

# Communication

## Bulletin *for Managers & Supervisors*™

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

July 13, 2022

## Office politics: 5 ways to use it as a force for good

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*Politics is about relationships – and making them stronger*

Say, “office politics” and you usually imagine backstabbing, undermining and catty gossip.

But politics are about relationships – and if you choose, they can be nurtured in a positive way.

Granted, you can avoid office politics all together. Work in a bubble. Skip small talk. Focus solely on your tasks and outcomes.

But the reality is, you will have a bigger impact on the organization, people and operations when you're supported and you support others. It's especially important when you're in a leadership or influential position.

With healthy office politics, you work toward being known, liked, trusted and

respected. That's built on personal, positive experiences – not by going to the dark side of office politics, where others often cut down colleagues to lift themselves up.

To make office politics a force for the good of your reputation, career and overall operations, researchers suggest:

### Widen your net

Good politics is about having as many positive relationships at work as possible. When you cast a wide net for professional and personal friends, you can build a network worth envy.

Get involved in projects and initiatives

*Please see Office politics ... on Page 2.*

### Sharpen Your Judgment

## Does poor review tell all, or is there hidden bias?

“This is ridiculous!” Employee Hazel Matthews practically screamed as she burst into her manager's office. “You gave me low scores on ‘respect’ and ‘professionalism!’”

“And this would be a perfect example of why I did that,” said Manager Dale Hinkins. “Now, please lower your voice, have a seat and let's talk about the final version of your review.”

“I have three documented incidents of you screaming at co-workers. Colleagues say you're unapproachable,” Dale continued. “And when you get upset, your attitude becomes shockingly disruptive – like now.”

“If people here weren't so rude to me, I wouldn't have to act in kind,” Hazel said. “Do I need to remind you about Janet leaving that

dangerous mess for me to clean up?”

“No, I have the incident report,” Dale said. “It was addressed and is water under the bridge.”

### Majority gets a raise?

“Seems to me, I get a bad rap here, and this poor review means I don't get a raise,” Hazel said. “That's convenient for you and your budget. I bet everyone who *isn't* a minority like me got a raise.”

“That's just untrue,” Dale said.

But Hazel felt it was true, and she sued the company, claiming race bias.

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.*

## Office politics ...

(continued from Page 1)

beyond your team, department and normal inner circle of workplace friends.

Volunteer to take charge of both formal and social plans.

### Make lasting impressions

Like it or not, politics is still a popularity contest. People connect with and generally like others who are pleasant, professional and thoughtful.

You'll want to extend that kind of behavior beyond first impressions with new colleagues, employees and customers.

If you want to continue to network and get ahead, do things faster and better than others would when asked. Highlight your reliability, responsiveness and willingness to help.

### Be central

A leader who uses office politics in a positive way knows when to agree and respectfully disagree.

You can't go along with everything and actually build credibility. In that case, you'd be seen as a weather vane,

going along with whatever way the wind blows. But you can't oppose everything either. Then you're just a stick in the mud.

Instead, state your position clearly, noting the pros and cons to taking your course. When it wins, give credit to team members who supported the work. When the group goes another way, accept that other ideas work well, too, and get on board with decisions you don't agree with.

### Help others

You can gain friendships, credibility and professional favors when you step in and help others without expecting anything in return.

Leaders who are generous by nature build networks of influence and appreciation.

Bottom line: People will remember when you helped them in times of need, and they'll step in or up when your time comes.

### Take risks

Be conscientious of how your actions and words affect others. Playing positive office politics should never harm those you work with.

But accept smart risks – those that give you room to fail, learn and get ahead then or the next time.

Source: [tinyurl.com/officepolitics528](http://tinyurl.com/officepolitics528)

## TECH CORNER

### 3 tech etiquette rules worth updating and sharing

Tech etiquette changes rapidly. What was once taboo is mainstream now. (Anyone remember emojis in email 10 years ago? Of course not!)

As new grads enter the workforce, here are tech etiquette tips for them – and reminders for everyone who's using email, Zoom, Slack, chat and beyond.

#### Be aware of limits

The tech experts at *The Wall Street Journal* suggest:

- **Know preferences.** Ask those you work with most – even if it's for

a limited time on a project – their preferred communication mode. That way, you can respond and get responses in the quickest way.

- **Know video.** Download the video app your company uses most (Zoom, Teams, etc.) on all the devices you might use to meet. And when in video meetings, mute yourself when you aren't talking.
- **Be cautious with what you write.** Never write something you wouldn't say to or want to be seen by your boss. Most communication on company apps can be seen and retained by the administrator.

Source: [tinyurl.com/techrules528](http://tinyurl.com/techrules528)

## COMMUNICATION BRIEFS

### ■ Quick way to boost mental health: Say, 'No' more often

Why is employee mental health a bigger issue now than it ever was? Sure, the pandemic and the level of unprecedented turmoil it caused can be to blame. But there's another issue: Many people – and especially leaders – don't say, "No" often enough.

Saying yes to more responsibility, decision-making, tasking, etc., makes us overwhelmed and burned out.

Instead, train yourself to say, "No."

- **Don't rush.** People who request your time or talent usually don't expect responses as quickly as you think. Ask for more details and take time to consider the commitment.
- **Be thankful.** When you decline, say, "Thank you for considering me. I'd love to, but ..." Be honest about why.
- **Soften the blow.** If you're concerned about maintaining a good relationship, offer to do something less demanding, more doable.
- **Stay firm.** Lose guilt. Hold your "No."

Source: Wall Street Journal, [tinyurl.com/sayno528](http://tinyurl.com/sayno528)

### ■ How to manage understaffed teams

Here are three strategies to manage an understaffed team. They're from Smeal College of Business at Pennsylvania State University experts:

- **Rethink projects.** Does everyone on the team need to be involved in every project? Probably not. Put people on the work they do best so they can focus more time on fewer things – and do them really well.
- **Look at who you support.** Whether your team works directly with customers or helps other departments, consider prioritizing them and the time you give each. You might even ask some, "Can we reduce the number of contacts or length of time we meet?"
- **Find quick interventions.** Find automated solutions for the most tedious, time-consuming tasks.

Source: HBR, [tinyurl.com/manage528](http://tinyurl.com/manage528)

## 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 Do your DEI initiatives really work?

Like a lot of companies these days, we wanted to implement Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives that made an impact on our organization and employees.

But like most initiatives, some are a hit and some are a miss.

We wanted to avoid the misses and make more hits.

#### Follow PDCA

This change model helped – and not just for DEI initiatives. We can use it for projects big and small. It's the PDCA approach:

**Plan.** Literally, plan what needs to be done, identifying the problem, resources available, solution and vision for success.

**Do.** Here, we do what we planned.

**Check.** This is the most important part. We analyze what's been done to be sure we're on track. We adjust as needed.

**Act.** If we achieved the goal, with or without adjustments, then we can put the plan that worked into full action going forward.

*(Monica Jackson, VP of Global Inclusion & Diversity, Eaton, Cleveland, spoke at Workhuman Live 2022)*

### 2 How we engage generations at work

We had several generations at work in our company. The newest generation was growing and the seasoned generation was shrinking. They all had great insight and skill to bring to the table.

Our hope was to engage the generations and create a better culture. Our plan worked.

#### Learn, share, collaborate

We believed the push to get generations to collaborate and learn from each other had to come from the top. So our leadership modeled it, asking newer employees for input in areas they didn't understand as well.

We also asked team leaders to promote more collaboration, soliciting input from every generation on their team when making decisions. They also emphasized that they wanted to hear ideas from the front-line and the newest generation in the workplace to move up the chain of command. And they encouraged older generations to share institutional knowledge.

*(Martha Bird, Chief Business Anthropologist, ADP, Roseland, NJ)*

### 3 A-player moving on? That's fine by me

Most leaders dread these words from one of their A-players: "I'm moving on." But I've found reason to appreciate their career change – and have used it for both of our good.

First, I do whatever I can to maximize their satisfaction, growth, and productivity with our company.

Specifically, I research the salaries for their roles in my industry, and try to set theirs higher. I believe it's a reflection of the results I expect and acknowledgment of their career achievements.

#### Education, too

Secondly, I cover the cost of degree programs and offer short-term learning modules, seminars, and certifications to keep everyone sharp.

If that doesn't keep them totally satisfied, I celebrate their decisions to leave because I recognize they're doing what's best for them. Then I maintain strong professional bonds with them

*(David Lenihan, President, Ponce Health Sciences University, CEO, Tiber Health, shared this success in Fast Company)*



#### YOUR LEGAL COACH

#### ■ Hit with a lawsuit: What's the first thing we do?

**Question:** I just got word that a former employee is suing our company and me, her former boss. What should we do now?

**Answer:** Daniel Schwartz, an attorney at Shipman & Goodwin LLP, suggests you:

- **Contact** an employment law attorney if you don't have in-house counsel.
- **Check your insurance.** Do you have Employment Practices Liability Insurance, which offers some protection from discrimination claims (with a variety of exclusions)?
- **Preserve documents.** Courts will likely want to see relevant documents. Ask IT to suspend automatic deletes so nothing gets trashed.
- **Minimize e-mail, chat and text.** Unless it's with an attorney, written words may be used in court. For instance, a CFO text like this can come back to haunt you: "I was worried we'd get sued. The manager seldom follows procedures."

**Source:** [tinyurl.com/sued528](https://tinyurl.com/sued528)

#### LIGHTER SIDE

#### ■ The truth hurts (your funny bone, that is)

It's said that the truth hurts.

These "truths" are only meant to hurt your funny bone!

- Death is the No. 1 killer in the world.
- Good health is merely the slowest possible rate at which one can die.
- Give a person a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a person to use the Internet, and he won't bother you for weeks, months, maybe years.
- All of us could take a lesson from the weather: It pays no attention to criticism.
- Health nuts are going to feel stupid someday, laying in a hospital, dying of nothing.
- Don't worry about old age. It doesn't last long.

## COMMUNICATION NEWS

## The danger of flexible work: Low motivation

Flexible work is great for employees who are highly self-motivated.

For the rest of us, it's not ideal.

London School of Economics researchers found that when people work at non-standard times, they have significantly less intrinsic motivation – and that makes work less enjoyable.

### 2 tips

So employees who work at night, when the kids don't need oversight, or those who take side hustles or those who cram it all into the weekend aren't having great experiences – even though they likely requested flexibility.

### Oh \$#!% – Here's why cursing is on the rise at work

The F-bombs are dropping as the angst rises – and that's at work on Tuesday morning, not the bar on Saturday night.

Researchers analyzed transcripts from conference calls between executives and investors, and the number of expletives is at a five-year high.

The problem: People let their guard down in the past two years of working remotely. They dress casually and talk a little less conservatively in business settings than they did before the pandemic.

Fortunately, researchers identified some self intervention strategies so employees on flexible schedules can stay motivated.

- **Reframe your time.** Focus on the benefits of working a non-standard schedule. For instance, when you plan weekend work, remind yourself of something fun or productive you'll do during the week.
- **Set limits.** When working outside company or department norms, set a timer so you step away after the same number of hours you'd work in a traditional setting. Then physically remove yourself from work and its demoralizing effects on life.

Source: [tinyurl.com/motivate528](https://tinyurl.com/motivate528)

Is it OK? Probably not, say business coaches and career experts.

### Keep it out of writing and in audiences

Cursing – especially in writing – can turn off bosses and customers.

Avoid it in email, text and chat, and when you're talking to a large audience. Those are the times when an errant \$#!% can spread quickly and out of context.

Source: [tinyurl.com/cursing528](https://tinyurl.com/cursing528)

## Sharpen Your Judgment – The Decision

(continued from Page 1)

Yes, the company won when an appeals court agreed with a lower court's ruling in its favor.

The employee's attorney claimed she was the victim of race discrimination because she received undeserved low performance scores that disqualified her from getting a raise. Other employees, who weren't minorities, were rude and didn't work well together got good reviews and raises.

The company's attorney argued the employee received fair – albeit, poor – reviews. The low scores on professionalism and communication reflected her poor work in those areas, and they were backed by incidents that were documented.

The court agreed she was a member of a

protected class, worked toward legitimate job expectations and was subject to an adverse job action. But, she didn't prove the fourth element of a race bias case: She didn't prove there was another worker who was similarly rude and aggressive, but was treated more fairly than her.

### Document and update

This case is a reminder on the importance of documenting performance issues – even the softer, more subtle kinds like collegiality – and being sure employees know where they stand.

(Based on *Abebe v. Health and Hospital Corp. of Marion County*. Dramatized for effect.)

### Quotes

Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change.

– Stephen Hawking

If something is wrong, fix it now. But train yourself not to worry; worry fixes nothing.

– Ernest Hemingway

Follow your passion, stay true to yourself, never follow someone else's path unless you're in the woods and you're lost and you see a path; then by all means you should follow that.

– Ellen DeGeneres

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