

# Communication

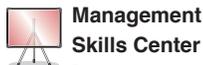
## Bulletin <sup>TM</sup> for Managers & Supervisors

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

June 13, 2022



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## 11 elements to productive, effective (even brief) meetings

*You don't need everyone in one place to get things done*

Remote, hybrid or in-person meetings are still a staple for productive teams – regardless of the groans that sometimes come when another is added to the calendar.

And many meetings still continue to have a hybrid element. Perhaps one person is working elsewhere for a day. Or maybe you want to talk to a customer or vendor who can't make it to your office. Or you need to meet in a hurry and everyone is scattered.

That's the new meeting reality – and managers and their teams need meetings to be just as effective as they would be if everyone was sitting in one room.

These tips from Wellable can help. The key is to plan your meetings in three stages: before,

during and after. You can even have some element of planning for “emergency” get-togethers. Here's what to do:

### Before you meet

- **Send an agenda.** You've seen this piece of advice here before – and it won't likely ever get old. If you don't have a goal and plan to achieve it, your team won't likely get anything worthwhile done. One goal and two or three agenda steps are enough to keep any team on track.
- **Assign a moderator.** This person's job is to ensure everyone gets equal opportunities to participate. Remote attendees often

*Please see Meetings ... on Page 2.*

### Sharpen Your Judgment

## Storied past or discrimination reason for firing?

“You seem to have a sordid past that never appeared on your résumé,” said Manager Leslie Spire. “Can you explain any of this that's just come to our attention?”

“It's more like trouble finds me,” said Dave Jenkins. “I won't make excuses for the things that happened when I was a teenager. Not at this age.”

“I wouldn't ask you to,” said Leslie, pushing a newspaper clipping across the desk to him, “if it weren't for the fact that they were violent. And your most recent run-ins with the law show a pattern of violence and political protesting.”

“I have no history of anything like that in the workplace,” Dave said.

“That's true,” Leslie said. “But all of this forced

your profession's governing body to take away your license. You never told us.”

“Why would I?” Dave said. “I got it updated when I moved here.”

### Too much cover-up

“You've covered up too many things that would be immediate disqualifications from your role here,” Leslie said. “I have to let you go.”

“Seems to me you're just covering up your distaste for a guy my age and the free speech I'm entitled to at the protests,” Dave said.

So he sued, claiming age discrimination and a violation of free speech. 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.

## Meetings ...

(continued from Page 1)

can't hear, be heard and participate because of group dynamics on site and technology lapses. The moderator can alleviate that.

- **Keep notes.** In addition to your moderator, assign someone – or take it on yourself – to keep you aligned with the agenda and movement toward the goal. He or she should also maintain notes on what is accomplished and the next steps.
- **Amp up the mics.** This is a step done well in advance of meeting. Give every team member the same reliable technology to attend.
- **Establish your norms.** This might change from team to team or meeting-type to meeting-type. Set rules for how you handle who speaks and when, how you'll make final decisions and how you'll record what's happened and will happen.

### When you meet

- **Break the ice.** Even in emergency meetings, do something quickly to make everyone more comfortable. For instance, play a funny, appropriate video. Ask remote participants to show their pets. Or just ask what everyone had

for breakfast.

- **Require cameras.** Researchers prove time and again that meetings are more effective when everyone is on camera. It helps eliminate miscommunication and improve collaboration.
- **Encourage raised hands,** especially when some employees are remote. You want people to raise hands to speak so no one is boxed out of having their voice heard.
- **Use mute wisely.** Remind participants to mute their mics when they aren't speaking, and un-mute when they *want to* speak. It's polite and another hint when remote attendees want to contribute.

### After you meet

- **Ask for unvoiced contributions.** Despite your best efforts to get everyone to participate, some people won't or can't speak up as much as they hoped. So ask for employees to send thoughts they didn't have a chance to express during the meeting
- **Get feedback.** Send surveys to find out what works well and what doesn't in your meetings. And ask participants to let you know what to try next to make meetings even better, briefer and more effective at getting goals accomplished.

*Source: Wellable, [tinyurl.com/meetings526](http://tinyurl.com/meetings526)*

## TECH CORNER

### 3 ways to get new technology without a complete overhaul

You'd love to have the newest, shiniest technology to solve all your business and communication problems.

But who wants the cost, hassle and frustrations of bringing in new tech?

Pretty much, no one.

#### Focus on this

So focus on getting the most – or more – out of what you have.

The Forbes Technology Council experts offer these tips:

- **Add more RAM and a solid-state hard drive** to an old PC or laptop.

These affordable additions usually make older, slow computers run as though they're brand new.

- **Downgrade to upgrade.** Go through your tech tools and disable and delete obsolete programs or software. They often hold back your budget and ability to upgrade.
- **Focus on no- and low-code tech.** Invest more in technology that doesn't require special maintenance and customization. You can find tools that integrate with legacy technology and then create, update and manage in-house.

*Source: [tinyurl.com/upgrade525](http://tinyurl.com/upgrade525)*

## COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

### ■ 5 kinds of words that lessen your credibility

Some words strip your credibility as soon as they cross your lips.

"Fairly or not, people judge you for how you speak just as much as they do for what you say," says John Bowe, a speech trainer and author. "The key to respect and credibility is to be direct, succinct and informative."

So avoid these words and phrases:

- **Asides.** Avoid anecdotes when they don't add to your point. Example: "So, I first got this idea from a guy on a flight to Austin two years ago."
- **Business jargon.** Everyone knows what they mean – which is nothing! Avoid "circle back," "bandwidth," "synergy" and every overused word.
- **Hedging words.** Avoid "kind of," "sort of" and "I guess." State your point as it is.
- **Facts already written.** If others can read it (in email, on a slide, etc.) don't say things such as, "As you can see here ..." or "This slide shows ..." or "Here on slide 12 is ..."
- **Fillers.** Avoid "Ahhh," "Um," "You know" and other noises to fill space.

*Source: [tinyurl.com/avoidwords526](http://tinyurl.com/avoidwords526)*

### ■ Empathy is NOT your best leadership tool: Here's why

We've preached it on these pages, and you've likely heard it elsewhere: Show more empathy with employees and colleagues.

Problem is, you probably can't. Or won't. Kellogg School of Business researchers found people who've had a tough experience are actually *less* likely to show compassion for someone else in the same situation.

After overcoming a hardship, we often take on a "suck it up" attitude. And that's not always the best approach at work when employees bring concerns, and even personal struggles, to you.

So if co-workers are struggling with something you overcame in the past, be extra careful about how you respond, researchers suggest.

*Source: [tinyurl.com/empathy526](http://tinyurl.com/empathy526)*

## 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 'Take your parents FROM work day' a huge hit

We wanted to make our employees' well-being a high priority. If we could help them be all-around well, we knew they'd be more engaged employees.

You might have already read about our "OperationChillax" – a plan to shut down operations for a week so everyone got time off without feeling they had to check in. (See previous issue of COM.)

It worked so well, we expanded it.

#### Help with adjusting

This next element was called "Take your parents FROM work day." The idea was to give employees with

children a chance to step away from their daily workplace grind and spend it with their loved ones.

Of course, it was similar to the traditional "Take your kid to work" day, but this was meant to be more fun!

We hoped it would help employees and their families adjust to being back in the office after they were used to being around each other so much.

We encouraged employees to share the fun things they did – and the light-hearted talk boosted morale and engagement on-site, too.

(Pat Kinsel, CEO, Notarize, Boston)

### 2 Weekly 'passion' chats improve morale

We found out that employees who have more flexibility to pursue their passions outside of work are more productive, engaged and loyal at work. (See Page 4 for more details.)

You didn't have to tell us twice that it's a good idea to encourage employees to pursue passions, so long as the work gets done!

To bolster that, we thought it was important to further encourage personal passions at work.

#### Bring best self to work

So we created space for employees to share their passions with one another. We held weekly meetings for team members to share what they are passionate about outside of work. They could explain what it was and the latest they were doing to pursue it. That encouraged everyone to make time for what they loved. And they brought their best selves back to work from there.

(Jon Jachimowicz, Assistant Professor of Business Administration in the Organizational Behavior Unit at Harvard Business School, shared this success in the Harvard Business Review)

### 3 Changes made remote onboarding welcoming

Like most companies we were forced to hire, onboard and train new employees entirely remotely.

When there's no actual personal interaction, all of that could have felt cold and unwelcoming.

We wanted to make sure new hires felt the warm culture we had, even when they wouldn't be on-site with colleagues for some time.

#### Slow down the process

First, we made some changes to our email templates, modifying each touch point with warmer language and personal anecdotes.

We sent a file to candidates and new hires before each meeting throughout the process with a background on who they'd talk with and how the conversation would go. It was almost like a meet and greet, walking down an office hallway.

We also slowed down the whole process so we could spend more time with new hires at each step, making them feel welcomed.

(Annie Lin, VP of People, Lever, San Francisco)



#### YOUR LEGAL COACH

#### ■ Is 'work from home' same as FMLA request?

**Question:** An employee told us he needed to work from home because he had to care for his wife. When his performance went downhill, we fired him. He claims it's an Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) violation. Is it?

**Answer:** I'll answer with a question, says employment law attorney Fiona Ong with Shawe Rosenthal LLP: Did he formally request FMLA leave?

It doesn't sound like he did, so he's likely not protected. That's based on a case where the court ruled against an employee who made the same claim.

An employee must request or say he intends to take leave to make a proper FMLA request – and be protected. Just saying he intended to work while out of the office doesn't convey he can't work or is taking time off.

One caution, Ong says: There is "considerable leeway" in how leave can be requested. So have conversations about intention going forward.

**Source:** [tinyurl.com/FMLA526](https://tinyurl.com/FMLA526)

#### LIGHTER SIDE

#### ■ Congrats and other praise gone bad

Congratulations! That's music to most employees' ears when they get a promotion. But there are so many other great (er, funny) things you can say.

These have been uttered in offices:

- Congratulations on getting promoted to the job you are already doing. Now get back to work!
- You are great! Way to go on your 1% raise.
- Don't bother me at work unless cake is involved, but enjoy your success!
- I heard you earned a new fancy job title. You are a big fish now!
- Fantastic news! Let's celebrate your success in a manner that's likely to get us all fired!

**Source:** [tinyurl.com/congrats526](https://tinyurl.com/congrats526)

COMMUNICATION NEWS

# Beware: New work harassment tool is emoji

Employees communicate more than ever through the written word.

And many times those email, text and app chats are laden with what-seems-to-be harmless emojis.

But they aren't so harmless. In workplaces, they've heightened the risk of harassment via emojis, as seen in several recent court cases.

For instance, emojis can often have deeper meanings (eggplants and peaches rarely indicate food). And one person's winking emoji to emphasize a joke is another's suggestive wink.

While emojis can add some humor and

compassion to workplace communication, they can be dangerous.

### Address it in your policies

It's something you'll want to address in your communication policies.

After all, digital communication already runs the risk of misunderstanding because tone can't come through texts and emails. So you might add a section in your handbook to address emojis and professionalism. Let employees know using emojis runs the risk of misinterpretation, which could lead to harassment claims.

Source: [tinyurl.com/emojis526](http://tinyurl.com/emojis526)

## Give employees the space, time to pursue passions

If you want to attract new talent – and keep your great people – try this under-utilized perk: Give employees time and space to pursue their passions.

Harvard Business School researchers found employees who see their jobs as conduits to pursue outside passions are more productive and have better well-being over the long term.

### 3 tips to become conduits

Here's how they suggest companies can become the conduits to passions:

- **Give employees power to define their work hours.** Then set clear goals and expectations so they continue to produce when they're not pursuing passions.
- **Pursue your own – and talk about it.** Lead by example, and employees will more likely reap the benefits of pursuing passions.
- **Encourage sharing.** Spend time at work asking and talking about people's passions so they know their pursuit of them is important. You'll likely hear cool stories, too.

Source: [tinyurl.com/passions426](http://tinyurl.com/passions426)

## Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes, the company won when the court dismissed the case.

The employee's attorney claimed he was the victim of bias because he was fired in advanced years and not long after his boss found out he spoke publicly on a politically controversial issue.

He suffered an adverse employment action because he was old and opinionated – which are covered under discrimination laws.

The company's attorney argued the employee was let go for clear, credible reasons. He had lost a license he was required to have for his position.

And he had a history of violence and convictions, which he hid because he knew the company wouldn't have hired him if they'd known.

The court agreed with the company's facts: He was terminated because of his lies, behaviors and criminal convictions.

### Check the truth

This was a surreal case for the employer.

And it's a cautionary tale on the importance of checking backgrounds and maintaining records and updates on any credentials employees must have to perform their jobs.

(Based on *Wilson v. Maricopa County Community College Dist. Governing Board*. Dramatized for effect.)

### Quotes

Success is getting what you want. Happiness is wanting what you get.

– Dale Carnegie

Everyone has to figure out their own line in the sand.

– David Henry Hwang

The world is divided between those who think they're right.

– Tara Brach

We don't laugh because we're happy – we're happy because we laugh.

– William James

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