments made about the employee were inappropriate. But they weren't proof of discrimination.

Not something to talk about

Despite the win, the court noted disappointment in the inappropriate comments. Under different circumstances, they could be evidence of sex discrimination.

Remind all employees that comments about an employee's sexuality or gender are **never** appropriate.

(Based on *Boshaw v. Midland Brewing Company*. Dramatized for effect.)

Quotes

It's not what you say out of your mouth that determines your life, it's what you whisper to yourself that has the most power.

– Robert Kiyosaki

Failure is the condiment that gives success its flavor.

– Truman Capote

We must be willing to let go of the life we planned so as to have the life that is waiting for us.

– Joseph Campbell

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Communication Bulletin for Managers & Supervisors (ISSN 1523-4290), issue date June 1, 2022, Vol. 24 No. 525, is published semi-monthly, (24 times a year) by Progressive Business Publications, 384 Technology Drive, Malvern, PA 19355; PHONE: 800-220-5000. FAX: 610-647-8089. Periodicals Postage Paid at West Chester, PA 19380. Postmaster: Send address changes to Communication Bulletin for Managers & Supervisors, 384 Technology Drive, Malvern, PA 19355.