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THE BOOK OF

EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATIONS

STRATEGIES & TACTICS

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Vol. 6

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Foreword

Dear reader,

Every aspect of public relations has had to evolve to keep up with a changing world, and employee communications is no exception. The way employees use social media affects brand reputation; the speed of information dissemination makes it more important than ever to communicate quickly to stem the tide of rumor; a new generation entering the workforce has values and motivations different from the generations preceding it. As organizations look to serve some of their most important stakeholders—those inside the organization—they must continually seek to emulate the example of PR experts who keep their practices up to date.

Those experts, whose advice we have compiled in this book, will tell you that internally focused PR can make a big difference in motivating employees. David Alexander, CCO at **Rotary International**, for example, shares how you can "deepen employee connection to your cause… through programming that links their participation to the achievement of organization goals." But as Bradford Walton, director of communication at **The Home Depot**, points out, "True associate engagement is a journey, it doesn't happen overnight."

Yes, it's a journey with several paths beyond direct motivation. It requires that you work with leadership during crises to demonstrate to employees that steady hands are at the helm. It requires working effectively with HR, marketing and other departments. It requires demonstrating to the leaders of tomorrow, the younger employees in your force, that you share their values and appreciate their voices. And if you can truly succeed, you'll go beyond mere job satisfaction, creating a legion of advocates for your organization and its mission.

In this sixth volume of **PR News'** Book of Employee Communications Strategies & Tactics, our authors, drawing on diverse backgrounds in brand, agency, nonprofit and academic PR practice, bring you practical advice for setting internal social media guidelines, structuring your team within the larger organization, nurturing talent and much more.

I want to thank our contributors for their thoughtful words wrung from dedicated practice; I trust that you, reader, will feel thankful for them as well.

Sincerely,

Ian Wright
Managing Editor, PR News

PRNews

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PR's Role in Employee Communications

How PR Generates Brand Advocates by Collaborating With Internal Communications

By Keerti Baker

Times have changed for public relations. Formerly categorized as purely an external communication tool, the power of PR has become recognized as a valuable asset to any organization's internal communications strategy. Legacy views of PR are too narrow for where organizations and communications have evolved to today. PR should no longer be equated to press releases and external media. PR has grown to support and, at times, lead on internal communications, a function that used to rest predominantly under the remit of human resources departments.

With organizational structures and internal teams becoming more complex, the need for clearer, timely and proactive internal communication has risen. Employees not only need to be kept informed, but also need to be positively engaged with. 21st-century living and its hectic pace have also seen an increase in the trend of home or remote working. This increases the need for employees in satellite offices and employees who work remotely to feel that they are part of the wider team and not isolated.

Tasks that sit within the HR function of an organization can be more effectively accomplished by collaborating with the proven tactics and methods of PR. Although there is a line between PR and HR functions, it is getting blurrier with time, with several aspects of internal communications crossing over to benefit from what PR can offer.

Given the discipline's distinct characteristics and various practical applications over the years, it is not a surprise that PR has evolved to play a vital role in internal communications. Here are some of the reasons why PR works so well to complement internal communications:

1. **Strategy**: PR's strategic approach to communication means that internal messages are drafted to reflect the organization's business objectives as well as objectives set by HR personnel. For instance, if the organization's goal is to increase market share in a particular product category, employees are informed of any progress or otherwise. Similarly, if the HR department has been tasked to reach particular employee demographics or roll out messages about any internal employee schemes, a strategic process is essential to ensure there is a plan of what messages need to be communicated to which audiences and when. In many instances, internal communication can solely become a task that is responsive to an internal occurrence. While necessary, this type of reactive communication should not be the driving reason behind internal communications. Having a proactive approach similar to that which is used by PR will ensure that both reactive and proactive messages are communicated in a timely manner to meet strategic objectives.

Who Owns Internal Communications?

As the lines between PR and HR continue to blur, the evergreen question most communications professionals are faced with is: "Where does the responsibility for internal communications sit?"

Although internal employee relationship management is an HR function, the specialty of communicating falls to PR professionals. They have a constant task of communicating an organization's news to external audiences and have devised strategies, techniques and methods to look after multiple projects and an ever-expanding workload that now includes digital platforms. Specifically, PR has established itself as a discipline that engages with diverse audiences to deliver complex messages in a simplified manner. For internal communications to be used to its best potential, HR and PR must work in partnership to deliver composed messages in a strategic way and ensure they are synergized across the organization, its teams and appropriate communication channels.

PR's role in engaging, motivating and structuring internal communication plans is only complementary to the overall communication objectives that are set in conjunction with HR's goals. These goals should wholly align with the organization's overall goals for internal communication, whether it is streamlining messages, eliminating internal silos or creating a strong employee culture.

HR may continue as the logical custodians of employee relations, but a central communication department with PR principles and/or PR professionals at its core will serve to enhance internal communications. While internal communications always will be a democratic discipline in its own right—one that is owned in varying degrees by all employees—the true guardians and leaders of internal communications are CEOs and senior managers. If the fundamental value of PR's role in internal communication is cascaded from the top down, the task of collaborating and engaging becomes easier.

2. **Content**: Content really is king and there isn't another discipline that comes close to generating as interesting, motivating and engaging content as PR does. With a core function of spotting angles and stories and generating positive goodwill, PR always will reign supreme when it comes to content generation. For internal communicators, content droughts hamper the most earnest of efforts and campaigns, but this characteristic of PR not only plugs the gap, but also urges new ideas by employees, which in turn enables smarter content planning.
3. **Timing**: Employees need to be communicated with in a timely manner. There is nothing worse than finding out a crucial piece of internal news in the office canteen or near the water cooler. It leads to unwanted segregation amongst teams, a lack of team spirit and a disjointed workforce. PR's characteristic of meeting press and copy deadlines enables internal communications to follow a clear process to communicate messages. Internal communications should consider internal approval processes and what cascade levels are in place to reach all employees. Furthermore, all relevant communication channels should be used to keep messages consistent to reach different generations of employees. PR's timing and methodical approach can significantly aid with this.
4. **Tone**: Different communication channels, such as internal newsletters or memos, the intranet, posters, internal

announcements and emails, should have a consistent tone that reflects the organization and its brand. Consistent tone and the proverbial "house style" can often be overlooked in IC. It is very underrated compared to the importance of meeting deadlines and broadcasting internal messages. PR pros, whether in agency or in-house roles, are well versed in juggling multiple projects and clients with their own tones and house styles. The PR function can define the tone of IC messages whether they are informal, corporate, laid back, passionate or impassive, and ensures they are consistently delivered in a professional manner.

5. **Quality**: In many instances, IC can focus on the quantity of messages and their frequency, as internal communicators are tasked with regular employee engagement. PR can balance this requirement by ensuring that the quality of messages is enhanced with interesting, relatable and topical messages. While specific and frequent messages have to be part of the overall internal communication plan, creative and interesting internal stories with news about employees captures the attention of different ages and levels of employees. PR can lend personality, culture and voice to the internal communications of an organization.
6. **Mediums**: IC needs to consider what channels employees use to access information. Is it permission-based or is it mandatory, i.e. can employees opt in to receive information, or are there certain announcements or messages that need to reach them? Using PR planning methods can ensure IC messages reach all intended audiences via all relevant mediums, such as: newsletters, the company intranet, emails, posters, personnel briefings, text messages and internal social networks like **Yammer**. PR's ethos and experience in dealing with multiple audiences and media perfectly equips it to ensure messages are consistent across applicable channels to reach all internal audiences.
7. **Embargoes**: At times, internal news and announcements precede the release of external news. PR's strict embargo procedures lend valuable experience to IC. This avoids any awkward or embarrassing situations where employees share anything confidential with external media or clients. Access to social media and networks also can prove challenging when looking to maintain control over what employees can share externally. PR's method of defining clear procedures and a chain of internal command can clarify any ambiguity in this matter so employees know whom to direct any sensitive inquiries to.

The very nature of PR and PR professionals facilitates easy two-way communication and relationship building to encourage dialogue between employees and management.

Theory vs. Practice

Theory and practice can be two very different truths. This is especially so when it comes to the evolution of PR as a strategic business partner to internal communications and HR. Theoretically, HR and PR operate as separate functions in many organizations, but in reality, their outputs are integrated and converge on almost a daily basis. The line between HR and PR is becoming an increasingly blurry one.

PR can help meet internal communication objectives, making the influential co-relation between HR and PR apparent with the following examples:

1. Increasing employee morale

PR can work with different departments to build internal relationships with stakeholders and business units. As an unbiased third party, the PR function is not privy to any HR-related matters or confidential employee matters. For the task at hand, it is only concerned with how internal relationships can be formed and built upon to achieve the communication objective. The very nature of PR and PR professionals facilitates easy two-way communication and relationship building to encourage dialogue between employees and management.

PR can strategically partner with HR initiatives to support increasing staff morale. First, PR can play a useful role in identifying opportunities to "shout about" different stories and news within the organization. Second, PR can generate a positive voice to enhance organizational culture, internally broadcast news about teams and colleagues and help keep people informed. By generating a positive buzz and vibe, PR can not only increase staff morale, but also encourage future participation from teams that would like to get their news known to the wider organization.

Sensitive news can also be viewed differently by employees when it is sent out by HR as opposed to it being sent out from a central communications team driven by PR. PR gives IC messages a consistent and professional tone, especially where difficult messages need to be cascaded across an organization.

2. Engaging with different tiers of employees

One of the biggest challenges facing IC is the engagement of stakeholders and team members in each level of the organization. PR can build long-term relationships and bridge potential gaps with teams and colleagues who are perhaps known to work behind the scenes and may feel less involved with the organization.

PR can identify and communicate the value added by each tier in an organization. A structured approach ensures all departments and service levels are considered for internal communication. Each team should be given the opportunity to speak to the wider organization via IC. This extends to senior leaders within the organization who are hugely influential in providing direction to employees, increasing morale and motivating teams. PR also acts as a valuable communication agent between senior management to refine, soften and tweak internal messages and deliver them in the desired manner. Consistency of messages not only establishes a house style that is welcomed by employees, but also builds trust.

3. Reaching all employees

Each organization is different and employees prefer receiving information in different ways. There are employees who don't log on to the company intranet unless there is need to reference a particular document, and then there are others who prefer to check the intranet for any company news before they begin their day. The point is that PR's approach to utilizing all elements of the communications mix will serve IC well when it comes to reaching different generations of employees.

IC can adopt PR's principles in following a defined format and a checklist approach to ensure all communication channels are updated with IC messages to reach the entire employee demographic.

How PR Empowers IC

When applied to IC, the tried-and-tested principles and practices of PR enhance the delivery of messages. It works in two ways, by connecting with employees and letting employees connect with the organization's values and goals. This alignment results in an enviable organizational culture where employees feel appreciated, listened to and valued.

Generating content from within the organization gives employees a voice and empowers them to share what they have achieved. When focus is shifted onto employees, they become more open to receiving internal news about themselves, their teams and people they work with. As a result, any barriers to receiving and absorbing IC messages can be removed and employees become more receptive to messages delivered by the organization.

This powerful two-way traffic of information can benefit any organization as employees become clearer on what role they play in an organization's success, what the organization's goals are, what the brand stands for and what values and culture they are part of.

PR and Internal Brand Advocates

Ultimately, the success of internal communication is shown when employees become strong brand advocates of their own accord. This organic process is one that happens over time. PR partners with IC to educate employees with key messages so they, in turn, become informed brand champions. This internal influx of information and motivation empowers employees to become positive external advocates when required. The reputation of an organization always can be measured by how happy its employees are to work there. This positive reiteration can be achieved by internal communications that is empowered by the strong working practices of PR. ■

Keerti Baker is media and communications manager, VOW Europe (Part of EVO Group). @Keertibaker

Revisiting Organizational Values for Culture Change Communications

By Susan Berthelot and Mark McElroy

The late business management visionary Peter Drucker reportedly said, "culture eats strategy for breakfast." **Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta** first vice president Marie Gooding recalled this quote when discussing why the bank decided to revisit its organizational values in 2015.

Gooding discussed how culture can define and limit strategy, and that the organization needed to get the culture piece more clearly defined. Bank strategy looked good on paper, and performance was strong. But the culture of the bank—expressed by five organizational values—was not clearly articulated.

In a 2014 survey of hundreds of employees across the bank's district, 50% of respondents said they knew the five values, yet none could name them all. The bank values simply weren't memorable. This realization became the catalyst for a comprehensive values-refresh project.

Project Framework and Environment

The bank's president and first vice president challenged a cross-functional team to come up with a plan to more crisply define the institution's values. A successful project would conclude with a well-received launch of authentic values by 1,600 employees across the Federal Reserve district. The second step would be a deep integration of the values as the foundation for how employees work.

Here's the framework that was adopted for this culture change initiative.

1. **Listen First** (What values resonate with employees? How do they feel about the values?)
2. **Be Authentic** (Do values express how people really feel? What are their individual stories?)
3. **Continue to Connect** (Do values capture and keep people's attention? Are they memorable?)

Bank staff work at seven office locations and more than 200 remote locations. The employee population is diverse in both the demographic sense and in job types. About one-quarter of employees are considered non-desk workers and don't have frequent access to email and intranet communications, so it can be a challenge to reach them.

Another consideration for the audience is long tenure, averaging 14 years. This aspect made it especially important to make the values refresh meaningful for the long term, and not just another "flavor of the month" campaign.

The results and recommendations follow.

Listen First

The first step in a culture change communications project is to send leaders on a listening tour across the organization. Recruit leaders to visit all locations and business lines, to listen to a broad range of employees, in roundtable discussions and in one-on-one meetings.

Next, listen through research. The teams researched values across the Federal Reserve System and in external organizations, and reflected on the bank's historical values. The research produced two guiding principles: (1) To make the values memorable, it was decided to limit the number of values to three, and (2) the values should be single words, paired with taglines and short, inspirational passages.

When you listen, you may be surprised at the heartening response. 400 bank employees (25% of staff) in six cities shared their ideas with leaders. Employees quickly identified Integrity as the essential bank value, with Excellence and Quality tying for second place. For the third value, a small but vocal group favored Diversity, while a diverse majority of employees favored Respect. Emotionally charged conversations raised concerns that success of this project might be undermined by a debate over words.

Emotionally charged conversations raised concerns that success of this project might be undermined by debate over words.

When you encounter debates about key decisions, it is best to trust the process. In this case, bank leaders kept listening.

Motivated by the bank president's sincere desire to "get this right," employee conversations were extended as were moderated meetings to build consensus among officers and senior managers. After additional site visits and meetings, bank leaders felt confident enough to choose Integrity, Excellence and Respect as the refreshed values that would define the institution's culture.

Be Authentic

To be authentic with culture change, you've got to share ownership. Out of many conversations with employees, three strong themes emerged, and they became the bank's refreshed values. In the bank president's words: "These values are not tablets from on high. They are the articulation of what employees shared with us about how they feel about the organization."

To encourage employee ownership, incorporate their voices in communications. It was decided to pair values presentations with unscripted employee voices, photos and animated word clouds. The rollout plan included an all-employee town hall launch event, talking points for managers, collateral featuring employee faces and voices and an employee six-word story campaign (see sidebar).

Continue to Connect

Following the program launch, the president and first vice president made visits to every bank department to talk about the values and invited employees to submit six-word stories about the values. Within a few months, employees submitted more than 230 stories. Each story represents an individual employee's skin in the game.

For culture-change communications, it's essential to facilitate conversations for the long term while avoiding campaign fatigue. The values have been reinforced with banners, in online video talk shows, in intranet stories of employees living the values and on electronic displays around the bank. In a culture where online commenting on intranet articles is rare, articles on values-related intranet stories regularly receive dozens of comments, with one story receiving 69 comments after publication.

Employees' six-word stories are being integrated into a keepsake booklet, permanent art projects, signage and an online values resource center. Next, the values messages will be integrated into recruitment and onboard-

Atlanta Fed Values, in Six Words

When the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta refreshed its organizational values, leaders wanted employees to take the values to heart and own them personally. The implementation team recommended a six-word stories campaign. Within a few months, more than 230 (of 1,600) employees had submitted original six-word stories.

Background

Ernest Hemingway was once challenged to write a story in six words. He wrote, "For sale: Baby shoes, never worn." Although some dismiss this as literary folklore, the six-word story was born, and it's been popping around the writing world for years. Six-word stories do not have to be sad—they can be inspirational.

Project Description

The six-word stories project invited employees to own the values by submitting a short statement about how one of the values resonated with them. It was easy to submit stories through an online form.

The project was the cornerstone of how the bank discussed the refreshed values for the long term. The stories appeared on the bank intranet and digital signage, in printed materials and on art installments. Stories were often paired with a photo of the employee who submitted them.

Guidelines for Great Six-Word Stories

- Personal statements are better than generic ones.
- Be creative—it's your story.
- Think of how a value has touched you, or how you embody a value, or why a value is important to you—then summarize it in six words.
- Your story doesn't have to be poetic; just write about what the value means to you.

Examples of Employee Stories

Value: Integrity

"True to others, true to myself."

"Be the person my dog sees."

Value: Excellence

"Made a mistake. Learned from it."

"We double-check, then check again."

Value: Respect

"We are different yet the same."

"Recognized my marriage before America did."

ing materials, management training and the strategic plan.

Wrapping It Up

For culture-change initiatives, you'll be successful if you put in place a thoughtful process such as Listen First, Be Authentic and Continue to Connect. Plan for a sustainable conversation, and offer personal images and stories all along the way.

In 2015, not one employee knew the bank's values. Today, all of its employees have embraced them as their own. This was validated in the bank's 2016 employee engagement survey, in which 97% of employees responded favorably to the statement, "I have a good understanding of the values of our bank."

A few months after introducing the refreshed values, the president said it best: "No program in the history of the bank has been so universally praised and so well-received." ■

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Weaving PR Strategies Into Your Employee Communications Program

By Tracy Zampaglione

Research consistently shows that effective internal communications help increase employee job satisfaction, productivity, morale, commitment and trust. An engaged workforce inspires excellence, and results in employees who are motivated and consistently produce good work. To achieve engagement among staff, employees must be kept informed through regular and effective communications that are timely and relevant.

So how can organizations use public relations to continually connect with employees?

The role of PR is to help organizations develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with not only external but also internal stakeholders through a first-rate communications program. Such a program represents a combination of people, messages, practices and purpose.

Communication is one of the most influential activities in organizations. It's vital to achieving goals and goes hand in hand with problem solving and decision making.

Internal communication is a complex and dynamic process that provides staff members with key information about their jobs, the organization and each other. Simply stated, communication helps individuals and work teams collaborate to achieve goals.

No Organization Is Without Challenges

While successful communications can present challenges to even small organizations, just think of how it can test larger organizations. The Corrections Department has the most employees of any agency in Orange County government. It operates multiple locations, including a Booking & Release Center, five detention facilities, three courtrooms, an offsite work release center and a video visitation center, which is also offsite. The jail compound encompasses 76 acres. On top of that, the organization is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

The department has more than its share of challenges in communicating with a large and diverse workforce that works round-the-clock shifts and that is geographically spread out. Without a thoughtful PR program in place, this scenario could present a logistical nightmare.

Many Channels Strike the Right Balance

Internal communication should occur on multiple levels. The **Orange County Corrections Department** meets the challenge of staying connected by using multiple platforms to communicate on a frequent and rich basis. The department publishes a monthly employee newsletter, posts numerous fliers throughout its facilities and sends organization-wide emails as part of its regular and routine employee communications program.

PR should never be a one-way conversation. An effective employee communications program invites and encourages questions. Our "Chat with the Chief" email box was created to allow employees to communicate

How to Please Your Employees	
P	Platforms – Use multiple platforms to communicate with employees
L	Leadership – Involve the organization's leadership with employees at all levels
E	Engage – Communicate with staff often to keep them engaged
A	Add Value – Provide professional development opportunities to employees
S	Seek Transparency – Being totally transparent inspires trust
E	Effort – Put work and thought into employee communications

directly with the agency head without having to go through their chain of command. It provides a direct connection to top leadership, and questions of general interest are published in the organization's monthly newsletter.

Face-to-Face Forums

Daily briefings regarding incidents and events in the jail are held during shift change, and multiple meetings occur on a regular basis. Managers meet weekly for a roundtable session, and there are quarterly meetings with other criminal justice agencies. Town Hall meetings are scheduled at least three times a year, and no topic is off limits. Those who cannot attend are invited to send in questions in advance, and the sessions are also videotaped and placed on the server for viewing at a later time. The Town Halls spur information sharing, issue discussion, problem solving and consensus building.

Dismiss the notion of distant and disconnected leadership and your company will reap the rewards.

Trekking the Trenches

To remain connected with both civilian and sworn staff members, top-level leadership make it a point to connect with employees by putting themselves out there in the trenches on a regular basis. Management embraces an out-and-about style that demonstrates transparency and that promotes approachability. When team members experience friendly, knowledgeable and open leaders, the result is an informed and trusting team.

It is not unusual to see the chief of corrections and the deputy chiefs walking the jail compound to talk with line staff, work alongside them, ask questions and help as needed. This builds connection, which is a major factor in running a successful operation regardless of the type of organization it is. The better you understand your team and its needs, the more equipped the organization is to serve both its internal and external audiences. Dismiss the notion of distant and disconnected leadership and your company will reap the rewards.

Invest in Employees

Investing in your employees with ample opportunities for training and career development communicates that you care about them and want them to be successful. Since communication is so important, organizations should work to develop the speaking, writing and presentation skills of leaders, supervisors and managers. Orange County Corrections has its own official chapter of **Toastmasters International** for this purpose. The club meets twice a month.

The department also established Women of Vision, Empowerment and Networking (W.O.V.E.N.). This program promotes professional development initiatives for female employees. The program endeavors to embrace change and make a difference through education, mentoring, leadership and networking.

Growing leadership abilities communicates to employees that you want to prepare them to move up in the organization. The agency offers a 15-week course series called Big Ideas on Leadership. The class provides an in-depth perspective into a variety of leadership topics. During the program, participants communicate openly and honestly in exploring their personal leadership philosophy as well as ways to increase their leadership effectiveness. The class culminates with teams of participants presenting a project that addresses a real-world issue within the organization or solves a current problem.

Total Transparency

Management needs to embrace total transparency. By doing so, it stops inaccurate information from flowing through informal sources of information such as the rumor mill and social media. Communication is the principal method by which employees share information, create relationships, find meaning and shape organizational culture and values. Internal communication can help motivate, build trust, create shared identity and foster engagement. If communication breaks down, it will have the opposite effect.

Failure to communicate can have a damaging effect not only on an organization's operational efficiency, but also on its overall image and market share. When done correctly, a multi-faceted employee communications plan based on solid PR can foster employee communications to stay favorably connected across all levels of the organization. ■

Tracy Zampaglione, APR, is public information officer for the Orange County Corrections Department.

How a Federal Laboratory's Communications Team Tells Its Quarterly Story in One Cool Page

By PR News Editors

There's a well-known tactic endemic to Washington, D.C., but used elsewhere, too. It's the old if-you-don't-really-want-people-to-pay-attention-to-something-issue-a-report-about-it trick. In the old days after receiving a hard copy of such a report you might glance at the cover, perhaps see if you're mentioned in it, look at the executive summary and put it on the shelf to become another selection in the buffet for dust mites. Today's equivalent is the desktop folder: a few clicks and the report now can gather virtual dust.

Communicators know this issue intimately, perhaps most when it comes to internal reports or memos. Oh, you can write them just fine, but try getting people to read or react to the document you spent hours composing. All of this boils down to engagement, of course, a constant torment of the communicator.

What's a Communicator to Do?

This was the dilemma for Kevin Kautzky, group communications manager, energy and environment directorate (EED), **Pacific Northwest National Laboratory**, Richland, Washington. He wanted to let senior lab leaders know what his team of 14 communicators was doing to spread the word about the work the EED scientists were doing. But how best to do it? "You produce a report, you send it to people and it gets lost," he says. "People get so much email today."

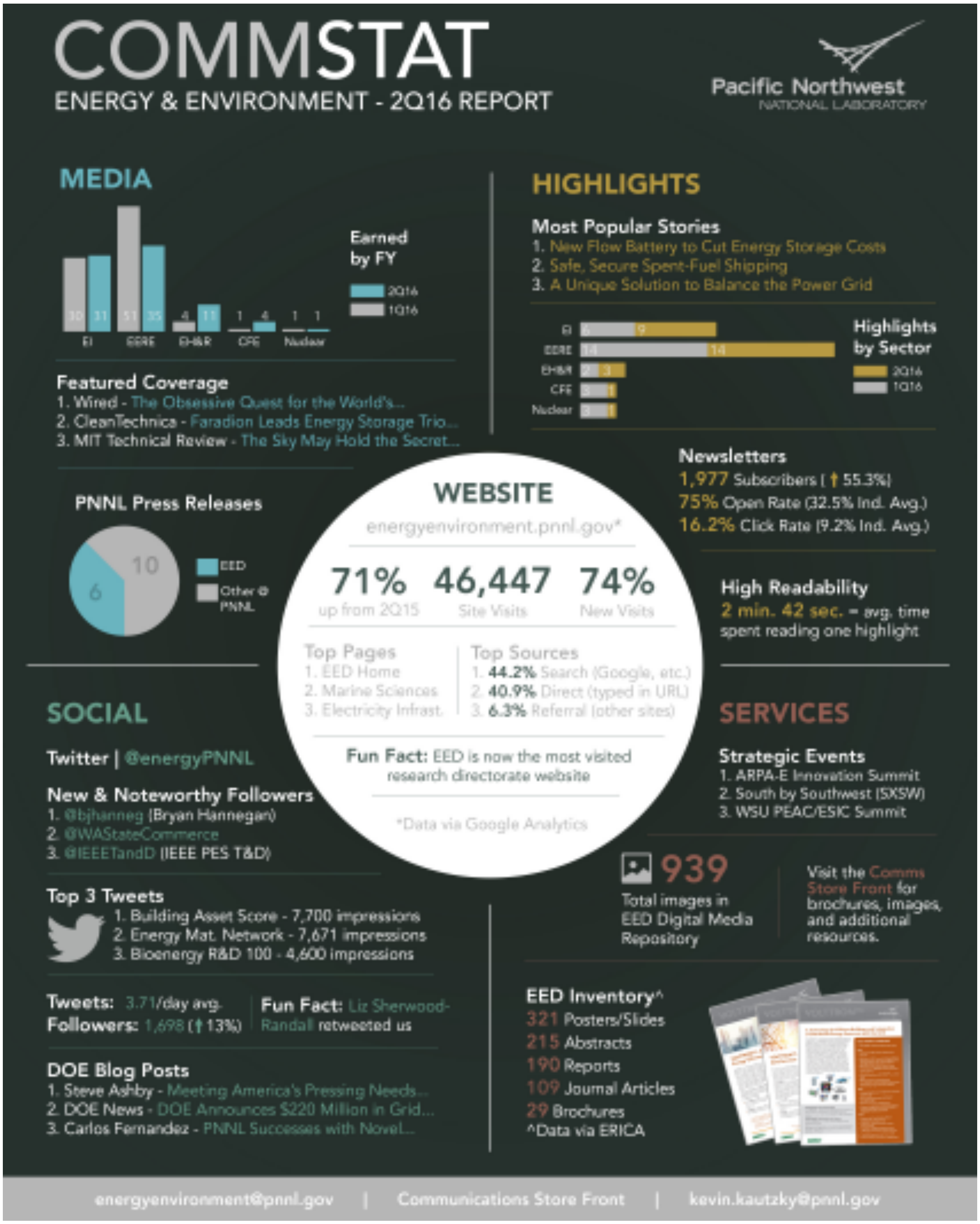
Instead Kautzky and his team at the federal laboratory came up with the one-pager in this article. Kautzky describes it as "a digestible" way for senior leaders to view his team's quarterly output. In addition to containing a slew of data, the infographic with the "high-tech look" scores points with the Lab's senior leader, who is a fan of the visual approach to data, he says.

The approach 'is to build buzz' around the document by not delivering it each quarter. 'When our senior leaders see it...they usually want to know more.'

Sorry, We Don't Deliver

Here's the kicker: Kautzky and his staff don't routinely deliver the document to senior leaders. "We [on the communications team] all have copies...it's a morale booster for us," he says. "We post it on our office doors, and have the e-version on an internal webpage." Team members also use it as a leave-behind when they meet with senior lab leaders. What, no electronic delivery to lab leaders? No, the approach, instead, "is to build buzz" around the document by not delivering it each quarter. "When our senior leaders see it...they usually want to know more. When they initiate the discussion it seems to resonate more than us just putting out a report." Adds Kautzky, "It's almost like a targeted marketing approach where we look to deliver our product to our customer when they are ready to consume it." It's worked.

Created using **Adobe** InDesign in 8-10 hours, the document features a data circle (middle) relaying website visits, new visits, top web pages and top traffic sources to the laboratory's site. You'll note the EED home



page leads the list of the lab's top pages. This data comes from **Google** Analytics. Data seen in the infographic's four quadrants (counterclockwise from top left: media, social, highlights and services) are collected "from a few internal systems and our social and web analytic tools," he says. The top left corner shows traffic to EED's five core research areas, each of which has a panel on the site. From left they are: Electricity Infrastructure (EI), Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy (EERE), Environmental Health and Remediation (EH&R), Clean Fossil Energy (CFE) and Nuclear.

In addition to the serious metrics, there are also fun facts, such as the one in the lower-left quadrant. It notes Deputy Secretary of Energy Liz Sherwood-Randall retweeted one of EED's tweets. And there is material included to be conversation starters, such as top tweets from EED's @energyPNNL account (bottom left) and "new and noteworthy followers" on Twitter. In this case one new follower was Bryan Hannegan (@ bjhanneg), associate laboratory director, **National Renewable Energy Laboratory**. On the back of the sheet are pictures of Kautzky's team and quotes of praise from senior lab leaders.

In sum, the infographic is an intentional mix of "sizzle and steak," he says. There are a lot of "great graphics and charts out there, but we want people to talk about this," Kautzky says. They do. ■

5 Tips to Help You Make the C-Suite More Relatable and Personable to Employees

By Anne May Navarrete

Take a clue from political campaigns: Voters want to know that the person they elect to run the country is a successful, proven, experienced leader. But the electorate also wants to gain insight into the human side of the candidates. What makes them tick? What inspires them? Are they nice people? Would I want to have coffee or a beer with them? Voters want to be able to relate. It's the same for employees and the executive suite.

Open communication between leadership and employees is integral to building employee trust, morale and engagement. Dry business language and performance metrics through company emails barely scratch the surface of who a leader actually is. More important, they do very little to make a company's leaders relatable and connected to employees.

Making business executives relatable can be a challenge, especially for companies with multiple office locations and work-at-home employees. In some cases, employees not only have never met their CEO but also don't even know what any of their senior leaders look like.

As successful communicators, we must find ways to build, enhance and grow leadership-employee relations. After all, we are the eyes, ears and voice of employees and leadership. We have the intel and connections to go beyond quarterly emails and newsletters and tell deeper, more relatable stories about the organization and its people.

Give 'Em What They Want

Employees and voters are hungrier than ever for their leaders and brands to be relatable. We rely on social media, customer reviews and blogs to stay in touch. Brands can interact with consumers in real time and tell stories in ways that they couldn't before. There is a sense of comfort in knowing someone is on the other side. This hyper-connected world has redefined the landscape of communication—we're accustomed to making personal human connections everywhere we go. That switch doesn't turn off when we enter our workplace. This has changed expectations for how communicators engage employees.

Executive profiles can help initiate that connection. But résumé highlights and professional bios only help to establish credibility—they don't shed light on the leaders' personalities. You can take your executive profiles to the next level by weaving in personal anecdotes and details that bring out their depth and character.

The first thing you'll need is a C-suite sponsor who will champion the project. Connect with someone who shares your passion for employee communication. And don't limit yourself to HR or marketing executives.

To sway C-suite doubters, you might want to build a mockup of what your final intranet product will look like. Include pictures, profiles and contests that will engage your employees. Once you've done that, the following tips will help:

Use Persuasion to Engage Employees

You have the power to sway employees' opinions about their leaders. Rely on the three modes of persuasion as you draft questions for the C-suite: ethos, logos, pathos. Prepare questions that will demonstrate credibility and appeal to the emotions. Connect and relate, all while entertaining and inspiring.

Here are some useful interview questions:

- What is your alma mater?
- If you could give your 16-year-old self driving advice, what would it be?
- What was your childhood ambition?
- What do you like to do on the weekends?
- What tech gadget can you not live without?
- If you could meet any celebrity, dead or alive, who would it be?
- What's your favorite movie?
- What is one random fact about yourself?

1. **Relate Outside the Office.** Ask executives about who they are outside of work. Anecdotes and shared experiences can help make people relatable.
2. **Inspire With Passion.** Appeal to your employees' emotions, imagination and hopes. Passion is key, and you can tap into it with the right questions. Have executives look back on their childhood ambitions, share stories about what shaped them and reflect on those who have inspired them. An executive shared a touching story about how the seed for a career in law was planted when he befriended a blind law student while volunteering at **Reading for the Blind**.
3. **Illustrate With Stories.** Employees want proof that their leaders are strong and successful. But, again, the way to prove this can be fun and relatable. At **Esurance**, one executive shared a story about how he sold pizzas door to door as a kid to pay for his band's trip to Florida. The link to a sales career was easy to see.
4. **Connect to the Business.** It's important to find ways to tie executive profile content to the company's business. This does not mean including business metrics or asking technical questions about the job, but a little reference goes a long way. For example, Esurance executives offered words of wisdom about safe driving, which fit with the brand's identity as an insurance provider.
5. **Engage Through Incentives.** It's not a surprise that engagement makes an appearance. The most interesting stories mean nothing if no one reads them. You have to bring employees to your content. A powerful yet simple way to do this is by creating incentives. An interactive element can boost employee engagement. Host a quiz on your intranet homepage, asking questions that only employees who'd visited the executive profile pages would know how to answer. Everyone who responds correctly is entered for a chance to win prizes.

Author Betty Bender once said, "When people go to work, they shouldn't have to leave their hearts at home." It's human nature to want to feel connected and able to relate. Walking through the workplace doors shouldn't change that. Employees want to feel a personal connection to their leaders. Communicators have the ability to provide that. The gap between a call center employee and the CEO is only as big as you allow it to be. ■

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Tips and Tactics to Help PR Communicate More Effectively With CEOs and the C-Suite

By PR News Editors

"Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown," the Bard of Avon wrote of King Henry IV. The rest of the body probably is unsettled, too. No wonder. To say today's kings and queens, aka CEOs, are pressed for time is an understatement.

One question, among many, for PR pros is "what are the best ways to break through to harried chief executives?"

Lost Sleep Is Key

Kate Finley, CEO, **Belle Communications**, takes a Shakespearean approach: Find out what issues are keeping the head wearing the crown from sleeping at night. "PR really is like an assistant to the CEO, so we need to figure out from the start what the business issues and goals are," she says. It's likely a combination of sales, profits, growth, reputation, vision for the future, strategy, the competition and operations, she says. "If these are keeping the CEO up at night, they need to be important to the entire PR team" and shape the proposals it makes to the CEO.

> **If a great idea [from PR] does nothing for the CEO or the organization, it's not a great idea.**

Adds Sharon Reis, partner, **GYMR Public Relations**, "[PR] has to be tied directly to a brand's business goals and perspectives…[it has to] know where revenue is coming from and where the organization is going."

Reis' filter is sharp: "If a great idea [from PR] does nothing for the CEO or the organization, it's not a great idea."

Learn the Specifics and Adapt

Once PR is crystal clear on the brand's business goals, communication is next. Reis emphasizes communicating to the CEO using the business terminology the C-suite employs. "We [in PR] speak our own language… don't do that," she says. "Figure out how the CEO wants to receive information…and use that style." Finley adds that knowing the CEO's communications preferences "up front" is critical and PR must be willing "to adapt its typical process to accommodate the CEO." Many times PR people will assume the CEO has been told about interviews and other events because numerous emails were sent. That's a dangerous assumption, Finley says.

Another tip related to the above: Pick up the phone when other communications to the CEO have failed. Once on the phone, though, be mindful of avoiding "process" (see below). Finley also advocates finding out how the CEO organizes his or her calendar and partnering with the CEO's executive assistant to help with scheduling and deadlines.

Avoid Process

When sending email to those CEOs who will respond to it, Finley says, use bullets, separating them so they look more visually appealing. Adds Reis, "with CEOs, if you're involving them in [PR] process, you've lost them…you must always be thinking how valuable their time is."

Says Jill Zuckman, managing director, **SKDKnickerbocker**, PR needs to approach working with CEOs on a case-by-case basis. Preparing a CEO for an important interview or an event varies depending upon the executive's learning style and other factors. Some CEOs prefer to see detailed briefing reports well in advance, others would rather have everything distilled into a single page emailed or texted, and there are those who want nothing more than a quick conversation just prior to the event.

Of course, CEOs who prefer detailed briefing reports or even just a single page can and do differ in their reading habits, Zuckman says. Some will read every word, others will skim the material and there are those who read just a few bullet points. "You have to find out the style of the executive you are working with and adapt to it," she says. ■

Leading the Charge: 5 Steps to Get Salespeople on Board With PR

By Liz Sophia McClellan

Traditionally, marketing and sales have struggled to align, a disconnect known as the three-legged stool. Fortunately, the turf war between these two camps has improved as marketing's role has evolved from a cost center to a revenue center. Tools like marketing automation and analytics have been widely adopted to facilitate and measure the quantifiable influence marketing has on revenue generation. There's no excuse for fuzzy math anymore.

While marketing has proven its worth to sales, there is still a wide gap between PR and sales. Salespeople typically lack an understanding of what PR does and the value it brings to the sales process. Sales thinks of PR as a press release factory that has no impact on lead generation and nurturing.

This limited perception causes PR to be ignored or vastly underused by sales to drive the sales process. This lack of understanding and utilization has created an enormous disconnect that is leaving a lot of potential revenue on the table. It's time for PR to lead the charge and bridge the gap.

When seeking alignment with sales, PR should consider these five steps:

1. Familiarize Yourself With Sales Metrics.

Salespeople need to know how you are going to help. Make it meaningful and measurable. First, arrange to sit down with sales reps and sales leadership so you can understand their goals from a metrics standpoint. Then determine and share specific examples of how you can help them achieve or exceed these goals. For instance, if a sales rep is trying to develop business within a certain industry, you can provide, or seek out, case studies in that segment and offer to help sales with a nurture type campaign. Offer to understand the key pain points for that segment or even the lingo it uses. You might even offer to write copy for sales. Reach out to leaders in that industry or at least enlighten sales about the industry's thought leaders. You should share key analysts' findings on specific topics with sales so it has rich talking points.

2. Understand What Moves Prospects Through the Buyer's Journey.

As a PR lead, if you can gain an understanding of what helps move and accelerate leads through the buyer's journey, then you can focus your effort on those tactics.

Every salesperson wants to close business faster. By knowing what works you can strategically align your time to enable the sales process and in so doing, avoid being typecast as a press release factory.

3. Know the Main Sales Objections and Provide Tools to Handle

A great PR manager will know what the top sales objections are and be able to help sales address them. A collaborative effort with marketing is required here. This is where you divide and conquer. Where can PR step in and provide validation for the top objections?

4. Familiarize Yourself With Sales' Wins and Losses

It is absolutely critical that PR understands why the company is winning and/or losing deals. By arming yourself with this information, you will gain insight into what works and what doesn't and focus your effort where it is needed most. If there is no formal win/loss program in place, PR should initiate and own this crucial process.

5. Help Them Help You

Testimonials and case studies are key to the sales process. PR can take the lead in providing incentives for your sales organization to keep this top of mind when closing new business. You want sales to understand, but also see value in asking a customer to provide a testimonial and be part of a case study. Incentivize your salespeople to ask for new customer testimonials as soon as the ink is dry. Sales should plant the seed about PR composing a case study down the road, once your solution has proven successful and measurable results have been achieved.

Smart PR leaders collaborate with sales to devise strategies and develop content with sales as the end goal.

Sales needs to understand that PR gets what it does and the unique challenges it faces in today's hyper-competitive, digital marketplace. Often there are multiple influencers involved with any given sales opportunity. This requires content that speaks to these unique decision makers. Smart PR leaders collaborate with sales to devise strategies and develop content with sales as the end goal. When PR empowers sales to close new business, it becomes integral to the revenue generation process and everybody wins. ■

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Activating an Army of Associates: Engaging Employees Through Volunteerism

By Bradford Walton

It's undeniable that an engaged workforce can move the needle in any industry. But in retail, markets continually fluctuate, shopping trends change, economies contract and expand, and it's the people who truly determine whether a company succeeds and makes a positive impact on the world.

The Home Depot Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the world's largest home improvement retailer, is focused on improving the homes and lives of U.S. military veterans and their families as well as disaster response. *Giving Back* and *Doing the Right Thing* are core values of **The Home Depot**, and are an integral part of The Foundation's mission. But those core values do more than just improve our local communities, they also support a company culture that enriches our associates' lives far beyond a paycheck.

With more than 400,000 associates, it takes a strategic internal and external communications program to keep them informed, engaged and enriched year round. Here's how The Foundation has found success:

Define the Challenge: Macro and Micro

In 2015, the retail sector faced steadily rising turnover at a rate of 5% each month [bloom.bg/1x0dQAK]. The Home Depot operates with 95% of its workforce as consumer-facing hourly associates, and workforce competition among retailers is steep. Like many in the space, the company needed a strategy to break through to recruit, retain and engage associates.

Team Depot, the company's associate-led volunteer workforce, is active year round, with a concentrated effort during Celebration of Service, a two-month volunteer campaign leading up to Veterans Day. In Celebration of Service's fifth year, The Home Depot Foundation had an opportunity to take a fresh approach to engage employees nationwide, including 35,000 veterans, and also enlist consumer support.

> **True associate engagement is a journey, it doesn't happen overnight—and it certainly doesn't happen solely through a two-month campaign.**

Step 1: Know Your Audience

Understanding your audience is critical to truly engaging associates from part-time roles to executive leadership. Peel back the layers and understand that it's more than getting them to volunteer, it's getting them to invest.

At The Home Depot, associates who participate in one or more Team Depot projects score five percentage points higher in their level of commitment to the company and their customer service than those who have not participated in Team Depot.

The Home Depot Foundation researched how to make the most impact on associates by creating Team Depot projects where they can use their unique skillset to help veterans facing enormous challenges. Priority was placed on safety and accessibility projects to make it easier for disabled and aging veterans to navigate their homes. These projects would guarantee a more substantial impact on veteran lives than the beautification projects that were common in past campaigns—and ensure participation and emotional connections from associates.

Step 2: Set Realistic Goals and Think Big

True associate engagement is a journey, it doesn't happen overnight—and it certainly doesn't happen solely through a two-month campaign. Define what "good," "better" and "best" results look like for participation, engagement and reach.

During Celebration of Service, we set out to increase overall volunteer participation and generate awareness of Team Depot's efforts among associates and consumers. The goals were aggressive, but attainable:

- Increase Team Depot activities to more than 15,000 associates
- Have more than 400,000 social media connections
- Donate $1 million to veteran causes through 1 million social media actions from associates and customers
- Earn more than 300 million impressions across traditional and social media

Step 3: Execute the Strategic Communication

With clearly defined goals, set forward with a plan to reach associates through social media and earned media, which helps to reinforce the program's importance and credibility. Here are other tips to keep in mind.

1. Know how each key audience wants to interact with the brand and be able to reach them there
2. Use the opportunity to bring people together, sometimes for the first time
3. Communicate to associates in every possible way; they are busy, so keeping campaigns top of mind increases the likelihood for participation and engagement
4. Don't underestimate the value of merchandising media results to all associates

6 Keys to Effective Employee Engagement

- Tap a wide network as a sounding board for planning
- Bring associates from different backgrounds and levels together
- Understand how each associate likes to receive communication
- Leverage leadership and grassroots communication
- Challenge associates, make them a part of telling the company's story
- Measure results in engagement, participation, impressions along with direct feedback

The Home Depot Foundation launched the #ServiceSelfie social giving campaign to engage associates, consumers, nonprofit partners and media nationwide. Associates were encouraged to showcase their commitment to service in their communities, and The Home Depot Foundation committed to donating $1 for each social media action, up to $1 million. Actions included sharing a #ServiceSelfie on Twitter or Instagram or liking, commenting or sharing one of nine weekly Team Depot Facebook posts honoring nonprofit partners. For the first time, associate engagement had the chance to inform and enhance the campaign's external success.

The Foundation rolled out the new cam-

RESULTS
More than 25,000 associates engaged with Team Depot at projects and via social media throughout Celebration of Service, a 67% YOY increase
The One District, One Project challenge was completed by 100% of The Home Depot's districts
Team Depot impacted the lives of veterans in 315 cities
Made 638,000 social media connections, increasing Team Depot followers by 18,000—a 2,000% increase over average growth—and a 2,000% YOY increase
Made more than 1,100 connections with associates on the Warehouse, an internal social media platform.
Donate $1 million to veteran causes through 21,671 #ServiceSelfies and 1,030,759 social actions
More than 140,000 people attended Veterans Day Kids Workshops and learned about Team Depot's impact on veterans; Sold #ServiceSelfie sticks in all The Home Depot stores nationwide

paign starting with its Team Depot Captains, a volunteer liaison and organizer between the district manager, store managers, nonprofits, veterans and hundreds of associates. In a training summit held in Las Vegas, The Foundation rallied captains around the #ServiceSelfie campaign and asked them to energize volunteers at their projects. Captains were armed with a bevy of supporting materials including signage, Team Depot eye black, banners and tool kits.

Team Depot activated store and corporate associates with a leadership challenge, "One District, One Project," calling for fewer, more impactful projects and stronger connections through grassroots internal communications. For the first time, store and corporate associates worked together on a two-month program in Atlanta with one consistent nonprofit partner. Additionally, corporate associates were engaged during the program's launch with captains passing out eye black and signage that adorned the building's lobbies and elevators.

To generate excitement before the campaign began, The Foundation activated six internal communication channels with prelaunch content including The Home Depot TV, store breakroom posters and a teaser video. Throughout the campaign, Celebration of Service stories and results were shared with associates through three articles in the 'Doings in Our District' newsletter, eight stories featuring Team Depot projects on myApron, the company's internal newsroom, Built From Scratch and a full-page story in the internal publication, Orange Magazine. Eight veteran stories were captured at Team Depot projects and shared alongside these communications to amplify the emotional connection between associates at any level in the company and their collective giving-back efforts. Additionally, The Home Depot Foundation encouraged continued participation through SMS texts to more than 3,000 THDgo members and through The Warehouse, the company's internal social platform.

The Foundation communications team also executed a nine-week media relations campaign, targeting national and local print, online and broadcast outlets in 210 markets to help share the story externally, and then showcase that third-party validation to associates.

Step 4: Measure Results, but Take It a Step Further

When measuring communication impact, take it a step further. Understand how programs impact associate perception and their engagement with the company. As a first step, dive into what was accomplished. Then, get an understanding of how the campaign truly changed behaviors and engagement levels.

For Team Depot:

The Home Depot Foundation's 2015 Celebration of Service created safer, more accessible homes for more than 750 veterans and their families. Approximately 13,286 Team Depot volunteers in 315 cities partnered with 291 nonprofits to work on 367 volunteer projects. The #ServiceSelfie campaign increased the program's reach on social channels as consumers and associates contributed more than a million social actions, which raised $1 million for nine veteran-focused nonprofits.

The Foundation also met with Team Depot volunteers to collect their experiences and feedback first-hand.

- *"Part of the reason I decided to make The Home Depot my career instead of just a job was what we do for our veterans. Many members of my family have served in the military, and many have given their lives as well. I wouldn't be able to live the comfortable life I have without their sacrifice."*
- *"Celebration of Service honors the people who have protected our great country. Veterans define our history and repaying them for their actions goes way beyond our scope of things. Team Depot events challenge us to bridge a gap between thanking them for their services and building an emotional connection."* ■

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2

Motivation and Morale

Welcome to Safety Week: Where Enthusiasm Drives Engagement

By Vicky Campo

Safety Week is a big deal at **Central Arizona Project** (CAP), which operates the canal that brings water from the Colorado River into central and southern Arizona—the state's largest resource for renewable water supplies. Employees come to its headquarters in Phoenix from all across the 336-mile aqueduct system to receive their required safety training, take part in a wellness expo, hear guest speakers, network with co-workers and generally get jazzed about safety. It's employee engagement at its best, and I think it's something every company should consider, especially if you have crafts and trades employees as part of your workforce.

Roughly 14 years ago, CAP made a conscious decision to create a world-class safety program. As you might expect, several occupational programs were put in place: asbestos abatement, confined space, hearing protection, et cetera. CAP quickly realized that while having solid programs was a critically important foundational step, it wasn't enough to carry the day. So it set out to create a true culture of safety, one where safety wasn't a nuisance, but instead where every employee was engaged.

It was 2002 when CAP began its journey. Since then it has achieved Voluntary Protection Programs Star Site Status, seen injuries reduced by about 75% and medical insurance premiums have risen an average of only 2.28% per year compared to national figures of 7% to 11% per year for the same time period. And those are just a few of the results CAP has achieved.

The Concept

There were already a number of employee-engagement elements in CAP's safety program, but it wasn't until 2010 that it developed Safety Week, which is perhaps the crowning achievement. The concept is relatively simple. You might call it a safety conference for employees. Really, it's a tool to bring your safety program to a completely new level of engagement, and it pays off not only in reduced injuries, but also in a more productive and involved workforce.

It's important to build Safety Week around the required safety training that you already provide, but instead of spreading it out over the course of the year, bring employees together and do the lion's share in one week. You might have to adjust your operations to make it work, but you will be getting everything done in one fell swoop, you will have the additional benefit of providing a platform for your safety messaging, and you will demonstrate your company's commitment to safety. If you can't stop for a week, you could do so for a few days, or break the week into shifts where half your employees come in part of the time, and the other half for the rest of the time. If you can think creatively, there is always a way.

Next, throw in elective classes on topics relevant to your workforce. This may mean expanding your definition of safety. At CAP, emotional and intellectual safety are included right alongside physical safety, and that is reflected in Safety Week offerings. Consider classes like desert survival, financial security, diversity, teambuilding, ergonomics, emotional safety and even how to check and change your tires. These classes encourage employees to be safe at home as well as on the job, and they will get administrative employees involved in your safety program to the same degree as crafts and trades employees. At CAP, the injury rate for office workers is comparable to those of crafts and trades employees, largely because of strains and sprains, so getting the administrative folks involved is a key component of Safety Week.

Camaraderie is an essential element of an engaged workplace and of a healthy safety program. People are much more likely to watch out for one another or point out safety infractions to people with whom they feel comfortable.

Provide free lunch with dynamic speakers. You pay your employees per diem if they are traveling to training classes. Offering lunch on site can often be cheaper than the per diem rate per person, and it gives folks a chance to network outside their normal workgroup. In the early days of Safety Week, we heard people all the time say how they'd just had a conversation with someone they hadn't seen in 20 years. Now, that is considered one of the innate benefits of Safety Week. And those of us in employee communications know that this camaraderie is an essential element of an engaged workplace and of a healthy safety program. People are much more likely to watch out for one another or point out safety infractions to people with whom they feel comfortable.

Having a dynamic speaker during lunch is a double win. If you have someone interesting and motivational, it can shift your workforce. Consider a local hero, someone with a compelling safety story or maybe someone who has survived an injury. This also is an excellent opportunity to bring out your management team to show its support for safety.

The Wellness Expo

Another important element of Safety Week is the Wellness Expo. This can include both a blood draw and a health risk assessment. CAP pays $100 per person for a company to provide this service, but it benefits the company in a number of ways. First, employees don't have to take time off to visit a doctor for blood work. In addition, the Wellness Expo catches those employees who don't regularly visit a doctor. But the greatest benefit is that it allows the company to gather aggregate data on employees' health trends and negotiate insurance coverage to suit the employee population. CAP, for example, noticed a rise in employees with high blood pressure, so it negotiated a co-pay of zero for generic blood pressure medications. This helps ensure that employees take their medications regularly to avoid future health problems that could be more costly.

Another way to get employees involved is to offer a vendor fair alongside your Wellness Expo. You'd be surprised how many folks will come out to talk to your employees for free. You might have companies providing safety shoes, safety glasses, chair massages, information on state parks and recreation, organic produce deliveries, gym memberships and more. Just set up tables and invite them to come. Many of these vendors bring prizes that can be raffled off at the end of the week. In addition to vendors, you can set up tables

Tips for a Successful Safety Week

1. Create a solid committee. You'll need people from safety, learning and development, maintenance, communications, HR, wellness and just some good ol' worker bees. You'll need people to coordinate communications, scheduling, speakers, instructors, catering, required training, volunteers, registration, giveaways, the Information Oasis, the Wellness Expo, the vendor fair and all the other small tasks that go into a successful event.
2. Create a guidebook. Something similar to a college catalog can outline all the activities and classes that will be available during Safety Week. Include a letter from your CEO to show management support. Tell employees how to sign up for classes and what they'll be having for lunch. Explain what will be available at the Information Oasis. The more they know, the more engaged they will be.
3. Set your date far in advance of Safety Week. Consider what kinds of things will be going on in your community. Will it be spring break? Will the weather be good? Will major work be going on? Check with the folks who schedule the work. They can give you the best dates, and getting them involved creates buy-in.
4. Publicize like mad. Do weekly teasers in your newsletter or intranet site. Showcase specific classes or instructors. If you're kicking off an annual campaign, give a sneak peek. If you have a video, create a movie poster. Whatever communications vehicles you have at your disposal, use them.

Set clear expectations for managers and supervisors. Give them opportunities to voice their concerns and have them addressed. Get their buy-in as soon as possible in whatever way possible, and make sure they know to encourage their people to attend.

to promote company initiatives like volunteer outreach, diversity initiatives and sustainability efforts.

Safety Ambassadors

Finally, to make Safety Week more successful, find a way to make your employees safety ambassadors. You might create a video featuring your employees, or perhaps a poster campaign. Both have been done at CAP. One memorable campaign asked employees to submit safety stories, either personal or on-the-job, where someone was nearly hurt. We choose the best 12 and ran one each month in print, on a poster and in video. Some included employees' children. You could feel people waiting each month for the next story, and the whole campaign was kicked off during Safety Week.

For those who don't want to be in the limelight, another way to engage employees is to give something away. CAP gives away a T-shirt each year with the campaign slogan. That way employees become walking billboards for the safety program. You can do car window shades to stress the importance of defensive driving or refillable cups to promote sustainability. Whatever it is, make sure it carries your safety message so that employees become spokespersons for your program.

Final Considerations

At CAP, Safety Week is mandatory for employees. If that's not feasible for your organization, you might consider a raffle as an incentive to participate. You can give employees a raffle ticket for each class they take and raffle off prizes from the vendor fair as well as other prizes you might come up with. CAP offers two employees one day off as grand prizes, but they don't need to be that extravagant. The vendor gifts can be quite nice on their own.

Don't forget to set up a central point for information. We call ours the Information Oasis, and it's always the hub of activity. You can offer snacks and coffee throughout the day, have schedules available, give away your Safety Week shirts or other safety-branded items and collect raffle tickets. You might also offer self-guided activities from the Oasis such as a safety scavenger hunt or a networking activity. You can use your safety committee to staff the Oasis in shifts.

Of course, to make any of this happen, you must have buy-in from management. For CAP, it was fairly easy to get buy-in from executive management. CAP had two members of its senior management team sitting on the safety committee who, week after week, had been bringing a safety message to upper management. It was middle managers and supervisors who resisted the most. They thought it was a waste of time and took too much away from "the work." Many of them grumbled and complained, and even discouraged staff from attending.

However, as our safety program continued to grow, and as Safety Week came back year after year, the complaints grew quieter. Part of that was refinement over the years, but mostly it was because Safety Week was getting results.

It isn't very often that we have a workplace issue that invites employee engagement the way that safety does. Every employer cares about it. Every employee wants to go home safe to his or her family. It's one of those issues that's important to everyone. And an interesting part: If an employee will engage on the level of safety, he or she is likely to engage on other levels as well. And the more engaged, the happier and more productive that employee will be. ■

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How to Improve Your ‘Organizational Clarity’ Grade by Being Brain-Friendly

By Liz Guthridge

Want to improve “Organizational Clarity” and ultimately your business performance and bottom line? Make sure employees see and act upon a clear line of sight between their job and the marketplace they operate in against the backdrop of the company’s strategy.

This alignment—both inside and outside the organization—is the key concept of *Organizational Clarity: The Case for Workforce Alignment & Belief* [bit.ly/1TSHPra], a two-year study from the **Institute for Public Relations**.

While Organizational Clarity is a new name, its purpose is familiar and comprehensive: helping drive business success as defined by financial performance, retention, recruitment innovation, learning and productivity.

Cramming information into the brain works if the goal is to pass a test. However, if want people to remember and apply new content— which is key for Organizational Clarity—the brain needs to rest regularly between taking in and storing new content.

The roots of Organizational Clarity are based on a broad range of disciplines. The report and the accompanying infographic, *10 Ways to Improve Organizational Clarity and Drive Performance*, are silent on neuroscience. Yet if you integrate brain-friendly actions into your other actions for employees, you’ll make it easier for the brain to respond and react. It’s the difference between coasting on a bicycle downhill versus pushing an 18-wheeler uphill.

Use These Brain-Friendly Actions to Help You Improve Organizational Clarity

To help employees achieve a clearer line of sight without overtaxing the brain, you can:

1. **Adopt brain-friendly communication basics.** These basics help employees pay attention, stay focused and remember.
2. **Include a social element.** When employees get involved with leaders and their peers around Organizational Clarity, they will increase their emotional connection to each other as well as to their job and the brand. These connections aid in spurring action and improving recall.
3. **Recognize efforts as well as results.** Recognition provides a “feel good” dopamine hit, which encourages employees to repeat the behavior and quicken the rewiring of the brain.

Brain-Friendly Communication Basics

Of all the brain-friendly actions you can take to help grab employees’ attention, these three are most suited to increasing Organizational Clarity.

- **Name it.** The name of a concept serves a similar function to a person's name. It's a quick identifier. This reduces the cognitive energy employees have to spend trying to remember what you're talking about or why it's important. The name can either be descriptive, such as an "Acquire to Invest" growth strategy, an acronym that's meaningful to the organization or whatever other moniker you choose. For example, **Salesforce.com** created "V2MOM" (vision, values, methods, obstacles and measures) shortly after its founding to help keep employees aligned to its business strategy and plans. More than 15 years later, V2MOM is a cultural icon for the firm [sforce.co/1Gaa8KX].
- **Chunk the content.** When you provide information in bite-size pieces, you figuratively help people digest what they hear, see and read. When you also space the content out over time, employees can literally sleep on it and therefore remember it better. Cramming information into the brain works if the goal is to pass a test. However, if you want people to remember and apply new content— which is key for Organizational Clarity—the brain needs to rest regularly between taking in and storing new content. Research has shown that sleep is necessary for the brain to store and recall memories. While you sleep, the hippocampus region sifts through what you learned and experienced during the day and plays back memories, preparing the most meaningful ones for long-term memory and recall.
- **Start with "why."** When you focus on the big picture—as in the purpose of your business strategy—you talk more abstractly than concretely, which appeals to the brain's motivational system. Ideally, this purpose should appeal to something big, such as the greater good, to inspire employees. That's because when employees can relate the organization's purpose to their individual beliefs and value systems, they have a greater emotional connection and self-interest. The tighter linkages they feel also can spur them to action. For example, **Mallinckrodt Pharmaceuticals**' "Managing complexity to improve people's lives" [bit.ly/2cOsTK4] can inspire employees to act accordingly. Many of Mallinckrodt's employees are highly educated and well trained, and deal with hazardous chemicals, comply with detailed laws and regulations, and make and sell pharmaceutical and biotech products and services around the globe. The point is not to embrace complexity for complexity's sake, but to figure out ways to harness that complexity and work through it to ensure that they're providing products and services to hospitals and doctors that will prescribe them to help people improve their health. Staff functions, including procurement, finance, legal, HR and others also adopt this mantra, managing the complexity of their function to enable fellow employees to get things done without being overwhelmed with minutia that they don't care about.

The Social Element

When you gather people to talk about the business and their jobs, you help them strengthen their connections to each other as well as to the content. These interactions help employees gain valuable insights, build stronger memories and commit to taking specific actions.

For this social element to succeed, you don't have to throw a big bash. The get-to-

3 Tips to Make Your Messaging More Brain-Friendly

To improve the influence of your messaging, try these three brain-friendly tips:

1. **Be positive with your names as well as your language.** Describe what something is, not what it isn't. Avoid phrases like "no more software" and "no more cold calling." Instead, flip it around to the more optimistic "work in the clouds" and "corral a pal and think of a link." When your language is upbeat and positive, you'll put people into a more positive state of mind. They'll be more open to considering your message. By contrast, if individuals perceive messages to be negative, they can become fearful and shut down.
2. **Include calls to action.** When you're chunking your content, leave room for a call to action. Messages without action can be clutter. Tell people—or at least suggest—what they can do next to advance the cause. To help people follow through, make the request visible, concrete and simple, providing a clear sequence of small steps. For example, if you want to gather feedback through an online survey, make sure to highlight the survey URL so it's easy to click, and provide an estimate of how long it will take them to complete (ideally fewer than five minutes) and what they can expect for their effort.
3. **Add the "how" shortly after the "why" to keep individuals engaged and motivated.** The brain has two different systems for processing the motivational (the "why") and the executional (the "how"). These networks work at different times. Individuals show a preference for using one network over the other, often related to their job. For example, visionary executives enjoy talking at the 50,000-foot level. By contrast engineers and others in the trenches often are eager to know the specifics about execution. By addressing the "how" soon after you explain the "why," you are able to link the purpose to the process and keep both networks and types of people engaged.

Note that many more brain-friendly tips exist. Three is a magic and manageable number, however. Longer tip sheets, especially with more than 10 items, can overtax the brain and cause eyes to glaze over–especially as a sidebar to a sizable article. Better to be succinct and specific than loquacious to get attention and be memorable and actionable.

If you're interested in more brain-friendly communication tips, please see 10 tips for sound bites with substance [bit.ly/2d6Uvee].

gethers can be informal as long as the environment feels non-threatening and conducive to candid conversations.

The leaders who sponsor or host the interactions also need to move away from "telling and selling" and strive for "involving and inquiring."

In fact, asking questions, especially thinking questions, plays an important role. Thinking questions are designed to help individuals stop, reflect and focus on their thinking.

When a person experiences an "aha" moment while talking or hearing others express their points of view, the person's brain literally changes. It forms new connections and changes in the way that individual thinks about and acts on a topic.

With these get-togethers, leaders also can encourage employees to help each other stretch. When employees gather, especially in diverse groups across functional and operational silos, to talk about the business, they can motivate each other, as well as share tips and tools and troubleshoot. This positive peer pressure can increase collaboration, improve productivity and strengthen relationships.

Salesforce.com leaders also encourage employees to share their goals with each other through **Chatter**. This degree of transparency helps employees be more open and straightforward with each other. When employees team up for the first time, they already speak a common language through their V2MOM and know what they want to achieve. They just need to figure out the best way to work with each other, and they're ready to collaborate.

Recognition

One of the best low-cost, high-value actions is thanking employees for making an effort toward achieving Organizational Clarity. Yet popular practice among many leaders is to withhold recognition until they see results.

Reinforcement theory, confirmed by neuroimaging, shows otherwise. When you acknowledge people for taking positive steps, verbal praise increases the likelihood that people will repeat the behavior.

From a neuroscience perspective, the prize activates the neurotransmitter dopamine, which helps control the brain's reward and pleasure centers and regulates movement and emotional responses.

As a result, when individuals experience a reward, they're motivated to repeat the actions to get more rewards, even if it's just another hit of dopamine. This combination embeds the action in the brain faster, which helps change behavior.

Expressing thanks has an additional benefit: Others notice the recognition and become interested in sharing the gratitude. The good behavior will start to spread, showing the power of positive, contagious behavior.

Bolster, Don't Burden, the Brain

These brain-friendly actions, especially the emotionally laden social elements, play to people's interests and how the brain is wired. By incorporating these actions, you can make it easier for employees to see and focus on their line of sight, which will improve your Organizational Clarity grade. ■

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After the Ink Dries: 6 Competencies to Lead Effective Post-Merger Change

By Deborah Hileman

Corporate merger and acquisition activity is lively across numerous industries. Despite the buzz the odds are low that any merger transaction will deliver the promised long-term value, according to numerous studies [see Citations], making the challenges for management even more pressing.

Experts agree that involving and integrating employees from both organizations quickly to create a common identity and culture around a shared vision are the most important factors for post-merger success and long-term sustainability. Building engagement and sustaining productivity while minimizing attrition requires a comprehensive approach that begins well before the merger is official.

By their very nature, mergers create angst and uncertainty among employees, and the significant changes associated with the transition to the "new" company are often met with skepticism, concern and a period of disengagement from the day-to-day work of team members on both sides of the transaction. Stress and anxiety run high. Not everyone will be cheering.

Employees can feel a complete lack of control over their work lives during a merger. According to one study, if there is a perception that the event may significantly impact jobs, the percentage of highly engaged employees is cut in half. The percentage of highly disengaged employees, meanwhile, may jump significantly.

Effective, well-planned communication strategy can help drive desired employee behaviors and build commitment to the new organization. Developing the strategy and executing on it are not just the professional communicator's job—these are competencies for the entire management team. Communicators can lead the charge for sustainable post-merger change with the right competencies and tools for themselves and their management teams. Among these key skills:

Communication Competency #1: Listen, Acknowledge and Affirm

The significant change associated with mergers can be destabilizing even in the best of circumstances. Leadership needs to set the right tone by acknowledging employees' questions and concerns. Calm, confident managers can help assuage employees' feelings of ambiguity during a merger, but it's not an easy task. People feel vulnerable. While organizational change is external, employees take it personally. It is not change itself, rather the transition—exchanging the devil they know for the one they don't—that causes concern and distraction. Formal and informal communication at every level should acknowledge the difficulty that people face in accepting endings and embracing new beginnings.

While communication efforts may focus on how wonderful the new organization will be, it is important to acknowledge the fact that change is coming. Even the simple act of listening to employees' concerns can go a long way toward easing the sense of powerlessness often felt during the transition.

Rather than trying to change employee attitudes about the merger, leadership may be well served by providing employees with the tools they need to manage the changes. For example, planned "ritual" activities that acknowledge the end of the "old" help employees start to let go, and activities to introduce new traditions or ways of working are critical elements of a successful post-merger transition.

By involving employees from both companies in the development of the merged entity's purpose—its mission, beliefs and core values—management can build understanding and commitment.

Communication Competency #2: Build Awareness, Understanding and Commitment

Employees have a basic awareness that the transaction has occurred, but do they really understand what just happened and why? Communication needs to provide employees an understanding of the overall business environment that drove the merger. Working with management, communicators should focus on making sure that there are communication touch points for every employee, regardless of their role in the company.

By involving employees from both companies in the development of the merged entity's purpose—its mission, beliefs and core values—management can build understanding and commitment. Communication to employees (and external stakeholders) can and should link every decision to these new principles. For employees to embrace these principles in times of uncertainty, they need to understand clearly where the company is going, how it plans to get there and what their role is in contributing to the new end-state.

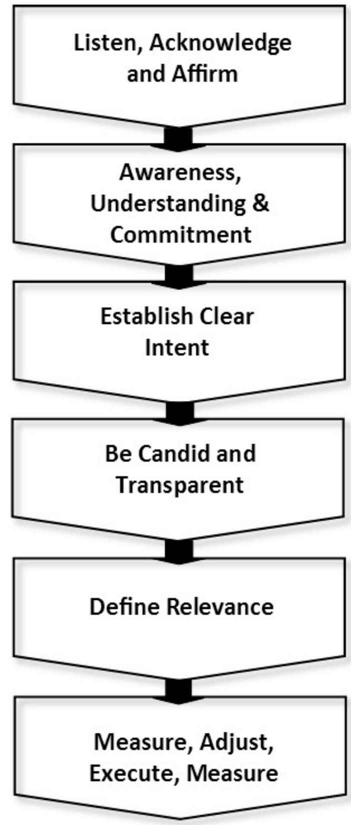
Don't forget about culture! Cultural incompatibility is one of the most-cited reasons that mergers fail to achieve their objectives. Culture is a living thing, and left to its own devices, may not support the company's mission, vision and goals. A well-planned approach to cultural integration involves employees in the operational aspects of the integration. Important questions to consider include: What is the plan to merge the two cultures? Even companies that have similar cultures will discover important differences that must be addressed. Does leadership want to maintain the culture of one company or the other, or do they want to create a new one?

From a tactical perspective, formal communication should occur frequently until the majority of the integration work is complete. If there are no decisions to announce, managers can talk about the decision-making processes taking place and should feel comfortable in saying "I don't know" when decisions have yet to be made. Professional communicators have a bag of tools to facilitate formal and informal communication between line staff and management. While face-to-face communication always is preferable, town halls, video conferences, company-wide calls and other real-time activities can help build awareness and understanding.

Communication Competency #3: Establish Clear Intent

Establishing clear intent supports the development of employee understanding and commitment. Communicators, through careful planning, can help assure that leaders articulate clearly what they plan to accomplish in the merged entity that could not be achieved in either previous company. Among the things to address: Why did the company pursue this? What exactly does it gain? Why is the company's success important? How will it get there? How will success be measured and recognized? How can employees take ownership of their part of making it work?

At the supervisory level, managers need support from communicators to determine what needs to change and the behaviors being sought from employees. Before communicating, managers can develop a clear understanding of leadership's intent by considering planning questions such as: Why are we communicating? What do we expect to change as a result of the communication? What new behaviors do my employees need to adopt? What behaviors need to be maintained, stopped or changed? What communication tactics are needed to support each of these?



Communication Competency #4: Be Candid and Transparent

Employees are adults and deserve nothing less than truthfulness and transparency from management. They can take bad news. But what they cannot tolerate is obfuscation and insincerity. Tough decisions have to be made, and it will take time and work to make them. When leaders are honest and sincere about inevitable changes a merger entails, their forthright approach, while challenging, will ultimately result in a stronger company.

Professional communicators should build these competencies into the strategy and encourage every manager to be honest about both the positive outcomes that the merger will deliver and also the challenges that it presents. Managers can build trust by talking plainly about expectations and goals and being realistic about the amount of time and effort required to become a successful new company.

Avoid corporate-speak and clichés. For example, "merger of equals" is a technical term in a transaction, but the reality for employees is that there is no such thing. One company's CEO will lead the new entity, creating anxiety for the "losing" team. There is a duplication of roles that will touch many employees. There is no such thing as "business as usual," and employees know it. Be honest. Tell people that some changes may be harder than others.

Be cautious about subjective descriptions such as "better" or "best practice," keeping in mind that better is in the eye of the beholder. Invite feedback from employees, positive and critical. Don't avoid tough questions. Address rumors head-on. Don't let misinformation spread and threaten to derail the integration.

Communication Competency #5: Define Relevance

Why is relevance important? Building post-merger engagement is about creating a relevant connection between each employee, his or her manager, coworkers and the company itself. Effective, constant communication is the glue that reinforces the connection.

It's the old "WIIFM" concept: "what's in it for me?" To further build trust in management and commitment to the new organization, employees need to understand why their role is relevant to it. An important goal of communication should be employees who can easily explain the merger to others. Connecting the organization's merger journey with the individual's internal transition creates the relevance needed to evolve thought into action. Communication should establish a clear line of sight to success between the corporate merger strategy and the employee's own personal WIIFM.

Additionally, bringing employees together quickly to collaborate on how to best integrate various functions helps build relevance through the shared work.

Communication Competency #6: Measure, Adjust, Execute, Measure Again

The merged company won't know if it is reaching the desired end state without measuring its progress. In addition to quantitative KPIs (key performance indicators), employee awareness, understanding, attitudes and engagement can be regularly measured during and after a merger. Ideally, employees in both companies are surveyed before the transaction closes to establish a baseline from which to begin. If a pre-closing survey is not feasible, professional communicators should advocate for a survey to take place as soon as possible after the transaction is complete.

Culture surveys can determine the norms in each organization before the merger and periodically thereafter to measure if the new culture is taking root. Engagement surveys provide data that help identify the areas of work needed to change behaviors, maintain productivity and mitigate the loss of organizational knowledge post-close.

Gathering ongoing qualitative feedback helps to identify areas where more effort may be needed to help employees manage the impact of changes on their work and relationship to the company. Direct feedback to managers also can help to identify and address concerns before they are a threat to the success of the integration.

Summary

During times of significant post-merger change, it can be difficult for employees to simply keep their heads above water and stay productive. Maintaining employee engagement in the wake of a merger or acquisition is a key element in its ultimate success. Visible leadership and well-planned integration communication strategies that involve employees at all levels will help keep the merger on track as change is understood, aligned and ultimately effected across the new company. ■

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What's in It for Me and Why Should I Do It? Addressing Diverse Motivations

By Ella Minty

Employees are not, strictly speaking, assets, although recently there has been a significant body of literature calling them "intangible assets." They do not have a very specific value in a company's profit and loss statement, other than the sections related to their financial compensations and bonuses. However, if you manage to get employees on board, get their support and buy-in for the projects or activities your company needs to drive forward, then you have succeeded and the value of your communication effort has been truly worth it.

Every organization, big or small, national or multinational, listed or not, has a corporate mission, accompanied by corporate values, objectives, et cetera. Some of these are larger than life and unattainable in practice; others are sensible and rather easy to work toward.

Assuming that employees old and new will readily adhere to and fully embrace a company's values, mission and objectives would be naïve. Why would they? The majority of them are there from nine to five to:

- get a paycheck at the end of the month,
- have part of their health insurance covered
- be able to pay for a mortgage
- afford tuition for their children
- retire with a decent pension

So how does the pragmatism of the actual reasons the majority of people look for a job align with an organization's employee-engagement objectives? At first sight, the dichotomy is stark and the two do not seem to intersect. However, if you are familiar with the general principles of socio-psychology, behavioral sciences and human motivation, you can easily find the convergence between "What's in it for me and why should I do it?" and the company's culture, mission, values and objectives.

The most important lesson to remember is that we, the people, are not defined by our job titles or work experience: These are what we are, not who we are.

Individuals are motivated by different priorities:

- What is important for those members of staff working in HR may bear no value whatsoever for people in engineering
- The staff in the U.S. head office may be looking forward to the company's Labor Day barbeque, while those located in its European branches couldn't care less about it
- Launching an internal blood donation campaign in support of a charity may hold high significance to middle-age employees and those who have health-related issues, with almost no contribution from young employees and singles

Motivation is a very powerful factor, and if you know which tools to use and methods to apply, then it will fall into place. The most

Before Anything Else…

1. Find out what similar motivational activities have been attempted in the past
2. Inquire which ones worked and which didn't
3. You can ask for views as to why some were a failure/success, but always draw your own conclusions
4. Try to take a random sample of employees and, informally, ask:
   - *"Would this* (as in the initiative/message) *motivate you?"*
   - *"What would make it count for you?"*
   - *"Why would you/wouldn't you be supporting it?"*

While the sample size chosen may not always be representative for the entire organization, that sampling, at least, would provide you with a qualitative and evidence-based approach for your communication efforts.

important lesson to remember is that we, the people, are not defined by our job titles or work experience: These are what we are, not who we are.

The easiest way to profile your employee target audience is to refer to Abraham Maslow's *A Theory of Human Motivation*, anecdotally known as *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*. Tailoring your messages, detailing the tactics of your engagement campaign and understanding the social profile and backgrounds of the employees you will be engaging matters as much, if not much more, than the platform you'll be choosing for your messages or the visuals accompanying it.

Let's take Maslow's motivational layers and address them one by one:

1. Physiological

The majority of employees will fall into this category. Basic physiological needs must be met and any corporate activity that will affect their ability to afford to eat and drink is not likely to be supported or easily embraced. Salary cuts, unpaid leave and compulsory redundancy affect these needs.

2. Safety

This layer generally relates to the employee's ability to afford a place to live. Feeling safe can also relate to the financial safety the employer can or cannot provide and how corporate projects and changes will affect this feeling of safety.

3. Love/Belonging

Aristotle argued that "man is, by nature, a social animal." It is imperative for you to identify which employees fall into this category, for they are most likely to easily embrace both the negative and the positive news coming from the head office. They are also the ones who will influence your communication efforts, adversely or positively. You need to understand them, bring them on board and make them feel that they are a significant part of the communication effort.

4. Esteem

Commanding respect is what this category is all about. These employees constantly need to feel respected, appreciated and valued. If your engagement initiative includes a consultation process, make sure staff are included or, at least, invited to submit their views. This category of employees perceives itself to be above the norm, and matters related to money, social circles and inclusion are less important to them.

5. Self-actualization

If you use the right approach, these employees are the easiest category to get on your side from the start. They are the ones who believe in a higher purpose, in the company's mission and in their actual responsibility to make the business expand and thrive. They are not self-centered and generally seek to understand the overarching purpose of the initiative you seek to promote. Unless you find the "higher purpose" of a communication effort, they will not be easily motivated to act.

If you work for a large organization, one with global offices and variable staff demographics, then matters become more complicated. Not only will you have to take the five layers presented above into account, but you will also have to consider employees':

- Religion
- Nationality
- Local customs
- Socio-economic indicators and
- Age

Naturally, you may argue that the age consideration applies to any organization, regardless of size. Of course it does but, in the case of a multi-national company, it applies much more. Why? Because age, in this case, needs to be evaluated in conjunction with the local culture, religion and nationality of the employee segment in question.

Age plays a significant role in the credibility of an individual and his or her perceived competency to lead teams, direct tasks and assume responsibility for the actions directed. There are numerous cultures across the world where age goes hand in hand with competency, i.e. the younger one is, the less knowledgeable and/or competent one is perceived to be. Generational differences in the workplace are often a challenge, but dealing with a younger boss in these cultures is perhaps the most difficult. Seminal in this case is the work of Peter Cappelli, professor of management at the Wharton School and co-author of *Managing the Older Worker,* and of Jeanne Meister, the author of *The 2020 Workplace.*

Religion plays a significant role for any employee's motivation and morale; use it wisely and it will work miracles. Although we live and work in a globalized world, societal and local values are not dissipating and merging; on the contrary, in an effort to retain the local culture's authenticity, they become stronger and more intrinsic.

Understanding the religious demographics of employees is important: The practicing Muslims, Catholics, Jews and Orthodox relate more easily to messages that would be assimilated to the company's goals and values; these give a higher meaning and purpose to their work, the same way a strong faith does. This has been evidenced by numerous academic articles and books, such as: "The influence of religion-based workplace spirituality on business leaders' decision-making: An inter-faith study," published in the Journal of Management and Organisation; The Corporate Brand by Nicholas Ind; "Religion as an environmental influence on enterprise culture—The case of Britain in the 1980s," published in the International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research; *Toward a Theory-Based Measurement of Culture in Human Factors in Information Systems*, edited by two PhDs (Szewczak and Snodgrass with Canisius College); "Does Culture Affect Economic Outcomes?" published in the Journal of Economic Perspectives, and many others.

Messaging therefore needs to take into account individuals' religious beliefs or spirituality. Of particular importance when crafting written messages or delivering speeches (during sales conferences, team-building activities or any other public event) are the potential jokes ascribed to various nationalities or religions and the need to refrain from vulgar expressions. For instance, while "for the love of God" may be laughed off by a majority of westerners, many would not perceive such expressions as funny or ice-breaking, on the contrary.

If a company has a very high percentage of religious employees, then messages related to duty, higher purpose and doing the right thing while acting ethically and fairly are highly likely to resonate much more than any other message platform related to tangible assets, growth projections and EBITDA. Conversely, if a company's religious profile is low, the most important thing is to attempt to draw out the sort of values and beliefs the company's employees abide by and craft messages in such a way that they resonate with the majority of employees.

Knowing employees' nationalities will also help you frame the tone of your messages. Geert Hofstede's work on cultures will be invaluable to your activity, and familiarizing yourself with the concepts of "high-power distance cultures" and "low-power distance cultures" will provide you with a good foundation on which to build your engagement efforts.

In Hofstede's assertion, "power distance" refers to the manner in which a society deals with levels of status or social power [bit.ly/1TmpUJn].

a. In the case of a high-power distance culture/society, those who are in positions of power have numerous privileges, everyone has their specific place without many possibilities of jumping societal ranks (Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Arab, Northern, Eastern and Western African cultures), inequality is the norm and the political ruling of the country/society in question is often military, totalitarian or autocratic; initiatives in the workplace are frowned upon and challenging workplace leaders is wholly unacceptable.
b. In the case of a low-power distance culture, those who are in positions of power exercise humility and leadership in coaching/mentoring, individuality is encouraged and appreciated, equality of rights and career progression are highly encouraged and societal structure is based on participation, dialogue and power sharing (Western culture).

For multinationals who have various regional offices, an acute awareness of the principles underpinning Hofstede's cultural dimensions is imperative for the success of any messaging: Befriending employees who are accustomed to very formal behavior from their bosses or using a friendly tone would be inappropriate and ineffective; seriousness and formality should be exercised. Conversely, using an authoritarian leadership style in a flexible working environment where team spirit and camaraderie are rife would be highly detrimental for the messaging goals of the business.

As a hypothetical example, let's say that a competency framework needs to be rolled out across the regions of a multinational business. The business has two global offices, one in London, the other in Mumbai. The messaging board for the London-based staff would be focused on personal development, opportunity for advancement, bridging competency gaps by providing new training opportunities and the possibility of being reassigned to other areas of the business where an individual is more likely to thrive. The messaging board for the Mumbai-based staff would emphasize solidifying the staff's leadership positions together with the added value they brought to the business, ensuring they have all the necessary support from HQ to grow the business and make it a regional leader in its field.

Local socioeconomic indicators should be taken into account if you try to supplement engagement efforts with material gain. The salary of a managing director in the U.S. or Europe is generally very different from the salary of someone with the same position in a developing or under-developed economy. Be careful not to offend with these incentives, because money and material gains differ dramatically from one case to another. For instance, a $400 prize/charity support may be significant for the U.S. but may translate to little in Denmark and Norway or a life-changing amount in Delhi.

Use the answer to this chapter's question as the cornerstone of your motivation drivers. Think about the unique selling points of every single communication effort you have to deploy; think about how best to translate it into a style, language and narrative the socio-psychological parameters presented above can relate to. ■

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The Stay Interview: A Strategy to Reduce Turnover and Retain Your Top Performers

By Leesa M. Schipani

Turnover in the PR industry is too high. While experts have varying opinions on just what the number is, **Nobscot Corporation** estimates that voluntary and involuntary turnover is as high as 55% [bit.ly/2e6oWWe], a turnover rate that is slightly less than the retail and hospitality industries, which traditionally have the lowest retention.

Understanding the cost of turnover is key for leaders at all levels of the PR organization. Once again studies on the actual cost of turnover vary. A conservative approach by **The Society for Human Resource Management** [shrm.org] suggests that every time a salaried employee leaves an organization, an average of six to nine months' salary is spent to replace the employee. For a manager making $40,000 a year, that's $20,000 to $30,000. Recruiting, training and lost productivity are the primary drivers of these costs. The bigger question to consider is how your client will be impacted. Relationships are priceless and your account managers build solid relationships with your internal or external customers. In high-touch, relationship-driven businesses, the loss of high-performing employees clearly signals the potential for a loss of revenue and profits.

So what's driving high turnover? Laurent L. Laurence, associate director of public relations for the **Public Relations Society of America** (PRSA), suggests that poor management is the cause [bit.ly/2dVNpKW]. Research has shown time and again that employees leave managers. Employee engagement thought leader Bob Kelleher says that "35% of U.S. workers said they would be willing to forego a substantial pay raise to see their direct supervisor fired" [bit.ly/1d8EqOs]. Since managers have direct day-to-day contact with their team, they have the biggest influence on retention. Undoubtedly, we have work to do to capture the hearts and minds of current and future employees. In an industry where most agree that onboarding is nonexistent, understanding your new em-

Five Questions to Ask Every Employee

When starting your stay interviews, schedule 20-30 minutes for your conversation. As you progress, build trust and gather actionable feedback, you may find you need to reserve more time. For the initial conversations, select high-performing and high-potential people on your team. Work your way to employees who may be satisfied and are giving required effort. Spend the least amount of time with the folks that clearly are not the right fit and help them self-assess and move on.

1. What motivates you to stay with the organization?
2. Why do you want to succeed in your role?
3. Which aspects of our culture work for you? Which do not?
4. If you were your own manager, how would you manage yourself?
5. How can I help you have a more rewarding experience each day?

ployee's experience at the 30-to-45-day point will help you to course correct as needed.

The stay interview is a tool that can be helpful in improving employee retention. Unlike an exit interview, which is conducted once an employee has made the decision to leave, a stay interview is conducted with employees throughout their tenure. Feedback gathered through a stay interview gives you an opportunity to make changes before the decision to leave is made. You may be saying to yourself, "I don't have the time to conduct regular interviews with my people." Today you are spending significant time away from your paying clients or internal customers to recruit, hire and train new employees. Investing just a fraction of that time in stay interviews and increasing employee retention will pay huge dividends.

Your goal is to create an environment where your employees feel safe sharing the good, the bad and the ugly. If done right, your staff will feel comfortable sharing without being asked.

Here's How You Begin Integrating Stay Interviews Into Your Employee Relations Practices

Keep it simple and get the conversation started. Your goal is to engage employees in a conversation around why they like working at your organization and learn what could be better. Because people work for and leave managers, the conversation should originate with the direct supervisor. Often HR wants to take on this role, but this approach fails to aid in building the vital employee/supervisor relationship. Many managers may not be comfortable in this role and will need help learning how to ask for feedback. Recruit managers who have a good rapport with their employees to be your early adopters and encourage them to mentor their peers.

Benefits of Adopting a Stay Interview Strategy

- Build engagement by allowing opinions to be heard, acted on and cared about
- Target new hires, high performers or high-potentials and learn what is working and what can be improved
- Demonstrate that you're taking the time to understand what's working and what's not
- Identify key factors that glue employees to your organization and triggers that might cause them to leave
- Help managers better understand how their actions might impact engagement levels

Anticipate that some employees will not be transparent at first. Your goal is to create an environment where your employees feel safe sharing the good, bad and ugly. If done right, your staff will feel comfortable sharing without being asked. Be patient, nonjudgmental and retaliation-free. As with any relationship, starting the dialogue and acting upon the feedback will show that you're truly interested in hearing what they have to say. As you continue to have conversations and employees share their experience with each other, you'll find them more willing to open up and have more productive discussions. Start with team members that you know will feel good about helping to enhance their workplace experience.

Individualize the conversation with each person. For your conversations to be viewed as authentic, focus on the unique personalities, skills and experiences of your team. Ask questions like "what inspires you?" and "why do you do what you do?" as icebreakers to learn more about your employees. You can then move into more job-related questions like:

- What motivates you to stay with this organization?
- Which aspects of our culture work for you? Which do not?
- What can I do to help you have a more fulfilling experience each day?

Show your people that you are truly interested in what they have to say through your genuine tone and open, relaxed body language. While listening to their thoughts, try not to get defensive or the sharing will stop. Thank them for their candid responses, particularly when comments relate to your management style. Remember: Feedback is a gift.

Act on the feedback received. Failure to act on the feedback in a timely manner will destroy your ability to be seen as credible and quickly thwart your efforts to acquire rich information. Based on the constructive criticism you receive, let the individual know what you have the ability to change, who you'll need to collaborate with and what you are not able to effect. Provide a realistic timeframe for discussions with partners and ask for your employees' patience while you work to enhance their experience with your organization. If the major piece of feedback is around how you manage this person, start with small changes and check in to see how you're doing. Your small efforts will be appreciated and will demonstrate your willingness to learn and grow as a leader.

Continue the conversation at regular intervals. Your first exchange may be a little challenging if your people don't feel comfortable opening up to you. Stick with it and check in with your employees periodically to show that you are committed to understanding what's keeping them at your organization. Following through on the commitments you make during initial and subsequent discussions will demonstrate that you want to hear from your team. At minimum, these check-ins are most effective when conducted quarterly, and organizations with high employee engagement make stay interviews part of monthly performance feedback discussions.

According to Anna Ruth Williams, PR Daily, the PR industry is "ripe for disruption" and workplace culture is among the top areas that need attention. Hiring, training and retaining talent that can meet the needs of the internal or external client is mission-critical. As Millennials and Gen Z continue to enter the industry, they will be looking for challenging assignments that tap into their strengths. We all hear that this generation stays with an organization for approximately two years. This is true if you don't provide them with new challenges, opportunities and appropriate pay increases. What better way to find out what will glue these talented multi-

Did You Know…

- 30% of workers are "engaged"
- 52% are "disengaged"
- 18% are "actively disengaged"

—State of the American Workplace, Gallup

Employee engagement differs from employee satisfaction and employee happiness in that engaged employees have an emotional commitment to the organization and its goals. This deep connection with the organization promotes discretionary effort on the part of the employee. Simply put, employees who are deeply connected to their organization go the extra mile. (Forbes, AON Hewitt)

The Great Place to Work Institute has been identifying and studying workplaces for 25 years and believes that building trust in your organization will drive employee engagement and discretionary effort. This trust all begins with the manager that you work for. Stay interviews are a powerful tool that can open the lines of communication and build trust.

tasking digital natives to your organization than to conduct stay interviews? ■

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TEN10: How One Brand Built Engagement Globally Through Recognition

By Keith Burton and Dharma Subramanian

We live in a time when people are simply too busy—overwhelmed with work, gagging on data and starving for information. We multitask while taking conference calls, race through emails or use a text or a voice message as our proxy when a face-to-face discussion is more important.

When **Tenneco Corp**., Lake Forest, Ill., administered its 2014 **IBM** Kenexa Viewpoint survey to approximately 30,000 global employees and more than 22,000 people responded, the company knew its people had something to say. And its leaders knew taking time to listen and thoughtfully respond was a key priority. Extensive focus-group research with employees and leaders helped uncover the theme of "lack of recognition" within the company—a chronic issue in organizations worldwide. TEN10, a global employee-recognition program, was developed and launched in April 2015 to address the research findings and help build real engagement through recognition at Tenneco.

What were its objectives? How was it built? And what happened as a result of it?

Tenneco administered its survey to evaluate employee engagement and look at key areas of focus. While the Viewpoint survey highlighted areas that needed to be addressed, it failed to explain why these areas had become more acute and how the company could act to mitigate or resolve them. When the Viewpoint findings were reviewed at Tenneco's senior management team meeting, leaders identified the need to conduct additional focus group research to gain more context and insights.

Focus group research goals included:

- Go deeper with qualitative interviews to understand the context and details behind survey findings
- Determine employee awareness regarding Tenneco's vision and how this directly affects personnel
- Gauge levels of awareness regarding the company's values and how these are embodied at work
- Highlight concerns and topics of interest for employees
- Evaluate internal communication at Tenneco, identifying specific courses of action that could be taken to improve employee needs

During a 90-day period, Tenneco partnered with four communications firms to conduct focus groups with more than 1,000 front-line managers and hourly employees, and 1:1 interviews with some 40 executive leaders and plant managers in 18 global locations in the Americas, Europe and China.

A common discussion guide was created to lead in-depth discussions with respondents globally. The 1:1 interviews ranged from 45 to 60 minutes in length, while the focus groups ran approximately 90 minutes. Facilitators who led the interviews spoke in the native languages of the employees.

Why Quantitative Research Is Never Enough

Companies for many years have adopted quantitative research for global employee engagement studies. These studies have given companies a look at data and information that can be linked to employee attitudes and certain business outcomes.

A mistake some companies make, however, is to conduct an employee engagement study and assume knowledge of the high-level global findings is sufficient to drive a more engaged workforce.

More is required. Companies must:

- **Go deeper with qualitative interviews** to understand the context and details behind global survey findings;
- **Provide an in-depth focus on employee perceptions** regarding the challenges and opportunities relating to their company's strategic plans and business objectives;
- **Determine employee awareness regarding a company's mission, vision and values**, and how this directly affects workers and motivates people to improve their performance;
- **Highlight major concerns and topics of interest for employees** in terms of their jobs;
- **Better understand operational issues, policies and practices affecting employee engagement**; and
- **Evaluate internal communication inside a company**, identifying specific courses of action that can be undertaken to improve audience needs, communication channels and the relevance of their content.

Determine employee awareness regarding a company's mission, vision and values, and how this directly affects workers and motivates people to improve their performance.

The focus group research and 1:1 interviews helped to uncover the global theme of "lack of recognition." To address this, the TEN10 recognition program was developed and launched, with the objectives of:

- Creating a unified global recognition program involving all Tenneco employees
- Celebrating those who embody Tenneco's shared values
- Incentivizing performance and restoring a sense of pride
- Building the reputation internally for a credible, authentic program

TEN10, a customized award program driven by peer nominations at the front-line level, kicked off in April 2015. Using forms distributed to all Tenneco locations, employees were encouraged to nominate their coworkers for embodying one or more of Tenneco's 10 shared values. More than 7,000 nominations were submitted. Local leaders reviewed these nominations to identify 1,000 local winners, who were honored during a global "Month of Celebration" held at approximately 100 plant and office locations in September 2015. Regional HR leaders further narrowed the list to 60 global semifinalists, who were then vetted by a panel of the company's senior leaders. The 11 global winners (10 individuals, one team) were selected by Tenneco's chairman and CEO.

A five-phase program was used to execute TEN10:

01/ ONBOARD (90 Days)

A detailed project plan was finalized. A robust toolkit of materials called the "TEN10 Program Package" was developed to support senior leaders and managers in the rollout of TEN10.

02/ LAUNCH (45 Days)

Facilities kicked off the nomination submission process and began gathering names of nominees. Calls were facilitated with director/facility-level leaders to prep them for the "Month of Celebration" in September. By the end of this phase, facility leaders identified their 10 local winners to celebrate in September and also selected an individual or team to represent their facility in the next round of review.

03/ CELEBRATE (30 Days)

During this dedicated Month of Celebration, facilities celebrated their success, honoring their people, including 10 local winners. They recognized Tenneco's growth, history, its legacy and shared values in each location. These events were publicized in local communities. During the latter part of the month, regional HR directors reviewed the names gathered throughout Tenneco to identify 60 semi-finalists.

04/ IDENTIFY (90 Days)

Each member of the executive strategy group provided recommendations for the top 10 winners, with the final decision made by Tenneco's chairman and CEO. Bios of those recommended contained in-depth narratives on the individual or team; factors supporting the nomination; details on their role and function; and other important information to help the senior leadership team make an informed decision.

05/ HONOR (120 Days)

The 11 winners were unveiled on a global webcast and celebrated around the world. As part of the celebration plan, the company's chairman and CEO visited every location with members of the senior management team to recognize winners with their families and peers.

TEN10 has been an overwhelming success at Tenneco. It generated more than 7,000 global, peer nominations. From October to December, dedicated panels of leadership reviewed these global submissions and carefully narrowed them down to 1,000 candidates, then 60 semi-finalists, before identifying 11 Global Winners. The 11 Global Winners were announced and honored by the Company's chairman and CEO during a February all-employee town hall meeting. The diverse group of winners included individuals from China, Spain, South Africa, Poland, Mexico, the U.S.

Touchstones for Driving Change Through Communication and Engagement

Following is our Top 10 list for driving change in an enterprise:

1. Define the change: It's all about the "Why?"
2. Create a roadmap to help employees visualize the change
3. Always ask: "What does the audience need to be more effective in their work?"
4. Listen, communicate and engage
5. Create content that is dynamic and accessible
6. Be unrelenting in follow-up
7. Align strategic plans and actions with desired culture
8. Share the good, bad and ugly examples
9. Challenge and involve others at every level
10. Keep score to determine outcomes, outgrowths and value created for the enterprise through new behaviors

and one team from India, ranging from line workers to managers.

TEN10 met and exceeded every objective the company set: It has proven to be a successful, global recognition program involving all Tenneco employees, celebrating those who embody the company's shared values and providing education and reinforcement of the shared values in ways that celebrate local cultural needs and language requirements. Storytelling was used to bring TEN10 to life through the images and words of its award nominees and winners. As a peer-driven program, TEN10 also has increased employee engagement levels, with close to 25% of the employee population being nominated as part of the program. Having already gained the reputation internally as a credible, authentic program, TEN10 will remain an intrinsic part of the company's culture in the future. ■

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Next Trends in Engagement: Great Content, Fewer Emails, Shorter Meetings

By PR News Editors

Internal communications and employee engagement become hot topics whenever communicators talk shop. Amy Kot thinks about these topics full time. The **Edelman** SVP has advised a global array of companies for nearly two decades about how best to speak to employees, improve retention and accelerate business performance.

Kot shared with us some best-in-class approaches designed to make your internal communications resonate with your customers, aka your employees.

Overall, brands should emphasize employee-centric communications that inspire plenty of dialogue as opposed to one-way, top-down models. Engagement is particularly important today since "turnover is so expensive... and social media makes it easy for motivated, engaged employees to be tremendous brand ambassadors," she says. The specifics:

1. Content Is Content Is Content

A great way to think about employee communications, Kot says, is to blur the line between external and internal. "The external is the internal," she says. After all, the content you provide to employees must be similar in quality to anything you write for external use: "sharp, fresh and to the point...that will capture—and hold—employees' increasingly limited attention."

Briefly: She advocates "short, snackable, visual" content, including "short-form articles, videos, infographics, listicles and **BuzzFeed**-style quizzes."

A tip designed to boost engagement is to include a call to action (heard that term before?). Ask employees to enter an online quiz or a photo contest and share the results via a social platform, like **Yammer**, Kot writes.

Homeland: Similar to external communications, it's critical to reach employees where they are, she writes. "Today's employees unlock their personal smartphones with a thumbprint and have 24/7 access to endless social and news feeds. Leading companies are capitalizing on this trend with internal news portals and apps that work on employees' personal devices, with content curated newsfeed style so it's easy to access, digest and share."

I Did It My Way: Many leading brands have found nobody tells their story better than their customers. The **FedEx Instagram** account, for example, is entirely populated with consumer-generated content. Similarly, Kot writes that best-in-class brands delegate "the bulk of [employee communications] content" to employees, deputizing them as citizen journalists. "Have them interview leaders, blog, tweet, photograph and film their experience to bring it to life for their colleagues," she writes.

2. E-maelstrom

"Employees are drowning in email," Kot says. What to do? Communicators must inventory what's going out, she says. Usually "email overload is a symptom of too many one-off missives from disparate teams," Kot says. As a result, smart brands create "cross-functional internal communications advisory groups to align disconnected functions around consistent processes and core messaging." Protocols are developed "to bundle similar messages from multiple senders and funnel them through a roster of fewer, more effective channels (e.g., all HR messages are included in a monthly e-newsletter)."

Put the Top Down: But to get an entire company to streamline its email flow, doesn't everyone have to comply? "Yes. This must start at the top," Kot says. In fact, a common problem for internal communicators, she writes, is that leaders of various business units "each have communication agendas and initiatives that compete for employee mindshare." An editorial calendar can rein in email.

Check, Please: She advocates guidelines and checklists for content creators "before they hit send on one-off emails and [to] prioritize messages so employees understand at a glance" emails that require immediate attention. Set up a four-tier message prioritization system. Tier I includes top-priority corporate initiatives and CEO communications; Tier IV is routine communications (staffing announcements, IT updates, local site communications). Only Tier I messages warrant all-employee emails.

3. Meet Me Halfway

You thought email was the only overload? You've not attended enough meetings. In her article, Kot singles out all-hands meetings and suggests ways to energize them. First, instead of a top-down agenda, use a virtual voting tool to let staff choose topics. "Crowdsourcing the agenda enables leaders to focus on priority topics and engages employees from the start," she says. Limit meetings to fewer than two hours (bless you, Amy).

I Can't Hear You: Employees, like customers, want to be heard, Kot says, so provide many ways for them to participate. "Beyond live Q&A, invite attendees to pose questions throughout the meeting via internal social channels, hashtags or a virtual real-time queue such as **SocialQ&A.com**," she writes. "Capturing questions can also serve as a metric for tracking engagement over time."

And: Shift the spotlight off the CEO and onto division leaders; use the 70/30 rule, limit presentations to not more than 70% of the meeting, with 30% for dialogue; insert dialogue throughout, don't leave it until the end; make sure all materials are available to employees after meetings with a recap of takeaways; "quick feedback surveys and/or mobile polls during or after a town hall provide insight for planning future meetings, as well as tracking engagement over time. ■

How to Ensure Your PR Team Is Fully Engaged, Motivated and Appreciated

By Wendy Lund

In most cases employees are, and will always be, a brand's greatest asset. They drive in-house and agency success. Engaging them should be the highest priority.

It's the CEO's responsibility to help achieve a singular, straightforward vision that propels the business and energizes employees to be best in class, renowned for unrivaled talent, forward-thinking capabilities and unrelenting client service.

Achieving a vision like this requires building an incredible company spirit where every employee feels that "we are in this together" and maintaining an exceptional culture that embraces doing something different for clients, colleagues and the community. Central to the creation of this shared passion for success is a dedicated plan for actively engaging and motivating employees.

To help foster a culture built on achieving greatness, it's important to offer employees highly experiential and hands-on experiences that relate directly to the transforming and diverse work they do.

Engagement Tied to Client Achievements

It's critical to motivate employees to avoid settling for the status quo and encourage them to think deeper, go the extra mile and do things differently and better. A lot of cliches, yes, but they are keys to better performance. To help staff live, breathe and celebrate great thinking and outcomes and to integrate this into a company's culture, there needs to be an ongoing commitment to harnessing employees' dedication to their work. Several of the following have proven successful:

- An awards program that recognizes employees who epitomize the values of the company.
- Monthly spotlights of great initiatives to highlight teams that execute new, different and effective programs.
- Timed to the **NCAA** men's basketball tournament or some other sporting event, an annual competition among teams. The teams are awarded points for receiving accolades, growing revenue, orchestrating program milestones and sparking innovation.
- Welcome lunches with the CEO for new employees. This allows the CEO to meet new staff and share the company's vision.
- "High fives" at monthly staff meetings to honor people who have done things differently and better.

These are examples only. Options are limitless, of course. The point is to find what works best with your employees and have fun doing it.

Training & Development & Distinct Needs

To help foster a culture built on achieving greatness, it's important to offer employees highly experiential and hands-on experiences that relate directly to the transforming and diverse work they do.

For example, as we know, PR today is global. As boundaries disintegrate, it's essential that all employees and PR teammates have an understanding of the regional and local nuances that color effective communications around the world.

To that end, companies have given staff the opportunity to spend time working in overseas offices to help expand their global mindset. Incidentally, the same holds true for overseas employees—having them work for a period in your U.S. office(s) can be beneficial. Beyond that, encourage employees to work in other offices throughout the U.S., should they have the desire to temporarily relocate to a new city.

One area that always seems to be a challenge in engaging employees is new business. This is true particularly when it comes to balancing and prioritizing new business with existing (and paying!) work.

On the agency side, to elevate employees' comfort with—and love for—new business, consider staging a "new business boot camp," where you introduce formal methodology and approaches to new business and provide resources to support these activities.

In addition to formal programs, "lunch & learn" opportunities are an excellent way to train staff through highly interactive sessions. Outside experts should be considered to help facilitate discussions with senior managers on communications best practices, managing people and teams for success and mastering sound financial management.

Maintain a Work-Life Balance

Various efforts to engage employees are all fine and well, but how can you keep staff refreshed, at the top of its game and motivated? It's critical to pay close attention to specific needs of each employee and ensure a good work-life balance. As previously mentioned, employees likely are your greatest asset, and everything we as managers do should be carried out with an eye toward creating a superior work experience.

From encouraging team members to live a healthy lifestyle to allowing them to take the time they need with their families (and actually use their vacation time) to providing a liberal telecommuting policy to something as simple as a Summer Friday program. All of these can make employees feel good about themselves and their work. I find that the quality of the work and the team spirit is best when employees know that they and their work-life needs are being considered.

By treating staff as your brand's greatest asset and making sure that its every contribution is valued, you will be able to pull greatness out of every employee and achieve your company vision. ■

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Enhance Company & Employee Performance via Vacations and Clearer Expectations

By Mike McDougall

It came as no surprise, as much as I feigned shock and dismay. A two-day, late-summer getaway I'd planned with my wife for months was underway, and the requests began flowing: an email asking for a quick review on one item; the I-know-you're-out-but-am-leaving-a-message-just-in-case voicemail; and a series of texts from a client encouraging me to break away for an overseas conference call midday.

We're connected as never before, even to the point of mocking our lifestyles, as Christoph Waltz does well in the **Samsung** Galaxy Note 7 ad ("Americans, I don't understand you. Working all the time, busy, busy, busy"). Factor in the demands on PR pros, many whose responsibilities fluctuate with the day's news, and business and personal time too often are indistinguishable. Where does that leave the concept of vacation? Should PR leaders attempt to have employees use most or all of it?

Last year, 55% of Americans failed to take their full vacation allotment, according to a study by the **U.S. Travel Association**, a 13% increase from 2013. Looking over a longer horizon, the use of paid time off (PTO) was steady from 1976 through 2000, when the average redemption rate began a steady decline. A study from the same group this past June noted over the course of the last 16 years workers have reduced their vacations by one full week.

With the constant demands of global business, shorter deadlines and rising efficiency expectations, it could be said that PTO is a vestige of a different era. Perhaps it should be reconsidered altogether. After all, other world markets are asking more of their workforce, especially South Korea. Data from the **Expedia** 2015 Vacation Deprivation Study shows that of the 15 days' vacation offered on average there, employees took advantage of only six.

Employees who skimp on their PTO: It may reflect an inability to plan their time wisely, which could be an issue in effectively servicing clients and working with peers when in the office.

Yet that doesn't seem to be the ideal solution, especially when the benefits of vacation are well established. A **Diamond Resorts International** survey conducted by **Nielsen** found 71% of people who take a yearly vacation are satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs. Just 46% who fail to take a yearly vacation are satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs.

It's not only the employee benefiting—the organization does as well. Writing for the **Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM)**, Stephen Miller, CEBS, notes that a 2013 SHRM study indicated HR leaders found employees who took their PTO were more creative, showed increased productivity and were better overall performers.

Jim Bush, president of **Bush Communi-**

cations, also sees another side to employees who skimp on their PTO: It may reflect an inability to plan their time wisely, which could be an issue in effectively servicing clients and working with peers when in the office.

Ensuring that PTO has the maximum return for everyone starts with leaders in each organization, many of whom are guilty of the vacation-reduction trend (myself included).

1. The first need is to establish clear expectations of why vacation is provided and how it should be used, recognizing this can differ widely based on employer.

This goes beyond a stock paragraph in the employee handbook and the early December use-it-now memo from HR. It requires regular conversation and feedback. You could do worse than elevating the topic to a similar level as other aspects of the business.

For instance, can an employee take two straight weeks off for a European holiday, completely disconnecting until he or she returns? After piloting this with one of my team members to mixed results, we have made our expectations much clearer. Now, we talk through what is needed from the company and the employee to make vacations occur smoothly.

2. Discuss the maximum continuous time allowed away.

Managed with a little imagination, even five days can stretch to almost 10 when factoring in weekends and departing on a Friday afternoon. For some businesses, even one week can be too much; three to four-day weekends may be the norm.

3. Agree on coverage in the office, keeping vital work flowing while also accounting for unexpected needs.

The U.S. Travel Association study showed that 30% of Americans weren't spending time away because they believed no one else could do their job. If this fear rings true, consider vacations an opportunity to promote cross-training—before, during and continuing after the PTO period.

4. Make requirements clear as to checking in digitally or phoning.

While the ideal would be to remain completely dark, this may be impractical owing to your company's size or projects. It simply might be the nature of PR today. The often-cited mountain of work that looms over someone's return to the office usually is manageable when tasks are kept moving by clients, peers, vendors or others versus piling up.

5. And when the date is on the horizon, begin helping the employee ease into vacation.

A **University of Colorado at Boulder** study included having people imagine their vacation in advance, which led to a more satisfying experience than simply remembering it after the fact. This also allows for a more seamless temporary transition of duties, versus the 6 p.m. dump-and-run.

And my brief getaway that began with a flurry of requests? A couple of gentle reminders of where I was, a firm but kind "no" when hints were ignored and 30 minutes set aside on the second day to clear through important emails made all the difference. Oh, and a couple glasses of wine at 3 p.m. by the lake. After all, it was vacation. ■

Mike McDougall, APR, is president of McDougall Communications. @McDougallPR

Bolstering Organization Motivation and Morale Through Connection to the Mission

By David Alexander

Strengthening your employees' connection to your organization's mission is a fundamental way to foster motivation and morale. For the most part, non-profits have the advantage as they tend to attract talent that is intrinsically committed to the customers they serve—yet reinforcing this connection provides a powerful morale boost that can further deepen your team's resolve to support long-term goals that have little or no immediate returns.

We have taken a number of approaches to this at **Rotary International**. To enhance our employees' understanding and commitment to our top goal of eradicating polio, an effort we have been committed to for more than 30 years, we needed to bring them closer to an effort taking place far from their homes.

We developed two programs to achieve this. The first was a staff trip to India to see our eradication program in action. Employees had the chance to participate in our initiative on the ground—seeing first-hand the work they are supporting every day through their jobs. As up to 172 million children were immunized across India, staff also experienced how Rotary connects with partners, health professionals, field workers, and with local communities to protect every child from polio.

The second program offered employees a chance to participate in "Miles to End Polio," an annual bike race to raise funds for eradication efforts. Traditionally this race is organized by and for our Rotary club members. Opening the opportunity up to our employees allowed them to connect to millions of our customers—Rotary members—and

Not every organization can imitate Rotary International's initiatives, but these are four takeaways any brand can take to heart.

Reflections From the Field

By Stéphanie Tobler Mucznik, Rotary Senior Media Relations Specialist for Europe and Africa, Participant in Rotary International Staff Trip to India

As I look up after trickling two drops of polio vaccine into a baby girl's mouth, I see a young man crawling across the platform, using his hands and arms to move forward. His legs are crossed and he pulls them behind him as he crawls.

I am standing at the train station in Moradabad, India, and all I can think is: He is the reason why we do this, why Rotary is committed to eradicating polio.

Since I started working as senior media relations specialist at Rotary in 2012, I have been involved with the polio program on a daily basis, informing journalists in Europe and Africa. However, until this trip, I have never been on site, only covering the issue from afar. Having had the opportunity to participate in the program, I am more convinced than ever about its value and impact. And it makes me proud to be part of something meaningful. I believe that I will be even more credible when talking to journalists about the polio program. I will be able to pull from personal experience instead of talking points. I will be able to use my emotions instead of quotes from Rotary members, and I will be able to explain this complex program and the challenges it faces because I have seen how it is tackled on the ground. I believe that this trip has made me a better brand ambassador for Rotary. This experience will not only benefit my work, but also those following Rotary's story.

see how their passions and contributions are helping achieve our goals.

One of the best ways to deepen employee connection to your cause is through programming that links their participation to the achievement of organization goals.

Both programs were rooted in a strategy of showing employees how they are in lockstep with millions of others moving toward the same goal. As we sought to drive engagement, learning and understanding of Rotary both internally and externally, four factors emerged as key to success [see graphic].

Ensuring Investment and Engagement in the Program

For employees to gain the most from this type of programming, it is important they are engaged in the process. Factors like protected time for the programming, pre-work to reflect on the experience in advance, and demonstrating dedication to the initiative are all important ingredients.

As an example and specific to our two programs, employees were asked to submit an essay explaining why they wanted to participate. The essays were inspiring—and showed us that we were engaging a group that would make the most of the opportunity. Here a few excerpts from the essays we received:

"What I try to remember every day is the ripple effect of small acts of kindness and car-

ing…Looking at the vast ocean, it is easy to forget all the single drops of water that comprise its majesty. And yet a single drop can make a difference in the lives of so many." —Ingrid Schwab, Rotary International

"I'd love to go to India so I can help prevent another case of polio. I'd love to…tell people that supporting polio eradication efforts makes a very big difference…With all of our support, one day we will all be free of fear of this virus." —Chonticha Yurai, Rotary International

Involve Them in the Mission

One of the best ways to deepen employee connection to your cause is through programming that links their participation to the achievement of organization goals.

In the end, six employees were selected for our staff trip to India, and were given a fundraising goal of $6,000 before their trip—$1,000 each. Their fundraising dollars will be used to support Rotary's broader global polio eradication initiative—funding everything from doses of polio vaccine to vests for vaccination volunteers in the field.

We helped them to make specific connections to what those dollars would support by equating donation levels they asked for in their funding to specific vaccination supplies and efforts. Their fundraising efforts continued to inspire. They beat their goal by more than double, raising a total of $12,200.

The "Miles to End Polio" bike race already has fundraising goals at its core, and employees drove incredible success here as well. In 2015, our nine employee participants raised more than $120,000 for eradication efforts. What's more, these funds were not raised in a vacuum. Going far beyond a donation alone, employee participation in the race brought them closer to the members they serve each day, and gave them a chance to work together in advancing our mission.

Sharing Their Story

With experiential programs like these, driving understanding and connection to the organization's mission doesn't have to start and end solely with the employees selected to participate. Social media provides many opportunities for participants to share their experiences in real-time with others.

Whether it's a long-form journal on a blog, a photo diary, or video clips of the people and places they encounter, all are rich territories for sharing. Externally, this content also can be used to showcase employee engagement and personal stories that deepen the public's understanding of your organization's mission.

If sharing stories is an expectation of the program, it is important to provide participants with tools, thought starters and ideas for how they can go about doing so. In the case of Rotary's programs, we provided employees guidance on how to effectively raise funds and share their experiences through media interviews, social media, blogs and presentations. We provided each program participant with:

- Tips for writing a travel diary, including question prompts and topic suggestions
- Best practices for how to share their experience on social media–including how to tag and connect their posts to the organization
- Suggested language for social media posts for each phase of their trip itinerary
- Organization key messaging, stats and figures to consider using for their stories
- Guard rails—do's and don'ts for any content published on behalf of the organization

Listen, Learn, Improve

When all the above steps are incorporated into employee programming, the outcome is a library of insights about what matters most, and what inspires most within your organization's mission and goals. This is not only true of the employee contributions, but also of the response and engagement received from external audiences.

When employee relations is combined with a communications plan that fosters connections both for participants and external audiences, the organization's mission and its community of supporters is enhanced, deepened, and ultimately—furthered. ■

David Alexander is chief communications officer, Rotary International. @dbcalexander

3

Internal Social Media Guidelines and Recommendations

The 3-Step Social Media Policy for Employers to Employees

By Ingrid Kibler

Did you know approximately half of your employees are posting about your company on social media? This statistic [bit.ly/25moFzz] may be surprising, especially if you don't have an internal employee advocacy program in place. With the rising popularity of social media, companies should expect their employees to be engaged in the online world, whether for personal connections or professional networking. Since employees are representatives of their brand, it's important companies equip them to interact online in a way that protects the employee and the company. Every organization, regardless of industry or size, needs internal social media guidelines to do that. Below is a three-step process to help develop employee social media guidelines.

A selfie taken at an employee's desk during the workday may seem fun, but if the photo shows the employee's computer displaying confidential information about a client in the background, then this post becomes a risk to both the employer and the client.

Step 1: Educate

The first step to any social media policy is to include a quick introduction on the power of social media, since some employees aren't aware of the potential impact to their company. Often, a post that may seem innocent actually can pose a serious risk to the organization. For example, a selfie taken at an employee's desk during the workday may seem fun, but if the photo shows the employee's computer displaying confidential information about a client in the background, then this post becomes a risk to the employer and the client. It's important to ensure employees understand social media is a powerful tool to be handled with care.

Below is a sample introduction to explain the impact of social media:

Social media is a powerful tool to communicate and engage with audiences worldwide. Our social media strategy is part of our communications strategy. Together they ensure all external messages are spoken in one voice and align with the company's goals and objectives.

Social media can be useful for both professional and personal reasons, but if applicable laws, professional standards and firm policies are not followed, social media also can create significant risks for our brand, our clients and our personnel. While there are many business opportunities and advantages to utilizing social media, you should take appropriate precautions, exercise good judgment and adhere to all applicable firm policies when using social media.

What's an Employee Advocacy Program?

Employee advocacy is the promotion of a company by its employees. An employee advocacy program formalizes and centralizes these efforts through a unified team that produces content and distributes it to employees for sharing on social media networks. This team is often the brand's in-house social media team. Content typically consists of company announcements, blogs, news coverage, insight from leadership, corporate social responsibility efforts and many others. Content for employee advocates aligns with the content being posted to the brand's channels, which in turn aligns with overall communications goals and objectives for the brand. This program equips employees with regular, brand-approved posts that amplify company messaging while helping the employee develop their own online professional image.

Tools such as EveryoneSocial or SocialChorus are used by team leads to generate and distribute the content, sending it directly to the advocates to personalize and publish on their networks. Tools can also provide analytics on the performance of content, as well as performance of advocates.

Before joining this program, advocates typically undergo social media training to understand best practices for successful engagement online. This is typically where a company's social media policy and guidelines are communicated to employees, along with additional training on how to use specific social media platforms and their features for maximum success.

Many companies are realizing the power of their employees as brand advocates within the social media world and are turning to these programs to tap into it. Today, employee advocacy programs are largely optional. However, elite brands are beginning to consider making these programs mandatory as the digital space becomes more competitive than ever.

Step 2: Equip

This is the section where employees are equipped to make wise decisions in their social media posts on a daily basis. General guidelines, detailing tone of voice, professionalism, et cetera, are essential to include. This is also the portion to include guidelines specific to your industry or company. For example, those working within insurance and legal fields have specific regulations in their respective industries they must follow. Often, employees are not aware these exist and can place the company at risk for unknowingly violating these rules.

In this section, it's vital to maintain a positive tone as opposed to a restrictive, disheartening tone. The goal is not to discourage employees from using social media, but rather to give them the tools to use it well. Don't forget to work with your legal team for proper disclaimers regarding freedom of speech, expression, et cetera to ensure these guidelines do not violate employee rights.

Below are sample guidelines:

- **Set a great foundation.** *Ensure your profiles are complete and accurate. Your social profiles act as your professional business card. Use correct spelling and grammar and strive to post consistently. Don't forget to engage with your audience and community by liking, sharing, retweeting and commenting on their posts and tweets.*
- **Maintain a friendly and respectful tone.** *Individuals you engage with should always come away feeling that you were helpful, personable, friendly and knowledgeable. Talk to your audience as you would talk to real people in professional situations.*
- **Avoid discrimination, harassment and defamation.** *Never post anything discrim-*

inatory, defamatory, harassing, offensive, derogatory, sexually suggestive, racist, threatening, indecent or in violation of any applicable law, regulation or company policy. If in doubt, leave it out.

- **Connect in an appropriate way.** *The use of social media with clients and others is permitted so long as it is confined to non-confidential matters and in accordance with company policies. Client communications should only flow through company-approved, secure methods.*
- **Remember there is no delete button.** *Keep in mind that content you post will likely be seen by more people than your intended recipients. Information originally intended "just for friends" or family can be shared easily. Assume what you write will be public and could be front-page news. Remember, anything posted on social media cannot be taken back—even if the post is deleted, anyone could have taken a screenshot, saved any photo attached, etc. and could repost it to the internet.*

Step 3: Enhance

Last, provide additional opportunities for your employees to help amplify your brand's messaging across their social networks. After all, company posts shared on employees' social channels reach 561% further than the same posts shared by a brand's social channels. Encouraging employees to follow your brand on social media and share its content regularly is a great way to do that.

Below is an example:

Here are our official social media channels that are regularly managed by our social media team. We encourage you to join our effort by engaging with content found on these channels, as well as spread any of the published content you'd like with your personal social networks via sharing, retweeting, etc. while adhering to our guidelines. We invite you to join us in building a strong community online.

- *Twitter: <Insert Link to Company Twitter Page Here>*
- *LinkedIn: <Insert Link to Company LinkedIn Page Here>*
- *Facebook: <Insert Link to Company Facebook Page Here>*

In this section, companies who have employee advocacy programs can include information on how to join. Other ways for employees to join the company's social efforts, such as contributing content to the company blog, sending photos taken at company events or acting as a liaison to support client efforts on social media should also be included.

Remember to keep your social media policy and guidelines short and easy to understand. This helps ensure employees will read them and feel empowered to engage online in a safe, positive way. Conversational language, when possible, is also encouraged to demonstrate the friendly, "social" tone recommended they use when posting on their networks.

That social media is here to stay is hardly a risky statement to make. Companies that embrace this idea are best positioned for success today and in the coming years. Those that recognize their employees to be some of their strongest advocates and properly equip them to harness this powerful tool for the company's benefit are those that will dominate the social media world. A social media policy with internal guidelines is the first step in the right direction to do that. ■

Ingrid Kibler is social media director at HCK2 Partners. @IngridKibler

Everything to Everybody: Communicating With Stakeholders in Every Role

By David Quiñones

Often, those who have spent time outside the corporate world can be blissfully unaware of its realities. With large teams and budgets, the common misperception is that it is easy to get new initiatives implemented and everyone on board, paddling in the same direction.

But effecting change across large organizations is more often like slaloming the Titanic through a gantlet of icebergs. The lurking danger, just under the surface, is lack of communication.

This is why we have seen an evolution during the past 10 years toward seamless intranets that integrate into workers' day-to-day activity. It's about communication, getting every single member of the organization to lean left, then to the right, in concert.

But organizations are changing. Communication is no longer as simple as us (employees) versus them (the public). Today, brands need internal PR to speak with contractors, vendors, equity and commercial partners, board members, franchisees and other stakeholders.

As I write this essay, our agency has just developed and launched a complex, multi-pronged internal communications portal for an automotive aftermarket-franchising client using proprietary software called **Jive**. The client is a conglomeration of some 10 separate, unique brands, each with a distinct business model and footprint across North America. It was our second such project in the past three years that focused not just on employees but networks of franchisee and store-level managerial constituents—the first having been for quick service restaurant giant **Burger King**. In these engagements, the threads weave together to form complex permutations of different user roles, permissions, communication types and requirements. By necessity, these platforms must take fragmented needs and coalesce them, becoming all things to all people.

It's about communication, getting every single member of the organization to lean left, then to the right, in concert.

Don't worry—it's only half as daunting as it sounds. Here's how to do it.

'Let's Talk'

Start by convening a strategy session with the brand's decision makers, outlining areas for potential improvement and how to get there. Most legacy intranets are inadequate for today's communication needs, and people will be eager to discuss pain points. Brands often don't realize they need a new solution.

To our client's credit, it understood this. Communications flow had been slowed by the daily grind of email sends, hand coding HTML and list updates. There was no one-stop shop or central repository for all institutional knowledge.

How Intranet Platforms Measure Up Against One Another

You have a lot of choices when building an intranet. Here are a few distinguishing characteristics.

Jive

Jive works most effectively as a partitioned, permissions-based social network. Think of a private Facebook, made just for your company. It has a distinct architecture based on "spaces," "groups" and "users".

In Jive, your community is a "space," a large container where everything else is and all activity happens. A "subspace," like "Marketing," "Legal" or "Europe/Africa Group" is contained in the main community space. Also in the space are "groups," like "Administrators," "Leadership" or "Party Planners," and "projects," like "New Website Launch," "Business Development Acquisition" or "Jerry's 50th Birthday Party." The software delivers content via "news" and "streams," and is highly customizable, if not always intuitive from the back end.

As you can tell, Jive gets a little "jive-talky" very quickly, and for those not steeped in its vernacular it can be difficult to discern "places" from "spaces," "groups" from "projects" and "streams" from "news." Jive is also very costly and takes the most time to implement. While an out-of-the-box Jive implementation (called an "instance") has become the most popular intranet solution in the corporate world, there are many limitations and drawbacks to the software that stymie certain projects needs and require in-depth consulting.

You can take Jive for a test drive and join Jive's own external community of Jive users here.

Wordpress

Many people familiar with the well-known open source website platform don't realize it is capable of being crafted into an intranet community, but through a series of plug-ins, customizations and with the right theming (check out Thrive in the theme store), it can.

Wordpress is great for organizations that have fewer than 1,000 users and want to manage every detail of the project. Wordpress is more flexible than Jive, but it requires greater upfront configuration and a deeper understanding of CSS and HTML.

As it is open source, there is no Wordpress "support team", per se, but there is an entire planet's worth of documentation and experts who can help with any problem—and do so for free.

Yammer

Recently acquired by Microsoft, Yammer is a freemium enterprise social networking service used for private communication within organizations. Like Slack, it focuses more on in-the-moment, ephemeral messaging. It is less robust than Jive and Wordpress, less costly than Jive, but simpler to use and implement.

Slack

The hottest internal communications system at the moment, Slack is a short-message driven platform that works best with remote teams of likeminded coworkers who need to share multiple ideas and messages on the spur of the moment and informally. Where ConstantContact, Mail Chimp and other email providers offer a "NASA approach," where every communication is like a carefully orchestrated shuttle launch, Slack is informal and most closely resembles old-school AOL chat rooms. But with GIFs.

A good strategy session should begin with a comprehensive appraisal of where you are as an organization. Paint an accurate picture of the current internal communications regime. Show examples of communication that has worked in the past and what has failed. Mostly, you'll need to ask some tough questions (Sidebar 3). The most important question, however, is which KPIs will define success?

You should emerge from a good strategy session with a realistic understanding of the size and shape of your current internal communications regime, and what its behaviors are. Where do you go from there?

Use Cases

After digesting the findings of your strategy session, it's time to build out use cases—detailed scenarios that lay out how every user will ideally interact with a new system.

Much of the use case will boil down to your internal communications process. From authorship to ownership to oversight, you must lay out an editorial/content plan that will be easy to adhere to, something flexible and scalable.

Identify a "content owner" for each department, brand or discipline. That individual should act as a liaison, funneling content for publication to the communications team. Content owners should know when the content goes up and when it should be scheduled to come down. Publishing life is very important for intranets, as most items become outdated or overwritten within a few weeks or months. You wouldn't want an employee searching for the latest 401(k) fund information to stumble across a version from 10 years ago, would you?

From there, a community manager should route the communication through any necessary approval channels. Practically, this is best done by loading the communication into the content management system and saving it as a draft. This helps keep edits neat and tidy and ensures version control. Send the draft URL to pertinent department leaders, legal and anyone else you trust to lend insight. (Some systems like **Wordpress** and Jive allow you to establish a moderation queue that automatically notifies people on the approval chain.) Begin this process two weeks before the community launches to get the approval teams ready for their new workflow.

A warning: Keep this circle tight. Too many chefs can ruin the soup. We all know that person who needs to weigh in with unnecessary feedback—a pathological compulsion that stems from a need to appear to be doing something. Don't include that person in your approval trust circle.

Building an Active Intranet in 90 days

Day 1: Strategy Session

Day 2-10: Digest Strategy Session

Day 11: Use Cases

Day 12: Solicit quotes from platform providers

Day 12-15: Refine and agree upon Use Cases

Day 16: Engage platform provider

Day 17-60: Community Development

Day 40-75: Communicate the new community to the user base, create excitement

Day 60: Beta Launch

Day 60-75: Content Import/Development

Day 75: Hard Launch

Day 75-90: Monitoring and responding to user feedback

Day 90: Provide first biweekly metrics report

Choose Your Solution

Based on the outcomes of your use case, the next step will be settling on a platform solution. What are you going to use to build this community?

For the project we are wrapping up, lashing together nearly 10 distinct automotive aftermarket brands, each with its own identity, we engaged our client with the aforementioned Jive Software. It was the right solution for the circumstance. But you should play the field (especially if you're in a consultant role working with several brands). Never get married to a single platform. No matter how much they bill themselves as such, platforms are never one-size-fits-all (see Sidebar 1), and many factors go into the decision.

An important consideration is how much your agency or department will remain involved following the launch of the community. Will you stay on to run the community? Will you devote man-hours to moderating articles, editing or authoring new blog posts or curating content? Or is this simply an install-and-leave?

It's a Community…But How Much of a Community?

Intranets traditionally have been one-way conversations—organizations speak to their employees, employees listen. But the advent of social networking has changed expectations. People can comment and weigh in on almost all media they consume online—they expect the same behavior from their intranet community.

Thus, intranets have become communities, fertile ground for the exchange of ideas. The more successful software providers have excelled at replicating this behavior, creating engaging, two-way conversations.

Your challenge is to identify just how much dialogue your client or brand can tolerate. Functionally, through advanced administrative features and permissions-based assignments, you can give users as much or as little voice as you want. You can give the entire system a direct line to the CEO, or you can limit feedback to the comments sections of posts.

The natural inclination for many brands is to limit this type of open discussion for fear of criticism, or worse, insurrection. We advise against this tack for two main reasons. First, the point of community-driven intranets is to facilitate precisely this kind of dialogue. To shunt it is to defang the very system you are implementing, and for that you may as well hang up a corkboard in the break room.

Second, sunshine is often the best disinfectant. If there is discord in your organization, being deaf to it won't make it go away. When issues bubble to the surface, you can actually do something about them before they boil over. Have a plan in place to address concerns when they are voiced. Don't forget, it takes a lot of courage for an employee or store-level worker to pipe up and voice criticism. If they do, they are likely just as wary of reprisal as you are of the negative light. Embrace the opportunity to make it a safe conversation, first with a community moderator response, then, if necessary, followed up by a member of leadership or even an executive. Meeting criticism head-on is a critical part of fostering trust and engagement in the community. Allowing your clients or leaders to paper over those concerns is doing them a disservice.

Staying Out of Development Hell

Now it's time to get to work developing. This is where the rubber meets the road.

There's no tougher part of the process than development because it requires patience. Programmers and engineers are busy coding, IT teams are integrating data and users, content managers are migrating content, project managers are keenly focused on timelines and implementing the plan outlined at the start,

When Planning Your Intranet, Ask These Questions

Here's what to ask in your initial strategy session:

- What does each stakeholder group need to know? What helps them do their jobs?
- How do these individuals get information? Email, meetings, conference calls, a combination?
- What types of digital devices do the stakeholders use? How comfortable are they in digital environments?
- Are they near other media, such as screens or monitors that could potentially be used to deliver key messaging?

Later, during use case sessions, ask some of these questions:

- How can users be grouped? Hierarchically? Regionally? By departments? By job functions? This is the first piece of architecture for your new intranet.
- When and where will each user group interact with the new intranet? Can you force their browser homepages to show the intranet? Or are you limited to mobile devices and email?
- How often does need dictate outreach? That is to say, on what cadence does your business require them to be updated? Daily? Weekly? Monthly? Use this to build out a standing editorial calendar.

and stakeholders are throwing curveballs in the form of additional builds and last-minute changes. Each part is dependent upon the other. Brand leaders cannot make decisions until they see the developers' work progress. Tech teams can't advance until they have approvals. Users can't see the site until it is functional. Done right, it's a deft tango of integrated teams hitting deadline after deadline. Done wrong, it's a tangled morass of development hell.

Project managers can save the day here. It's their job to shine the light on any bottlenecks and suggest ways to break them open. This is a true skill.

During development, you must identify and engage with a group of beta users, and you must regularly poll them for feedback. Separately, you should be sharing development and access with key stakeholders, brand and department heads and evangelists in the C-Suite who will help in what comes next.

Launch and Post-Launch

As development winds down, your efforts to drive awareness should be ramping up. An intranet community is only as strong as the user adoption, and you want robust adoption from day one.

Communicate early and often. Tailor your messages and highlight the part of the use case that appeals most to user-groups. For your finance team, let it know about the slate of new native reporting tools built into the community. For your Latin America team, show it the translation text that will make communications pertinent to its audiences. For your legal team, play up the moderation and approval functionality that gives it insight.

Recruit evangelists, well-respected VPs and executives who can rally the organization to adopt the community. Ghostwrite emails on their behalf, exhorting users to get online and start conversing.

All communication should build toward a

launch day, and that theoretical date is crucial. All projects must have a beginning and an end, or you risk creep. Make that launch day a steadfast rock that cannot be budged.

Most important, for an intranet community to be successful, it must be quantified. Remember those KPIs you decided on way back during your strategy session? Time to start measuring. Make analytics and metrics a part of your daily activity. Only by defining success will you be able to tell if your new community is doing its job. ■

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Mobile Tech Lags Behind for Company Intranets as Pressure Builds for IC Pros

By PR News Editors

We live in a mobile world, so mobility is ubiquitous, right? Not so fast. While it's true that many things are done via mobile apps, it's not been the case with internal communications (IC). Even some top-flight technology companies are only just now introducing mobility to their intranets via smartphone apps in response to employee demand.

Part of this is due to high and diverse demands placed on IC. Something has to fall lower on the priority list. "The pressure seems greater than ever [in IC]. Everyone seems to want an internal communicator…everyone wants a video," said Leigh Woisard, SVP, corporate communications and public affairs, **Cox Communications.** Like other business units, IC can respond only to a limited number of demands. Yet it's proven to be so capable, IC "might become a victim of its own success" in that it has to respond "no" so often to stakeholders, she said at an **Association of Cable Communicators** roundtable.

But back to intranets, from a cost perspective, [mobility] "is one of the toughest aspects of IC [for small and midsize brands]. Setting up [a mobile capability for a corporate intranet] for a company of 200 costs the same as if you were setting it up for a company of 20,000," said Michael Rudnick, managing partner, **Prescient Digital Media.**

Back of the Line for IC Tech

In general IC often is near the bottom of the priority list when it comes to tech updates. IC tech tends to be looked at only before big events, such as a merger or a product roll-out. Yet "how do you get people [particularly Millennials] to take you seriously" if your IC lacks a mobility component? "Everyone wants everything to be mobile today," Rudnick adds.

Comcast, the nation's largest internet and cable provider, only recently added mobility to its IC as part of a relaunch of its intranet. As such, responsive design, where designers aim to provide an optimal experience across a range of devices, including desktop monitors to mobile phones, was important, said Liesl Henderson, Comcast Corp.'s senior director for IC.

The most difficult part of the Comcast intranet rollout was balancing stakeholder demands with budget, security and legal realities, Henderson adds. "Everyone wants a button on the intranet and the home page...it really was an adventure...we had to say 'no' to some requests," she said.

On the positive side, Comcast's new intranet is much "clearer and better organized" than its overloaded predecessor, although there's still at least one issue ahead. "Our challenge now is with social...I don't think we'll move to a single [social] tool...there are so many tools out there and people use them for good reasons."

An issue facing IC pros with healthy technology budgets is deciding which tools to purchase. With large companies there often are multiple constituencies, some of which champion rival tools. IT wants one technology, employees favor another, the C-suite a third. And then there's the shiny, new toy syndrome. "Don't buy a technology just because it's the latest thing. Look at your business goals, be strategic and thoughtful" before purchasing, he said. And keep an eye out for chatbots. Eventually, instead of finding the right website to see how much vacation time you have left, you'll ask your screen vocally and get a Siri-like answer.

Yet should IC be perceived as slow-moving or that "it's asking too many questions," employees will push out messages, which may be incorrect, on their own. Adds Woisard, "Employees are no longer sitting at their desks waiting for us to communicate to them."

Some intranet issues are similar to what IC pros are grappling with daily. "We're the gatekeepers…it's part of our job to apply filters…employees are deluged with information…our main goal is delivering the business message" to employees, Henderson said. Woisard agrees. "Having too many messages out there causes confusion…How do we change behavior? That's what we really want to know."

As with external PR, the subject of measurement is never far from PR pros' minds. "Data is your friend," Woisard said, "you need to measure" what messages are being read. Cox uses a tool that allows IC to see what email messages employees open, she said.

Despite the plethora of technologies, Woisard noted her brand still gathers employees regularly with senior executives for coffee. "Every demand made during those coffees is documented [by IC] and sent to the C-suite," she said. "It's back-to-basics but it's important." ■

4

Leading and Nurturing Your PR Team

6 Ways for Leaders to Grow Their Employees Into Future Leaders

By Justin E. Pettigrew

Let's face it: As PR managers, we are often so overwhelmed with work that sometimes managing our employees takes a backseat to the work at hand. And we have bosses to report to, too. Add to that that most of us have type-A personalities, used to doing the job rather than delegating it, so team management—especially good team management—can easily get buried under other things on our Outlook calendars.

PR managers can take a cue from other functions in a company by letting their teams take the initiative to improve processes, streamline workflow and establish new ways of creating and implementing campaigns.

Practicing PR requires the ability to move fast, think quickly and plan well. We get things done. We try to create well-oiled PR teams that can rise to the occasion and carry out well-executed campaigns. What we may not do so well as managers of others is to create an environment where those employees can learn good people-management skills so that they can grow into good leaders.

As a 14-year veteran of corporate and agency public relations, I interacted with and worked for really good managers and really bad ones. I also helped mentor and guide employees as they worked to further their careers. To be a good manager, we have to treat our employees as we think we should have been treated when we were in their shoes. We also have to respect their career goals, their abilities and their limits. Here are six tips that will help your employees feel more integrated and invested in your organization, help you carry your workload more effectively and lay the groundwork for them to become good managers themselves.

1. Find Security in Your Own Job and Let Your Employees Flourish.

Yes, as PR people, we're all replaceable. And we want to hold on to good employees because they help us look good. But when we see things through a lens of fear, then our job, and by extension, our life, begins to be based in potential threats rather than potential challenges. In order to be a good boss, we have to feel at least somewhat safe in our own positions. If that's not the case, and you can't necessarily change the environment, then change your attitude. It's not all bad at work, and if it is, you need to find a new job yourself. Coming from a place of confidence in our communications with employees feeds a sense of confidence for the team, and you'll look better to top management because of it. Don't be afraid to let employees stretch their skills beyond just doing their jobs. Also, as a link to top management or even as a part of the dominant coalition, we can make sure our teams feel that they're an integral part of the organization. Encourage them to step outside of their comfort zone, and talk about their career goals and their place in your organization. If you're helping them move forward in their careers, they will most likely support you as you move forward in yours.

2. Bad PR Managers Tell. Great PR Managers Engage.

One key for creating great teams, and by extension great manager potential, is to engage employees in creating an environment of *kaizen*, or change for the better. PR managers can take a cue from other functions in a company by letting their teams take the initiative to improve processes, streamline workflow and establish new ways of creating and implementing campaigns. Also be prepared to shoulder the responsibility if something doesn't play out positively. Employees who feel protected will in turn (hopefully) protect the team. By acting more like a coach than a boss, we can create powerful departments or work groups that aren't afraid to do things in new ways. By extension, these employees can be encouraged to lead others in possibly doing things differently. Letting go of control can be hard. But if you want to create better employees and therefore better future leaders, then sometimes it's good to get out of the way and let the good stuff happen.

3. Create Personal, Authentic, One-on-One Connections.

A study by **Dale Carnegie Training** found that employee engagement was linked directly to the worker's relationship with his/her immediate supervisor. If you inspire your employees to greatness by being straightforward with them, not griping about the bad stuff with them and actively managing conflict, you'll be a lead-by-example manager who can then help create future lead-by-example leaders. This can be hard if you have inherited a team from a former manager. Some people will resist a change in the status quo and may even resent you for a while. The key to getting past this, in most cases, is to try and connect on a personal level while maintaining your professional distance. It's a fine line, and often the only way to get there is by trial and error. Camaraderie, however, breeds camaraderie, and by showing employees you truly care about them as individuals helps them open up to truly care about others too.

Can We Be Friends? It Depends.

Management publications often warn managers away from forming friendships with their employees. So how do you establish meaningful connections? Letting employees know you care about them as people is smart. Taking family vacation with a particular employee probably isn't.

Boundaries are important. As is treating all of your employees equitably.

If you go for drinks with one of your employees, take another out the next week, until all of your employees have had some personal time with you. Favoritism kills team morale faster than most anything else. Showing employees you care about them as people is good. Being friends outside of work is something else entirely. If you have a "friend" relationship with an employee because of a connection outside of work, that's great. Just make sure your other employees don't feel like you're showing favoritism.

4. Hold Regular, Meaningful One-on-Ones.

All too often the time set aside to meet one on one with employees gets interrupted by a project or call that needs immediate attention, or they're disorganized or continually rescheduled because of other priorities. Here are some ways to make sure meetings happen, and even better, make them fruitful for team-member growth.

- **Meet in your employee's cubicle or of-**

fice. Instead of talking over your desk, go to your people. Sit in their guest chair. Change the power dynamic. Even better, leave your phone in your office when you go to sit down for a one-on-one. Distractions can kill a meeting, and by extension, a team's morale. If you act as if a text or an email is more important than time with your employee, that's a sure way to show him/her you're not fully invested in your time together.

- **Don't have an agenda.** Against popular wisdom that says to have one, I say don't. Even better, let your employees come up with the agenda for your meetings. Have in mind anything that you need to cover with them, but let them lead. This goes a long way in teaching good management skills, and is a good way to gently guide employees in creating productive future one-on-ones without being "the boss."
- **Spend more time listening than talking.** Yes, we have things we need to communicate to our teams. But use team meetings for that, so that everyone is hearing the same information. One-on-ones should be for that particular employee to set goals, review information and projects and get your feedback on any ideas they might have.

5. Let Your People Grow in Their Particular Strengths.

There's one key to this: open and honest communication with your people. We're a creative bunch and we need to keep busy. We're also intuitive. Use that to your advantage within your team. As much as possible, let people rise to their strengths. I had the pleasure of managing a superb team during my time at **Turner Broadcasting**. I had a strong writer and special events planner on the West Coast, a strong pitcher in New York and two younger staffers in Atlanta who would take whatever I threw at them. Everyone knew their strengths. At the same time, I was challenging them all to grow as managers themselves by allowing them to delegate work to other members of the team as they saw fit. There were some hiccups at first when I established this idea, but after a few weeks they were operating at a higher level than even I thought they could. Letting them define their own place on the team helped to keep everyone satisfied in their current roles and grow as managers. It also created a more organic environment that kept petty conflicts at bay.

6. Know That Not Everyone Wants to Be a Manager. But Push the Ones Who Do to Keep Growing.

We want our employees to grow and succeed, but we don't need to push our own career paths onto them. We also need to respect each employee's natural limits and priorities. Nurturing good managers means that you'll eventually lose those people to bigger and better things. In the grander scheme of things, you'll look like a better manager, and those employees who leave may be able to help you in your career growth too. For those who perform well but who don't have management aspirations, keep pushing them to do their jobs better, and help them grow to whatever level they want.

These tips may not work for every employee. You may have someone on your team who poses problems for you and other team members. Know, however, that those people won't stay long—they've got bigger aspirations. Hopefully, these six things provide some guidelines for being a better manager and for fostering better management skills among employees for the time when they will manage others. ■

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Assessing and Improving Morale With Free Job Perks for Enormous ROI

By Jessica Rosenberg

It's 9:16 a.m. on a Monday. The rain is coming down heavily, battering my office window and leaving a dull, grey sky. The word "dreary" goes through my head. But I actually feel pretty good. Why? I'm wearing jeans. And tomorrow, I'll work from home. Next week, I'll participate in our biannual employee feedback survey.

Even now, a year since our new perks were announced, they make me happy. When I wake up and it's awful outside, it's a comfort knowing I can slip on jeans. The same is true for my colleagues—we all talk about it. The reality is that our five new perks have profoundly influenced our morale. And they were also easy to implement. And they were free.

Sometimes when I talk with friends in other offices, they ask how it happened—how, seemingly overnight, we got new, exciting perks. Perhaps you're curious, too. Maybe you're wishing *you* were wearing jeans or working from home.

It starts with listening to the murmurs: *I wish…* or, *If only we could…* You start to pick up on repeated themes. Your colleagues wish for things, and some of them seem implausible while others seem entirely plausible. Implausible: *I wish we could each get a check for $10,000 just because; If only we could be promoted every year*. Plausible: *I wish our transit subsidy were better; If only we could have more flexible hours*.

Once the plausible perks are in your head, it's hard to get them out. You start to think, "We should do casual dress. Clients rarely visit our offices. There is no harm to the company—no work, money or productivity lost. Why *can't* we have casual dress?" And it's a fair question.

So ask it.

> **We asked some very important questions seeking to understand which perks are meaningful to staff and why. Because we didn't just want more perks, we wanted the exact perks that would improve morale.**

The Idea

That's how our new perks began. One day I asked the company president if we could talk about perks. I'm not in HR or office management, but it was important to me. And I differentiated between benefits and perks, benefits being big-ticket items like health insurance or 401(K)s and perks being little extras that can improve the day-to-day.

When we met, I shared my idea: What if there were perks we could offer staff that would increase morale without costing the company anything? My plan was to survey staff to find out which perks would be most meaningful, and then (hopefully) implement the most-desired ones. They could be minor or major, but they would all be free to the company.

Asking the Right Questions: Surveys Should Be Thoughtful and Strategic

Surveys on subjective, possibly sensitive topics are most effective if they can do two things at once: Give employees a chance to vent and write whatever they want, and ask employees to provide you with quantifiable data. In survey terminology, you want both open-ended and Likert scale questions.

Here are the six questions we asked in our Perks Survey. Notice how they give employees different ways of providing feedback and ways of providing both positive and negative feedback.

1. Which of our current benefits and perks mean the most to you and why? Please list up to five.
2. Are there any of our current benefits or perks that you could do without?
3. We'd like to explore what perks you'd like to have that are not currently offered. Below, you'll find a list of perks we compiled from our research. There is also an "Other" slot for you to provide your own ideas if you didn't find something on the list. Please categorize each perk below (including any "Other" perk that you enter) on a scale of 1 to 4, as defined below.
4. Is there anything that particularly concerns you right now regarding our benefits or benefit-related policies?
5. Imagine that we look at the results of this survey and implement ONE change. We announce that change over email with the subject line, "Good news, everyone." As you're opening that email, what are you hoping that change is?
6. Is there anything else you'd like us to know?

And that's exactly what happened. With the green light to proceed, I got to work. I sat down with a colleague one afternoon and we crafted the "Perks Survey." We did it on **SurveyMonkey**; it's not a fancy list. It's only six questions long and it's written in everyday language. But it asked some very important questions seeking to understand what perks are meaningful to staff and why. Because we didn't just want more perks, we wanted the exact perks that would improve morale.

The Execution

We began the survey by providing a full list of current benefits and perks. You might have three or 30 (we listed 24); anything works. The idea is to show staff all the company is already offering, and also give staff members the full list to jog their memory for any comments or requests. Dedicate a couple of questions to how employees feel about the current benefits and perks.

One of the questions we asked regarded which benefits or perks employees thought they could do without. Our thinking had been that new perks don't all have to be free to the company if there are costly existing perks we could remove. If you do birthday parties for each employee, for example, and it turns out no one wants that perk, you can remove it and put that money toward something else.

When we looked at the results of this "do without" question, though, we found no one really wanted to give up any of the current perks. Staff was able to list which perks didn't seem necessary, but it still wanted them. The reason given: "They help me feel appreciated."

Appreciation was one of two core ideas that came out of our survey. (The other, flexibility, I'll address later.) We learned that our cell phone subsidy, occasional catered lunches, even the beer and wine in the fridge… these small perks served as daily reminders that the company cares about everyone. As we thought about additional perks to add, we always came back to this idea, asking ourselves: Which perks will make staff feel most appreciated?

We also thought a lot about the answers we received on our next survey question regarding which new perks are wanted.

We listed 12 perks that we'd read about online, heard our friends and family talk about or even that we'd heard employees mention (*I wish…; If only we could…*). For each, we asked survey takers to rank the perk from 1 to 4, with the scale defined as follows:

1. I'm not particularly interested in this perk
2. I wouldn't have thought of this perk but it sounds sweet
3. This perk is important to me
4. This perk is important enough to me that I struggle with us not offering it

We also included a comment box where survey takers could list up to three perks we didn't mention.

In retrospect, I am so glad that we did this question via ranking. It's something I absolutely recommend to anyone embarking on a perks survey. If staff had just marked "interested" or "not interested," we wouldn't have learned that the lack of certain perks was actually quite troublesome. Ultimately, the ranking enabled survey takers to communicate a feeling of urgency or even desperation that we hadn't fully realized was there.

The Results

The results from this ranking were encouraging and fascinating, especially where survey takers ranked a perk as 4—that urgent/desperate answer of, "This perk is important enough to me that I struggle with us not currently offering it." The results were encouraging because the most-desired perks seemed possible to implement, and fascinating because, well, if they're so possible to implement and so universally important, why aren't more companies offering them? Included here were the ability to telecommute, flexible workday or workweek, summer Fridays, casual dress and the flexibility to use paid holiday days off on days of your choice.

In one word: flexibility.

The perks that didn't have an element of flexibility tended to rank lower: wellness programs, contests, clubs, etc. The desire for appreciation also manifested itself in the

Understanding the Results: The Benefit of Diving Into Likert Scale Questions

We asked one (long and complex!) Likert scale question, tasking survey takers with ranking 12 different perks on a scale from 1 to 4 that we defined in further detail. The results reveal bunching in some places and disagreement in others, and you have to look at the actual vote count to understand what the weighted average represents.

In our survey, two possible perks received an average weighted score of 2.63: flexibility to use paid holiday days off on days of your choice and casual dress every workday. What that number doesn't tell you is that in one case zero survey takers labeled the perk as "important enough to me that I struggle with us not currently offering it," whereas in the other case 25% of takers expressed that urgent/desperate desire for the perk.

Digging into the data a little further helped us understand which perks sounded nice to a lot of people, and which perks, while unimportant to a few people, were extremely important to others. We couldn't offer every perk, so knowing which perks would make a significant difference in employee morale was important.

Lessons We Learned About Employee Perks That You Can Learn From, Too

1. We don't live in a vacuum. Employees see what their friends' and family's companies do. They read newspapers and blogs. They scour Glassdoor.com. The result: Employees know what perks are out there, and they want them.
2. The lack of seemingly simple perks can affect retention. In some cases, employees want certain perks badly enough that not having them can lead to thoughts of leaving the company.
3. Many if not most of the perks that employees want cost zero dollars. It's all about flexibility and appreciation, and these things are free.
4. You'd be surprised how happy a pair of jeans can make most people.

answers, for example in a pretty universal request for regular employee feedback surveys and additional employee recognition.

The remaining three questions of our survey sought to fill in gaps—any concerns, et cetera. While the answers to these questions didn't ultimately change what we went on to recommend, it seems helpful to ask them. First, asking employees about their concerns and experience conveys appreciation. Second, you never know what you might learn; a couple answers didn't impact perks, but did get us started on other important conversations.

The Outcome

So what happened with the perks? With all this great data in hand, we made recommendations to the president and together agreed on five brand new perks. There was only one perk employees had really wanted that we were unable to offer—a flexible workday/workweek—just due to the nature of our business. The rest we could do.

And we did.

And that's amazing.

That week, we gathered everyone and announced our new perks:

1. Work from home twice a month
2. Summer Fridays
3. Flexibility to use paid holiday days off
4. Casual dress
5. Twice-yearly surveys asking for employee feedback

The next day: jeans everywhere. The next week: A couple people worked from home. The next month and year, well, as I mentioned, it's wet and dreary outside right now and I'm happy. Because I woke up this morning and felt the usual slog of a rainy Monday morning, but then I remembered that I can decide if I want to dress up or wear comfortable clothing. That flexibility turns out to make me incredibly happy. And the fact that my employer offers it, well, that makes me feel appreciated.

The cost for all these perks, as promised, totaled $0. It doesn't cost anything to let employees work remotely or complete biannual surveys. But the result has been impressive. We talk about it a lot—how much we appreciate the ability to come in on a holiday we don't celebrate but then bank that time for a vacation. Or how great it feels to have Friday afternoons to ourselves in the summer, the feeling of warm summer air pressing on our skin as we sit with a friend for lunch, or the exhilaration of visiting a museum that otherwise we never make the time to get to.

Small perks can make a big difference, making employees feel more appreciated. The act of doing the survey also seems important;

asking employees which new perks would be most meaningful not only means your efforts are properly directed, it also makes employees feel appreciated because you listen to them. Of course, you have to be able to listen. I have no doubt that our experience was made easier because we're a small team. Were we a 500-person company, there would be more coordination involved and more decision-makers. Still, the simplicity of surveying staff about free, easily implemented perks seems replicable in most any situation.

And at least here in the Washington, D.C., area, many people we run into now enjoy similar perks—telecommuting and casual dress, especially. That's pretty recent, though. It seems as if just a few years ago, telecommuting was only for freelance writers. Now, many of us have the opportunity. Thinking ahead to a few years down the line, it's hard to picture any workplace not offering these perks (barring any reasons a certain perk is incompatible with a company's work). So we say, why not be one of the companies that offers these or other perks sooner? It's easy, it's free and it makes employees very, very happy. ■

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How to Make Your Team's Brainstorming More Effective and Productive

By Susan Blanchard

PR and communication agencies are known for brainstorming with their employees to spark creative concepts—ideas that take shape as clever campaigns, strategies, taglines or other essential messages.

Yet some studies indicate a lot of group brainstorming may be unproductive. Brainstorming involves culling ideas from group members who advocate as many original thoughts and unique solutions as they can in a short time. Invented in 1929 by advertising agency leader Alex Osborn, the traditional method of brainstorming can unleash a torrent of creative concepts.

On the other hand, brainstorming also can result in group members talking simultaneously and fixating on a small set of ideas rather than searching for more solutions.

While PR agencies continue to engage in traditional brainstorming, researchers Nicholas Kohn and Steven Smith have written that "brainstorming is inefficient." Fixation blocks creativity, they write in *Applied Cognitive Psychology*.

Kohn, lead researcher of the 2010 study *Collaborative Fixation: Effects of Others' Ideas on Brainstorming*, says, "Fixation to other people's ideas can occur unconsciously and lead to suggesting ideas that mimic your brainstorming partners." The inclination to copycat others' concepts quickly suppresses out-of-the-box thinking.

Another drawback is groupthink, a phenomenon where individuals feel pressured to conform to the group's consensus. They remain silent about their views, fearing these ideas may rub people the wrong way.

One obvious way for groups to overcome the tendency toward uniformity is to gather a group of members with diverse expertise and backgrounds.

Irving Janis, a retired **Yale University** research psychologist and a professor emeritus at the **University of California**, notes in *Victims of Groupthink* that group members suppress personal doubts about their views to avoid being judged. In addition, they'll often minimize to themselves the importance of their views.

But even as critics decry brainstorming, citing how exposure to others' ideas can limit one's creativity, Paul Paulus, a psychology professor at the **University of Texas at Arlington**, says "There's no substitute for brainstorming if it's done creatively."

In the book *Group Creativity: Innovation Through Collaboration*, Paulus notes, "One obvious way for groups to overcome the tendency toward uniformity is to gather a group of members with diverse expertise and backgrounds, and to ensure they share their diverse perspectives."

He also explains that group creativity can exceed individual brainstorming both in the quantity and quality of ideas produced.

Instead of calling on group members to freewheel countless big ideas—the first that come to mind—some researchers now recommend brainstorming alone, or combining group brainstorming with solo brainstorming.

Ryan Townend, CEO of **William Joseph Communications** of Calgary, Alberta, urges employees to brainstorm alone and as a group. In addition, every department at the agency is involved in brainstorming sessions: copywriters, artists, sales executives, web developers and finance personnel.

Townend starts by hosting a discovery meeting where he talks about successful strategies. He also describes the problem that a brand is facing. Then the group examines the brand's market research to combine scientific findings with the art of brainstorming.

Next, brainstorming ensues. But Townend doesn't stop the process after an initial brainstorming. He urges group members to leave the session and think alone rather than trying to present all their ideas in one meeting. "All ideas need time to nurture," he says. "You could be taking a shower or cutting the grass and go, 'Ah-ha. That will work perfectly.'"

Townend also says "brainstorming must have a direction and a goal." This advice coincides with what experts say: Never brainstorm without a clear idea of what you want out of the process.

A term Townend refers to when describing his technique is elastic stretching. Group members return to the table after brainstorming alone and present a creative concept that they'll push to extremes. Later, they'll allow the concept to relax, like elastic, until it fits within the brand's comfort zone.

Brainstorming alone is also effective, and many experts recommend the Nominal Group Technique:

- The group leader describes a problem. But before any discussion takes place, members silently jot down possible solutions.
- Then members present their ideas to the group until every idea has been clarified by its owner and noted on a flip chart.
- Group members are allowed to ask questions to be sure they understand the idea, and new alternatives often surface as a result.
- Finally, group members silently evaluate the ideas one by one, recording their first, second, third and remaining preferences.
- The "winning" idea is the one that earns the popular vote or ranking.
- The advantage of the Nominal Group Technique is that it permits the group to meet formally but also encourages independent thinking. ■

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Recruitment and Retention: 6 Tips for Building Great Employee Teams

By Bob Pearson

The best sports organizations in the world are continually obsessed with recruiting the right team members. Building a team that will have the right chemistry to win and then retaining those administrators, players and coaches after they have achieved some level of success are perhaps the twin holy grails of sport.

A dose of reality: If the top teams in the world have trouble getting this exactly right with nearly endless resources, we need to realize building the best teams that succeed and then remain intact is hard work.

I've had the benefit of watching amazing leaders build teams at 500 companies. At my current firm, I've been involved in this activity. If I think back over 30 years and imagine what the key lessons are, here is what comes to mind:

Recruiting

1. Capability and Curiosity: Many are capable, but few are curious. When you have both, you have a person who has the hunger to learn and the ability to do something about it. It's what we often refer to as "fire in the belly." The thing is, you have to have talent and fire to do really well.

2. Diversity of Thinking Helps Retention: Members of great teams often say one very important thing: They speak of many people smarter than they are in certain areas at the organization where they're employed. In addition, they say they can benefit by learning what these people know, and they love it. They realize that they have to think effectively and differently and be willing to accept the views of others to achieve excellence. When you know you can learn more by staying at an organization, you often do. So diversity of thought and retention go hand in hand.

Avoid worrying that someone will leave. Rather, we should focus on helping those who are eager to succeed do exactly that.

Building Teams

3. Avoid Boxing-in and Encourage Unlocking: Sometimes, in an effort to show great clarity at the time of a hire, the new hire's responsibilities are so clear that there appears to be no room to evolve the role. When you do this across an organization, it works great if you are in the military. It is terrible if you are encouraging innovation and freedom of thinking. Great leaders have the ability to give guidance on what you should do and then watch you, shape you and help you unlock.

4. Coach Managers on Managing: No matter how many teams we may have managed, we're all always learning how to deal with new and different personalities, complex and new issues and changed marketplace realities. We need to conversationally coach managers so they can see what they need to do, and then do it in ways that work for them. Just as we avoid boxing in a person, we also should be careful about micromanaging when we coach. Help people discover what to do. It's more powerful and lasts longer.

Retaining Talent & Teams

5. Focus on Intellectually Scalable Models: It's a reality that talent will come and go. So leaders must focus on building intellectually scalable models that outline how to work, how to achieve results, which processes to follow and what great results look like. High-performance teams, in turn, will define these models to meet their team's skills. And when one team member drops out and another comes in, the team can continue to excel. If you establish clarity in how you achieve success together, you can build teams that do well in a sustainable fashion. Each team will make the models better for the next team.

If you find your time being dominated by the unhappy few who often also are the ones with the largest egos, then you are spending your time unwisely.

6. Retain Team Members Who Remain Hungry and Focused: Time to whack a sacred cow. Avoid worrying that someone will leave. Rather, we should focus on helping those who are eager to succeed do exactly that. If we keep our focus on those team members who are positive, forward thinking, business-focused and who bleed the company's vision, you're in good shape. If you find your time being dominated by the unhappy few who often also are the ones with the largest egos, then you are spending your time unwisely.

As former **GE** chief Jack Welch said a long time ago, don't focus on the type IVs, get rid of them. Type IVs, in his model, were capable of high performance, but they worked against the social fabric of the company. Just being smart isn't enough. You have to be smart, high performance and a cultural fit.

Avoid worrying that someone will leave. Focus on helping those who are eager to succeed do exactly that. If you find your time dominated by the unhappy few who often also are the ones with the largest egos, then you are spending your time unwisely.

Overall, the biggest learning that I've had is the most simple and it is really a series of insights that I've learned by watching my favorite team, the **New York Yankees**, over the years.

Great chemistry and talent can lead to being the best in your business. Talent is easy to spot. Chemistry is a process of getting the right people together, giving them the right amount of space, the right amount of coaching and supporting them with the right resources. Chemistry is super hard.

It's really a never-ending formula that we will tweak for the rest of our careers. We'll win some championships; we'll lose some, too. That we can count on.

What matters is what we choose to do tomorrow and for every day thereafter. ■

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6 Tips to Help Communicators Better Engage With Remote Employees

By Jessica Nielsen

Many internal communicators have an idea of how to define a remote worker, but a consistent definition often is hard to find. While some believe a remote employee is anyone who does not work at headquarters, this is not really the case. Those who work in a company building, owned or leased, remain highly connected to the brand. The ability of internal communicators to reach them is relatively easy. Remote employees typically are telecommuting from home, embedded at customer sites or working in remote parts of the country. Reaching these employees can be tricky. It certainly is not impossible. A few simple and inexpensive tips will help internal communicators reach them:

1. Choose and Deploy Employee Ambassadors: Within every subsection of employees, even remote employees, there are company champions, i.e. fully committed and dedicated team members. Find them. They will have immediate credibility. They understand the unique challenges a remote employee faces and have conquered them. They've successfully identified ways to remain connected to the organization.

Fortunately, finding these individuals is easier given today's technology. Whether through an open call for volunteers or by sending an invitation to those you've identified as engaged employees, identifying these assets is critical for success. Provide them with messaging and materials, as well as a way to connect with fellow remote team members. Make sure you thank them for their effort. In addition, ensure that the manager of each ambassador is aware of the program and the employee's role in it. Support from managers is crucial if you want to have a successful program.

2. Provide Mobile Applications: Many organizations have embraced reaching their remote workforces through mobile applications. While app prices can vary greatly, usually they are worth the investment.

There may be some obstacles, though. As we know, some brands have been slow to add mobility to internal communications apps. Another obstacle is determining what functionalities should be included in the app. Survey employees and work with IT to identify tasks most important to employees. While you may be unable to launch all of them simultaneously, having a solid timeline will ensure that the most important ones are included at the beginning. Functionalities that remote employees can use will drive them to your app, which can alleviate or at least help mitigate a slow adoption process.

Timecards and expenses are examples of relatively easily adapted tasks that are vital for remote employees and those at HQ. Good design will ease the process for both.

Via this same portal, communications materials, including those aimed at rallying employee morale, introducing products or addressing misconceptions or problems, can be added. A tip: Employees quickly become proficient with apps they find helpful.

Similarly, many organizations have deployed **Skype** as an internal communication tool for remote employees. It's simple, can be downloaded quickly and is familiar to many. Such familiarity shortens the adoption process.

Assure leaders of remote workers they will have the tools and information to engage staff. Whether it is a quarterly toolbox mailed to managers, or specific, directed information sent periodically, reaching managers is crucial.

3. Create Dedicated Virtual Communities: Creating such communities can be achieved by leveraging social media platforms. **BAE Systems Intelligence Group** has successfully used **Facebook** and other platforms to reach its remote workforce by creating dedicated sites for employees. While this can limit the amount of information internal communicators can provide, it's a complete platform that takes little effort to get up and running. This probably should be viewed as an opportunity to address both employees and potential employees. It could and should serve as a recruitment as well as retention tool. Further, a Facebook page can be utilized to direct employees to applications or websites that can provide more secure access.

4. Engage the Leaders: The most basic step of any employee communications program rings true for virtual employees as well. Assure leaders of remote workers they will have the tools and information to engage staff. Whether it is a quarterly toolbox mailed to managers, or specific, directed information sent periodically, reaching managers is crucial. Employees' first point of reference and the individual they trust the most for information is their manager. Without connections to this critical group, your messages will be left unheard or misunderstood.

5. The Low-Budget Solution: Finally, if truly strapped for budget, emailing a newsletter focused on remote employees is an option. Just ensure that your focus is on the employees' needs and information they most want to receive. Reviewing best practices (i.e. HR benefit information always is important), surveying employees or measuring click rates of news items can help communicators decide what remote employees crave. Items with high click rates should be included in each newsletter to remote employees. Remember that providing information from a top-down perspective only will lead to a less-than-optimal result.

6. The Basics: Keep in mind sometimes all people really need or want is understanding. For many remote employees, acknowledgement of the complexity of their position is vital. Usually they know the upsides—the immense independence they enjoy, as well as the chance to exercise judgment. They wonder, though, does anyone in the home office understand the downside? Always being the person who decides, implements and follows up is tough. They wonder if anyone knows their name, or recognizes their contribution. Make sure you do, or someone meaningful at the home office does. ■

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3 Skills That Aspiring PR Pros Need—and How Mentors Can Help Them

By Jacqueline Strayer

As PR and communications practitioners, we often emphasize communications skills, including writing, when hiring junior staffers. Communications competency obviously is critical, but how much thought do we give to other business skills? Can those additional skills make the difference between an average hire versus an outstanding one? If so, what are those skills and are they being emphasized adequately in professional development programs and academia?

A survey for PR News exploring some of these questions suggests skills in addition to communications for young PR pros to hone. Moreover, veteran communicators might hire better employees by looking for evidence of several skill sets in addition to communications.

The survey data was culled from more than 150 respondents in the communications and PR profession who serve in positions from CCO to individual contributor roles. Most have more than 20 years of experience (63%); 25% have 11-20 years of experience; and 9% have 4-10 years of experience.

Respondents were asked to rank 14 potential skills that ranged from advancing personal brand, collaborating on a team, building relationships, financial understanding, critical thinking and strategy development, among others. These 14 choices were offered in a series of six questions gauging viewpoints of most important to least important for success early on, their importance when seeking to advance to a senior PR position and the role they played in the eventual success of the survey's respondents. Here are the chief findings:

1. Critical Thinking Tops the List: The respondents considered critical thinking the most important skill to have when embarking on a PR career, although not in large numbers (30%). Relationship building (27%) followed closely. Understanding the business or sector you are working in was a distant third (13%). [See chart A]

Unfortunately the respondents, in another question, said few young PR pros possess critical thinking skills. Just 9% said critical thinking was part of the young PR pro's tool kit. Instead, they stated collaborating on a team (35%), building relationships (33%) and advancing personal brand (15%) were the qualities young PR pros most often possess.

2. Skills of Less Value: We then asked what skills are least critical for young PR pros? Creating a personal brand topped the list (28%), developing a leadership model (21%) and understanding effective management theory (17%) followed.

3. Skills Young PR Pros Are Least Capable of: When queried what skills young communicators are least capable of, understanding finance was first (38%), followed by developing strategy (19%). Nothing else was close [See Chart B]. This is interesting, because as you will see [#5], when we asked what skills had been most important to respondents' success, financial acumen was deemed unimportant.

4. Skills to Advance: When respondents were asked to select three skills that are most important for advancing to a senior leadership role in PR and communications, the percentages were large. The top vote getters: building relationships (64%), critical thinking (55%) and strategy development (54%). These three were markedly higher than the other responses, which included understanding the business sector (29%), emotional intelligence

Business Skills and PR

(24%) and collaborating on a team (21%). So-called hard skills—finance (9%) and measurement/analytics (7%)—barely registered [see Chart C]. This was consistent with findings in the 2016 PR News' Salary Survey (PRN, June 6).

5. Relationships Matter: When asked what skill contributed most to their own career success, building relationships topped the list (38%); next was critical thinking (23%); followed by understanding the sector they were in (9%). This contrasts slightly to the responses regarding what young PR pros need to do to be successful at the outset of their careers. That list started with critical thinking, followed by relationship building and understanding the sector. Again, we note the small responses for the hard skills of finance (2%), measurement/analytics (0%) and legal (0%). Emotional intelligence and collaborating each received 7%; strategy development got 5%. Several respondents commented that writing was important to their success; some indicated understanding/navigating politics within an organization was necessary to be successful.

The respondents were 55% female and 45% male. The majority came from publicly traded companies (52%) and private companies (20%). Nearly half lead their communications' organization (49%).

The data provide a useful construct for leaders and academics as they coach young PR pros in critical thinking and help them advance their understanding and appreciation of analysis and the range of possibilities in decision-making. In addition, leaders and mentors can provide tools and insights to help aspiring PR practitioners develop meaningful professional networks, realize the value of feedback and hone listening skills. With guidance in strategy development, the aspiring PR practitioner will enhance his or her ability to deliver results and benefit the organizations they support. ■

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What Young PR Hires Are Thinking and How to Help Them Succeed

By Evan Martinez

We've all been down the road of uncertainty that follows one of life's milestones: college graduation. The intimidation around securing a job and deciding what to do with the rest of your life can be daunting. As someone in this category, I understand the anxiety. I also have felt the excitement of receiving that first offer letter. More than likely the young hire is arriving at your company with a basic knowledge of communications and much curiosity. I'm generalizing, but I feel new college graduates are adaptable, careful listeners and hungry to learn everything they can about your company.

To help you and your new hire adjust to each other, it's important to know what that young, probably nervous, person who's joined your team is thinking.

1. 'I know I can do this job well and deserve to be here. I'm nervous because making mistakes is inevitable. Will my boss embrace the learning curve as much as I do?'

Your young hire stepped out of a world of drafting press releases about fictional world meetings, using celebrities' social media platforms to form a crisis communications strategy and crafting compelling speeches for presidential or senatorial candidates. There is no doubt that we are ready to complete these tasks in the real world, but much hinges on the first few days in the office. Entering an unfamiliar environment, surrounded by new faces and unknown challenges, can be scary. It also can be unimaginably exciting.

Being comfortable is key. After four years of studying with the same people and improving our writing skills in the same set of computer labs or classrooms, a new office environment can be a shock to the system. Take some time to walk around the office to introduce your new hires to coworkers. Help them become familiar with the setting. Sit them down and explain that you understand there is an adjustment period. All of us have felt pressured when writing a last-minute press release. Think about what you would have wanted your supervisor to say in a situation like that and say it.

2. 'What personality quirks do I need to know about?'

Every supervisor has preferences that a new hire needs to learn. These could be as simple as wanting to receive documents in PDF or wanting PowerPoints saved in a folder that lives deep in the shared communications drive. Some bosses want new hires to submit several drafts of press releases and speeches; others want just one version.

Many supervisors prefer to take the trial-and-error route. Others embrace a more straightforward approach (i.e. they provide a list or discuss their preferences). I've been fortunate to work in environments that align with the latter; however, many aren't as lucky. Some of these quirks might not register at all with you, a senior executive, because the employee you supervised previously knew the routine. Try to remember that things get lost during a transition. What now is second nature to you and your staff is brand new information to the young hire.

No matter how busy you are, remember the freshly graduated, nervous new hires want to learn from the seasoned communication pros surrounding them.

3. 'What's the balance between being proactive versus being bothersome?'

"I'm wary of asking too many questions," says Sydney Baldwin, a recent American University graduate and newly minted publicity coordinator in New York City. "I imagine this thinking stems from the job insecurity in the communications industry that many hires feel. They want to be perceived as independent and informed, so the line dividing the proactive from the bothersome is blurry." I couldn't agree more.

There's little need to tell you that communications is fast-paced, deadline-oriented and coffee-fueled. In our minds, this leaves little room for the Q&As we desperately need as we begin our careers. That is not to say the environment is this way in reality, but the pressure new hires put on themselves to succeed and impress overshadows that. No matter how busy you are, remember the freshly graduated, nervous new hires want to learn from the seasoned communication pros surrounding them. They want to get to know you and the team they will spend the majority of their days with. Most of all, they want to know that even during the busiest times, asking questions and being curious will be encouraged, not discouraged.

4. 'What skills should I be improving?'

Even if you are hiring someone with a top-notch communications degree, it doesn't mean they will have mastered every skill you expect from them. As a senior executive, speaking in front of audiences or performing sophisticated research might seem easy. To a new hire they can be very intimidating. The key to help them improve their writing, research and presentation skills is to offer critiques.

Receiving negative feedback from a supervisor isn't easy, but it's the only way to grow as an employee. Take the skills that led you to hire them, address the skills you need them to master and meld the two. Maybe your new hire is a phenomenal storyteller but doesn't know how to write persuasively. Perhaps they can create captivating presentations, but sweat profusely every time they stand in front of a room. No matter the skill, my advice to senior executives is to find the balance of praise and criticism. Offer them critiques that let them know what they should be practicing at home after work. At the same time, let them know that you admire their courage for taking criticism and doing something with it.

In the end, new hires are just people trying to become you someday. You know how you got to where you are. Share that. ■

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Boost Employee Morale and Impact Company Operations via Engagement

By Autumn Manning

Public relations can often get a bad rap in pop culture, but in reality, PR professionals are some of the most innovative, creative and determined people in the modern workforce. PR practitioners spend ample time strategizing integrated campaigns, writing persuasive content, and creating meaningful relationships with the media to assure the right news is delivered to the right people.

At the same time, recent data shows not all PR professionals are completely satisfied with their jobs. The survey showed that both executive leadership and their employees gave job satisfaction and organizational culture a "B-" grade, citing "an open communication system" and "enhancing interpersonal skills to enrich relationships and teamwork" as key ingredients to becoming happier and more fulfilled at work. Essentially, PR professionals want to feel connected and engaged with one another, and with their organization's mission and culture as whole.

Employee engagement and recognition strategies have proven to quickly and effectively combat feelings like these, and in ways that are beneficial to both employers and employees. Here are some tips for effective employee engagement to help build culture, boost morale and retain top talent in public relations:

Use Brand, Design & Physical Space

Walk into the Chaotic Moon office in Austin, Texas, and you're instantly overwhelmed with a sense of "cool," so much so that you're questioning if you're cool enough even to be there. As much as we'd like to believe that space doesn't matter, we spend a minimum of 40 hours a week at the office, and it's important that it "feels good" to be there.

To retain top talent in PR, it's imperative that employee workspace is conducive to interconnectivity and contemplation. Open space concepts and group meeting areas encourage thoughtful conversation, idea sharing and open communication.

To retain top talent in PR, it's imperative that employee workspace is conducive to interconnectivity and contemplation. Open space concepts and group meeting areas encourage thoughtful conversation, idea sharing and open communication. The good thing about this strategy is that office designs that are conducive to collaboration and productivity are often the cheapest.

Consider these ideas when thinking about in-office engagement and communication:

- Buy your furniture from **Ikea** and **Overstock.com**
- Pick accent walls for a splash of color
- Rip the carpet up and stain cement floors
- When painting, think of the wall as your billboard

The Constructive Feedback Framework, Explained

1. **Get In the Right Mindset**
   Before delivering feedback, leaders should clarify the message they intend to deliver. By identifying the specific information that needs to be communicated, leaders can ensure they focus on what's important, eliminating extraneous "noise" from the conversation.
2. **Focus on the What, Not the Who**
   It isn't necessary to editorialize the characters of your team members. When giving feedback, leaders should seek to address and improve specific elements of behavior rather than attempting to point out the problematic traits of an individual.
3. **Give Specific Examples**
   While leaders should refrain from naming names or repeating hearsay in feedback meetings, they should point to specific examples of the behavior they're trying to address. This specificity will give team members a clear picture of where they fell short and recognize an opportunity to improve.
4. **Explain the Impact**
   Team members may not necessarily recognize why certain behaviors are problematic. They might not understand how important their role on the team is. Specifically inform them of how their behavior impacts them, their team and the organization as a whole.
5. **Pause**
   When providing feedback, it's important to create a dialogue rather than talking "at" team members. Remember to pause, to check for understanding and to let team members speak. Additionally, leaders should make sure to listen for any questions or concerns team members may have.
6. **Outline Next Steps**
   Feedback conversations remain somewhat impractical if a course of action isn't taken to address what is discussed. Leaders and team members should work together to determine actionable steps to take to deal with the issues covered in the critique, and all stakeholders should retain notes to keep them on track. In addition to forming an action plan, it is a good idea to determine ways to measure progress toward the outcome of the intended feedback.
7. **Follow-Up and Follow-Through**
   After implementing the action steps determined during the constructive feedback meeting, leaders should casually check in on the progress of the team member. Leaders should use follow-up conversations to address any questions or needs their team members have; they can also use this time to remind them of upcoming milestones, and to give positive feedback so that team members know their improvement is being actively recognized. Naturally, if more corrective intervention is required, leaders should gently share that feedback as well.

Promote Trust and Eliminate Hierarchal Barriers

A Plank Center study [bit.ly/2fo3rSa] showed another major contributor to job dissatisfaction in public relations is a "lack of trust" in an organization—data showed that a significant gap exists between leadership and their employees' perception of job satisfaction, performance and engagement.

Public relations and agency culture can permeate a feeling of internal distance due to its natural, hierarchical structure, and agencies can especially benefit from initiatives that eliminate these kinds of barriers. If you sense a divide in your organization, consider flipping traditional company structure on its head to ensure every employee is treated the same, with equal amounts of respect. Imagine an office culture where there's no emphasis on heavy titles, or where executives sit in the same type of desk and chairs as the employees.

Professional development programs are

another great way to show an investment in each and every employee in order to close the divide between upper management and junior staff. Try implementing a "PR University" program to train new staff on topics like media relations, content marketing and press trip planning. Don't forget to include even your highest leadership in these initiatives, too, to unite your team as a collaborative and cohesive unit where no one is above another.

Use Constructive Feedback as a Springboard for Engagement

In public relations, team collaboration and interconnectivity are key to foster a culture of open communication and constructive feedback, and ensure that fresh, innovative ideas are always flowing.

Successful PR leaders must remember that each member of their team plays an important role in their organization's success and that each brings a unique set of skills, perspectives and strengths.

When used the right way, feedback is an excellent engagement strategy that can help your team assess strengths and weaknesses. Understanding this will allow you to leverage team strengths, while also allowing leaders to intervene and direct support to where it's needed most.

Implement Quality of Life and Time-Saving Rewards to Help Leverage Long Hours

From balancing a plethora of accounts to meeting deadlines and producing the best possible work for clients, PR professionals spend hours upon hours at their desks, with weekly work time clocking in close to employees in medicine or law. When it finally comes time to relax, employees may feel they haven't had close to enough time to unwind before it's already time to head back to the office. Quality of life and time-saving rewards can help enhance your employees' time outside of work, so that they remain refreshed, fulfilled and consistently ready to perform their best.

Rewards like free grocery delivery or laundry service for a month, or the opportunity to come in late for a week can be the small boost your staff needs to keep team morale thriving. Or maybe your employees work for clients that often host major announcements or events on the weekends—in this case, rewards like a half-day off to hit the spa or catch a movie will help your team take back the weekend and come back refreshed and ready to produce awesome work.

Give Your Team Purpose Through Participation in Wellness and Corporate Social Responsibility

In public relations, it can be difficult to find a happy medium with work-life balance, let alone prioritize health and wellness on a daily or weekly basis. By incorporating employee wellness initiatives into your organizational culture, your team will feel appreciated, respected and motivated to give their best to the job.

Smith Brothers, a communications agency based in Pittsburgh, Penn., understands just how stressful the agency environment can be and has transformed its company culture by making health and wellness a priority within the office. The team embraces a healthier lifestyle by sharing health and wellness success stories, new workout tips, and healthy meal and juice recipes, which they include in their weekly emails to the team.

Here are three things you can do to boost morale and culture through wellness initiatives:

- Organize a team to come up with ideas for the rest of the staff. Having a health committee will help you push forward and organize those awesome ideas.

- Keep wellness top of mind by sharing best practices with your team on a weekly basis. Include some health tips in your weekly newsletter to the team or the dashboard in the break room.
- Encourage people to share their big wins with the team. Hearing your coworkers' success stories will encourage more people to hop on the healthy bandwagon.

Alternatively, rewards that go hand in hand with corporate social responsibility give employees more meaning at work through service to the community. Public relations practitioners often serve clients across a variety of industries, and rewarding employees with a day off to volunteer or donate to the organization that means most to them is an excellent way to give employees individual meaning and purpose through their hard work.

Align Employee Behavior With Company Values to Foster Positivity and Inclusion

As is the case with many industries, public relations can become very internally competitive. While all PR professionals are pushed to produce high-caliber work for their clients, they are also in competition with their colleagues to move up within an organization. This is natural, of course, but preventing this behavior from becoming too saturated within your team's culture will help foster a more engaged, positive and motivated staff as a whole.

For example, in weekly or monthly staff meetings, try implementing a program where one employee passes on an award to a peer with an explanation of why they deserve it. Or consider hosting an annual peer-to-peer award ceremony during a company party where everyone votes on someone who was most aligned with core company values throughout the year. In an industry that can instinctively feel highly competitive, bringing your employees together through consistent peer-to-peer recognition will work wonders for boosting team morale.

The Bottom Line

Creating a culture of appreciation and investment might seem like a "nice to do" and not a "have to do" for your team when so many other day-to-day items can easily stand in the way. But the benefits of implementing a culture of effective engagement, rewards, constructive feedback, and professional development truly outweigh these obstacles. And in an industry that thrives on creativity and the consistent exchange of ideas, assuring employees feel recognized and appreciated has never been so important. ■

Autumn Manning is CEO of YouEarnedIt.

5

Communicating With Employees in Crisis

Don't Forget: Communicating With Your Employees During a Crisis

By Eden Gillott Bowe

During a crisis, employees can be your greatest ally or worst enemy. A surprising number of companies expend all their energy and resources focusing on their customers during a crisis. Don't fall into the same trap by neglecting your employees. A successful company needs great employees (and a great crisis plan).

Why It's Essential to Keep Employees Informed

To keep your employees calm, you must instill confidence and loyalty.

The advice that follows assumes that whatever method of communication and content you ultimately use is reviewed and approved in advance by legal to ensure that you're not violating any laws or opening yourself up to a possible lawsuit in the future.

Don't keep your employees in the dark. By keeping your employees informed, you have the advantage of shaping the story by controlling the flow of information.

Always avoid the dreaded information void. When a vacuum occurs, it's quickly filled by rumors and speculation. This leads to misinformation, which in turn leads to panic, fear and an unnecessary loss of reputation.

The solution is simple: Don't keep your employees in the dark.

By keeping your employees informed, you have the advantage of shaping the story by controlling the flow of information. This is similar to the strategy used to effectively work with the media. You must reassure and manage your employees' expectations. If you fail to manage expectations, you're actually creating another crisis.

Types of Crises

There are many types of crises. While some may not seem on their face to rise to the level of a "crisis," they still require strategic communications. A "crisis" is in the eye of the beholder—or, more accurately, in the eye of the person experiencing it.

- Mergers & acquisitions (**Heinz** & **Kraft**, **Dow Chemical** & **DuPont**, **Anheuser-Busch InBev** & **SAB Miller**, **Starwood** & **Marriott**, **Virgin America** & **Alaska Airlines**)
- Mass layoffs (**Macy's** in 2016, financial crisis of 2008, the auto industry)
- Loss of accreditation (**Delaware Art Museum** after it sold its most famous painting to pay bills, **Morris Brown College** after a financial mismanagement scandal)
- Change in leadership (Steve Jobs at **Apple**, Sumner Redstone and Philippe Dauman at **Viacom**)
- Natural disasters (Hurricane Katrina in 2005, Tojoku earthquake and tsunami in 2011, Hurricane Sandy in 2012, Louisi-

ana flood in 2016)

- Acts of terrorism (9/11, Paris' Charlie Hebdo)
- Bankruptcy (**Circuit City**, **Borders**, **Blockbuster**, **Sports Authority**, **Chrysler**, **Enron**, **Lehman Brothers**)
- Criminal charges (**Enron**, Bernie Madoff & his Ponzi scheme)
- Accusations of molestation (schools, daycare, eldercare facilities)

Planning (After the S*** Hits the Fan)

The best time to handle a crisis is to be prepared for it before it happens. Regrettably, this usually isn't the case, whether because of the nature of the crisis or because those in charge didn't feel a need to be prepared. Of course, there's a vast difference between knowing you should have a crisis plan and actually putting one in place.

Let's assume you've got no crisis plan. The s*** hits the fan. Now what? Take a deep breath. Now, let's get organized.

How to Get Everyone on the Same Page

Employees will talk to family and friends. It's a fact of life, and you can't realistically avoid it. And what they say may eventually leak out to your other stakeholders and the media. So at least make sure they have the correct information to start with.

You've already designated and trained your official spokesperson. So don't lay it all on the line because you neglect to tell your employees how to handle an inquiry from the media (including bloggers).

The easiest way is to give your employees a simple script. For example, "Let me put you in touch with the person handling these calls." Or "What is this call in regard to? What's the best way to reach you? I'll make sure to pass along your information." The benefit of the latter is that it lets you screen the calls and be better prepared.

You should also inform employees how you'd like them to deal with the situation via social media. While it's usually best for employees to refrain from talking about the crisis on social media, you can't legally bar them from doing so.

There are numerous ways you can communicate with your employees during a crisis.

Get Organized: 10 Questions You Need to Answer

You're going to receive an onslaught of questions from your employees, customers, vendors, community, investors and the media. Stopping to answer them will feel like the last thing you want to do. But if you don't communicate effectively, you'll regret it.

1. What do we already know?
2. What do we need to know?
3. Has anyone been injured, sickened, died, etc.?
4. Who's involved?
5. How did it happen and how long have you known?
6. Who (if anyone) is at fault?
7. Have you had similar problems in the past?
8. What are you doing to ensure it won't happen again?
9. What are you doing to help the "victims"?
10. Whom do you need to inform, and how will you inform them?

Everything you say and do must be carefully choreographed. It's important to have a well-thought-out plan in place. Make sure you prepare executives and managers with the key message(s) as well as a Q&A.

Caveat: Don't focus all your energy on what you're going to say, then neglect the delivery.

Which method you choose varies depending on your firm's culture, the issue's severity and the sensitivity. The basic rule: The more grave the news or situation, the higher up the company ladder the announcement needs to come from.

- **Formal notices.** Printed notices issued on letterhead used to be the standard. That's no longer the case. Nowadays, these formal notices are showing up on a company's intranet or via email. *This is useful when*: The information is not sensitive and it's more of a formality.
- **Video broadcasting. Chipotle** recently did this after their long-running contamination issues in 2015-2016. Chipotle shut their 2,000-plus stores to inform their employees about new safety measures it was taking to protect against future outbreaks. *This is useful when*: You need to convey a message simultaneously and may not have the resources to train enough staff to deliver the message in small forums.
- **Team managers.** A top-down approach where C-suite executives have the message delivered verbally by the team leaders of each division. Top management is empowering lower-level managers to inform their own teams since those team managers are closer to their staff and have a better rapport. *This is useful when*: You want a more personalized approach that's somewhere between a formal notice and one-on-one meetings.
- **Conference calls.** It seems that many of our lives are filled with scheduled conference calls. While they're good for disseminating news on recent events or giving a status update on a project, they absolutely shouldn't be used for mass layoffs. *This is useful when*: You have a status update or want to share more run-of-the-mill (and often mundane) information.
- **One-on-one.** This is the most personal way to deliver a message. *This is useful when*: Laying off employees or delivering extremely personal or sensitive information.
- **Anonymous posts.** Having a space for employees to post or ask questions anonymously is one of best ways to make employees feel safe and comfortable. *This is useful when*: Employees have questions or concerns that they don't feel comfortable asking.

What to Say and What Not to Say

Never speculate. If you do, you could be spreading misinformation or giving credence to a problem that doesn't actually exist.

Never use emotionally charged words, such as catastrophe, disaster, sham, embezzlement, etc., because the media will glom onto them.

Avoid process language because it's too formalistic and your employees don't care. All they care about is how this affects them, what happened and what's being done to fix it.

When you do have a formal statement, the pre-approved spokesperson(s) should send it out electronically so there's a paper trail. This will also reduce the risk of employees misunderstanding your message. ■

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7 Ways to Manage Employees Dealing With Various Personal Crises

By Lauren Izaks

Where there are employees, there are personal issues, from health scares and terminal illness to death and divorce. No matter what kind of business you're in, it's smart to be prepared for these situations before they arise.

The best way to mitigate any awkwardness that may happen when an employee is facing personal issues is to create an atmosphere of openness and professionalism. In my experience, it's best to have an office culture of trust and communication so employees know they can come to you in the case of a personal emergency. I believe in working by the Golden Rule, treating everyone with the respect I wish to receive.

Here are seven ways that managers can effectively work with their employees during personal crises.

1. Create a Plan

Have a plan in place at the beginning of an employee's hire regarding personal days and a bereavement policy. Transparency from the hiring process onward gives employees a clear idea of the system they're working with and helps establish mutual trust that will be essential when crises do arise, but…

2. Treat Each Incident Individually

While it is important to have a system in place for employee emergencies, the fact remains that each situation is different, and must be treated as such. Taking things on a case-by-case basis helps promote trust; rather than someone feeling as though they are being put through unnecessary bureaucracy, it's sometimes best to handle things as they come.

Don't try to iron out all the logistics of time off and work redistribution at the moment a crisis happens; there's a time for that when things have calmed down.

For example, one of my employees had a health scare that required many follow-up appointments. Instead of holding fast to the personal day policies we have, I worked with her one-on-one to set up a system of in-office time and working from home that would allow her to go to her appointments while still taking care of her work responsibilities. She was relieved that she could focus on her health, the office was happy that she had the time and space to get better and the clients were pleased that the work was still getting done.

3. Put the Person First

When an employee is in crisis, focus on the person, not the person's work. He or she might be worried about his or her to-do list getting finished, but your job as the manager

By the Numbers: Paid Time Off and Bereavement

Companies around the country and world vary greatly when it comes to paid time off, paid vacation days, holiday time off and bereavement policies. I've found that erring on the side of flexibility goes a long way—namely, I offer employees an extra day off to take on their birthdays, because 100% of workers would rather be having fun on their birthdays than working! Check out some other stats—how does your company stack up?

2 – Percentage of U.S. companies that offer unlimited vacation days to full-time employees

23 – Percentage of U.S. companies that have no paid time off or paid holiday policy whatsoever

10 – Average number of vacation days offered per year in U.S. companies

25 – Average number of vacation days offered per year in European Union countries

90 – Percentage of employers that offer paid bereavement time to full-time employees

3 – Average number of bereavement days offered to U.S. employees for immediate family members

Based on a 2013 study by the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM)

is to take the lead in a tough time. First and foremost, just get the person home. Don't try to iron out all the logistics of time off and work redistribution at the moment a crisis happens; there's a time for that when things have calmed down.

I dealt with one situation where an employee's parent had suddenly died, and she was in complete shock. Understandably, I made arrangements for her to get home, then made plans to follow up with her later on. It simply wasn't the time for lists or deadlines to be discussed. I was able to rely on the plan I had in place, but still treat her like a human being that was dealing with loss.

4. Don't Judge the Circumstances

Everyone deals with tragedy and trauma differently. Some people throw themselves into their work to distract their minds, and for some, work is an additional stressor that can compound existing issues. Bear in mind that people react differently to life events, and what might not be a big deal for one person can be earth shattering for another.

I'll use the example of a grandparent passing: To some, this is a monumental and tragic event, and to others, it's a sad occurrence but an understandable part of the circle of life. It's not my, or anyone else's, place to tell an employee to move through his or her grieving at any pace besides what he or she is comfortable with.

5. Utilize Teamwork and Backups

If a personal event causes an employee to take time outside of the office to deal with situations beyond his or her control, the truth is that the work generally cannot wait. For this reason, I suggest preemptively putting a system in place where schedules and assignments are shared with another person. That way, if extenuating circumstances occur, our clients won't feel the effects and the work can be picked up by another person with access to their information.

In our company, this is put into practice through the weekly to-do lists our employees put together, broken down into tasks by client. In the unfortunate event something happens that requires out-of-office time, other members of the accounts can make sure that the work is being handled. By utilizing these calendars and lists on an ongoing basis, we're doing preventative crisis management that we're all comfortable with.

6. Check In Sensitively

In the interest of prioritizing the employee's happiness, I often do a check-in after a respectful amount of time. This should be done sensitively and at strategic times. For example, I like to check in before lunch or at the end of the day. That way, the employee is not distracted in the middle of the workday, and if he or she needs to take a few minutes to collect him or herself, there's time for it.

In the case of my employee who lost a parent, I followed up with her via text over the course of the next few days to make sure she was doing okay. Throughout this process, we set up a plan for her time off, and she was better equipped to deal with the logistics after she had some time to process her loss. She knew that I cared about her, but also respected her private life.

7. Follow the Law

Finally, it must be mentioned that depending on the size of your business, you may have legal responsibilities to deal with. You're probably aware that once you reach 50 employees, you're subject to the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which requires that the employer give time off to individuals with medical needs or acting as the caregiver for a family member, but check with your local and state laws for specific requirements.

Keep in mind that it's often in the best interest of you, the employer, to put your employee's satisfaction and well-being above federal requirements and internal policies alike—remember the Golden Rule. When disaster strikes, a little sensitivity and flexibility can make all the difference—and it leads to happy employees, a positive work environment and wonderful client support. ■

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Walk Before You Can Run: How to Establish a Crisis Communication Plan

By Samantha Kruse and Kelsey Chapekis

At the outset of a crisis, organizations are primarily concerned with communicating with clients, consumers, investors, shareholders and the media, often neglecting one of the most important audiences: employees. In any crisis, failing to communicate a clear and effective message and internal and external response protocol to employees could result in a secondary crisis wave. Having internal crisis communications and business continuity plans in place is an essential part of any crisis preparedness exercise. When communicated with correctly and efficiently, employees could become an organization's greatest advocates. In the event that internal communications are mismanaged, those same employees could become an organization's worst nightmare.

Practice and Preparedness Make Perfect

When developing an internal crisis communications plan, it is of the utmost importance to determine what employees need to be told, and how they should be told. Determine the necessary information employees need to know, and then how to properly disseminate this information.

Just as in sports, practice makes perfect. Crisis-preparedness drills must include employee communication protocol drills, including preparing a spokesperson or point of contact for employees. If employees are accustomed to hearing from their direct managers in person regarding organizational procedures, meetings with leadership and their direct reports should be set up immediately in a crisis; if employees at a large organization are accustomed to attending conference calls led by the CEO in response to crisis scenarios, dial-in information should be included in a crisis response plan notification tree.

As is the case with talking points targeted at key audiences like regulators or stakeholders prepared before a crisis hits, talking points targeted to an organization's employees must also be developed. Messaging should emphasize a clear and decisive chain of command so employees know all the information that is necessary for them to perform their jobs while the crisis is successfully managed. People will not be tempted to engage in speculation or gossip if they're confident they've been fully informed.

A point of contact for employees needs to be clearly defined…having an organized method for employees to get answers will allow them to return to focusing on their day-to-day responsibilities.

It should be noted that international companies face increasingly difficult challenges regarding internal communications. While communicating to offices and branches in different time zones across the world poses its own challenges, talking points and protocols must also be dictated by different cultural concerns at each global location.

It is also essential that the internal "face" of the crisis for all employees be someone who commands trust and respect. For example, if the CEO of a company rarely sends an email to employees scheduling an all-staff meeting, he or she should not be responsible for this step.

Especially in a large company, a point of contact for employees needs to be clearly defined. It is inevitable that there will be an influx of questions regarding the crisis and how it could potentially affect the company's operations, so having an organized method for employees to get answers will allow them to return to focusing on their day-to-day responsibilities.

When (Not If) Crisis Strikes, Be Ready

The No. 1 rule of internal communications is that employees should never find out about any crisis or major news for the first time via the organization's public statement, but from the organization itself. When The Boston Globe published a story in early 2016 that **GE** (General Electric) was moving its headquarters from Fairfield, Conn. to Boston, Mass. before the company made its official announcement, employees were understandably shocked and confused. GE acted quickly, confirming the story with its employees before confirming externally with other key audiences.

Even without a leak, a company relocation as big as GE's announcement, from the town that had been its base for 40-odd years, needs a prepared internal communications plan. The important lesson in this example is that if GE had not had a plan in place, its communications team would not have been able to turn around a response to its employees before addressing the rest of the marketplace.

Internal Crisis Communications Checklist

- Have you designated a spokesperson, or numerous points of contact, for internal communications?
- Do you have a template for employee-specific talking points?
- Have you drafted content and design elements for a dark website that can go live if needed?
- Do you know how you will manage employees' social media accounts?
- What does your business continuity plan and crisis response plan look like? Do they communicate with one another and provide for internal de-escalation processes?

Go Digital or Go Home

Consumers have an easy-to-access space to get answers. Rather than bombarding a company's social media handle with questions, it is important for employees to be able to easily find answers, especially at a large company. Having a dark site prepared to launch in tandem with the announcement of a crisis can quiet panicked inquiries before they start. A dark site should include, for example, sections aimed at employees, customers and vendors, including FAQs, access to remediation services and call center contact information (as necessary).

Employee-specific FAQs that are available online will help maintain smooth internal operations. Especially for employees who do not work at headquarters, creating a resource that can help answer questions will promote calm and dispel panic.

Stopping the Spread

An internal crisis communications plan also needs to determine how to manage what employees are saying both externally and internally. In the digital age, disgruntled employees aren't complaining just to their neighbors; they take to Twitter or Facebook and share their thoughts on a platform that has the potential for nearly unlimited reach. Social media can serve as an instigator or an extinguisher in times of crisis, depending on the corporate response.

Any recommendations made to employees regarding their use of social media should fall in line with company culture. These protocols should be in place and socialized before the crisis hits. If employees have always been encouraged to refrain from mentioning their employer via personal social media channels, then it makes sense to continue this policy. If that sort of policy had never existed, putting one in place during a time of crisis may spook employees into concern that they're being misled or muzzled. It is better to earn employees' trust and explain to them why it is in everyone's interest to let the communications team handle external communications efforts.

The 'New Normal'

Once the initial crisis has dissipated, the company must also communicate to employees how to return to normal day-to-day operations. Keep in mind that reminding employees of the appropriate points of contact will help ensure that the de-escalation phase of crisis mode runs smoothly. It is also helpful to schedule recovery meetings for employees so that everyone is on the same page and knows they are being kept informed of company goings-on. When employees feel like they are well informed, they will be far less likely to continue any speculation regarding the recent crisis. Whether or not an organization is satisfied with its internal crisis response protocols, testing and retesting the crisis response plan needs to become a quarterly or annual practice, and the plans and processes should be institutionalized (especially if they were not already).

After all external crisis communication efforts, a postmortem is conducted to determine what went right and what could have gone better, and an internal crisis communication campaign is no exception. There will never not be a need for speed, honesty and transparent internal communications, so it is important to continue smoothing out kinks and improving future employee communications plans, whether related to a crisis or not. ■

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How Proactive Employee Engagement Provides a Crisis Safety Net

By Gabor Sarlos

In crisis situations maintaining employee loyalty is critical. Only well-informed and highly engaged employees will provide the support the company needs. Not only will employees need to ensure continuity in their work, but by becoming a most sought-after source of information, they will face new challenges by becoming "crisis ambassadors." For crisis situations, academic literature and crisis management cases argue for securing ongoing employee engagement and following an inclusive internal communication policy.

Crises in a Nutshell

Crisis situations are turning points that can make or break a company. Prevention, management of and following up on crises are all critical to the long-term operations of a company. Maintaining staff loyalty is essential to ensure operations of the company and safeguard its reputation. If not earlier, these are the moments when management usually realizes: Without the loyalty of employees, the crisis might escalate. Such lessons reconfirm that employees are the prime stakeholder group of any organization.

Crises can occur for a variety of causes. Natural disasters, technological failures, management mistakes, employee actions or sudden market changes can all cause fundamental threats to the existence of the company. Regardless of its nature, crisis can lead to one or more of three related threats: public safety, financial loss and reputation loss.

Crises are often compared to geysers, where a lot is happening under the surface before the actual eruption comes. Actual crisis management starts far before this eruption and includes ongoing identification and mitigation of risks, monitoring of issues, development of crisis scenarios, delivering crisis trainings and preparing the crisis teams. All these serve the mitigation of possible physical, financial and reputational damages. Employees need to be placed in the center of all of these efforts.

Engaged employees will want to take part in helping the company overcome the crisis. Instead of being passive audiences and simple receivers of messages, they can take an active part in snowballing communication to the external audiences.

Why Focus on Employees in Crisis Management?

Traditionally, companies in crises tend to focus on their external publics. Management is usually worried about the customers, the business partners, the authorities and the media, and directs its crisis management actions to the external world. In a study from a few years ago, it became clear that in Denmark 67% of the companies with proper crisis scenarios had clear policies about external

10 Golden Rules for Internal Communication in Crisis

1. Be quick
2. Be honest
3. Admit if you do not know something at the given time to the desired extent
4. Draw a line between what is for internal audiences only, but be prepared that it might leak
5. Help employees make sense: Interpret what has happened and explain your actions
6. Share your vision
7. Give priority to channels your staff uses and trusts
8. Listen to what your employees say, ask, comment and suggest
9. Keep frequency and consistency in communication
10. Be realistic: You can't beat the grapevine, so make it work for the common good

communication, while only 31% had a similar policy in place for internal stakeholders (Johansen, Aggerholm & Frandsen, 2012). In the 21st century, in crisis situations, internal audiences need to be handled as the prime stakeholder group, as internal communications are fundamental to successful crisis management.

The most important single condition for continued operations of the organization is the loyalty of the workforce. Uninterrupted operations, insofar as they are possible, ensure the financial stability of the company and represent moral backbone and stamina in overcoming difficulties. Airlines continuing operations in extreme winter weather, maintenance of production following natural catastrophes and keeping brands alive after financial insolvency all have a common feature: They rely heavily on the engagement and dedication of staff. Engaged employees form the backbone of the necessary conditions and are the prime asset in maintaining operations in crisis situations. However, employee loyalty will not prevail unless it had been nurtured earlier.

Building employee loyalty is a long-term process and needs close cooperation between management, HR and PR functions. It involves creating a corporate culture of respect, openness and constructiveness, developing and maintaining the appropriate communication channels, involving employee representatives in the strategic processes of the organization, empowering staff to make decisions that are needed to deliver optimal performance, having clear and widely recognized policies and practices in place and in general providing the conditions for collaborative work. Certain types of crises, such as industrial accidents, workforce disputes, company restructurings and personnel issues are especially prone to risking the principles of internal communications. Nevertheless, based on their sense of belonging and ownership, engaged employees will want to take part in helping the company overcome the crisis. Instead of being passive audiences and simple receivers of messages, they can take an active part in snowballing communication to the external audiences. Building employee loyalty is therefore a long-term investment into the stability and the reputation of the company. Weaving a safety net will stop the company from free falling in crisis.

How to Engage Your Employees in External Communication?

In these moments, the role of employees actually grows not only in the field of operational stability but communication as well. In today's world, the boundary between the internal and external world is not impermeable. However hard management might want to resist, information from within the company will always leak. In modern societies, everyone is part of various social structures with specific communication channels. Social media posts, after-work chats in the bar and evening family stories are sources of information to the external world, and add personal accounts to possible "official" accounts of the events. Unease, confusion and an increased risk of reputation loss will appear if a strong contradiction prevails between the official company voice and these personal accounts. Similarly, media news, social media posts and supplier insights each contribute to the full picture and affect the workforce's perception of the crisis. A piece of evening news will spread between employees like wildfire. Again, internal and external circles tie up.

So why not ride the tide instead of letting the message drift away? Turn employee communication into opportunities to snowball credible messages. Support their blogging, social media posting and evening discussions crisis by providing training in social media communication and formulating of messages. If management neglects this, the opposite will become reality: A lack of informing and involving the internal stakeholders can easily lead to disgruntled employees sharing unnecessary information and actually putting oil on the fire.

5 Myths to Beat

1. "We can keep our problems within the company"

No, you can't keep everything internal. These days, everything is out in the air and on the net within hours, or even minutes. Rather, grab the opportunity and involve your (key) employees to snowball your messages.

Internal Crisis Checklists

Pre-crisis: How to prepare your staff?

- Build loyalty and engagement through involvement and empowerment
- Create and regularly audit a proper communication structure
- Break with top-to-bottom and bottom-to-top approaches, and facilitate a structure of multidimensional communication flow
- Provide crisis trainings and simulations
- Create crisis teams
- Develop workforce-wide communication skills and competences

During the crisis: How to manage your staff?

- Follow the 10 golden rules (see other sidebar)
- Involve and empower staff in snowballing information
- Provide consistent sense-making and messaging
- Be supportive to employees' individual social media activities
- Maintain clear and open lines of communication with and between employees to minimize rumors and maximize consistency of communication

Post-crisis: How to build on crisis?

- Involve staff in evaluation and conclusions of the crisis
- Create a common internal body of knowledge and experience
- Make the necessary operational changes and provide an explanation of what is being done and why
- Continue involving and engaging employees to create a safety net for further potential crises

2. "We can keep this crisis off the net"

No, you can't prevent a crisis from starting its own life on social media. Rather, grab the opportunity, guide and train your people what, how, when and where to communicate.

3. "We will share all the information via our intranet"

No, your employees will actually not read the company intranet. Sharing key information only on the intranet will not satisfy their hunger for information. Nothing can replace live, firsthand information from top management and immediate supervisors. Employees will want to voice doubts and fears, raise questions, provide input and actually contribute to solving the crisis. This can only be done through live and personal communication.

4. "It is enough if management gives their interpretation of things"

No, not all employees will agree with your interpretation of events and the way the company solves the issue. Nevertheless, you need to provide an interpretation and help employees make sense of what has been happening and what is to be expected. It is important that through a genuine and credible interpretation and an open discussion, your key employees should join you to actually become spokespeople for the case. Let them be crisis ambassadors of your company.

5. "We need to put out the fire first and then inform our people"

No, your employees will not wait for management. It would be simply increasing the risks if management didn't deal with employees in the first place. Follow the "Three-I Rule": Inform, involve and inspire. Give your staff the vision that by joining hands, the company can overcome current difficulties.

Why Is Internal Crisis Management an Ongoing Task?

For any organization, a crisis is always an opportunity to emerge with strengthened energy. The workforce of the company can play a fundamental role in contributing to this fresh start. However, a system needs to be in place that engages employees in all three phases of a crisis. Before any crisis, staff needs to get support in becoming prepared for various scenarios, be provided with scope and guidance during the crisis and have the opportunity to be involved in the evaluation and in the learning and developing process following the crisis. ■

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What 'The Martian' Teaches Us About Employee Communications in a Crisis

By Jeremy Boylen

In the heralded film *The Martian*, things go badly quickly for **NASA**, and the agency adds to the crisis by making some communications errors.

Few of us will confront the kind of dilemma NASA faced in the movie, yet many of us may need to manage staff communications when a crisis hits our organization. You'll recognize NASA's mistakes below—but what about your bosses? Do they get it?

The Martian presents an opportunity to start a discussion with managers about how to communicate with staff in a crisis. In truth, NASA's managers might have been in a no-win situation. Perhaps I am being unfair to them. Still, the film can serve as a launchpad for a discussion about employee communications during a crisis.

We Have a Problem

A massive storm forces NASA's crew to hastily abandon Mars, leaving behind botanist Mark Watney (played by Matt Damon), who is thought to have died. Problem is, NASA later discovers Watney is alive, but decides not to tell the remaining crew members traveling back to Earth.

NASA Director Teddy Sanders (Jeff Daniels): "If Watney is really alive, we don't want the Ares 3 crew to know. They have another 10 months on their trip home. Space travel is dangerous. They need to be alert and undistracted."

Alone on Mars, Watney is furious when informed that the crew has not been told of his survival.

Watney: "They don't know I'm alive? What the f*** is wrong with you?"

Flight Director Mitch Henderson (Sean Bean): "The longer we wait, the worse it's gonna get...we need to tell the crew."

NASA's Mistake

In the film, NASA withholds the truth from staff until it feels it has a complete plan of action to cope with the crisis it faces. This is understandable, but counterproductive. Astronauts and employees perceive withholding of information as a lack of transparency, honesty and goodwill on an employer's part. At best they feel left out, at worst deceived.

Flight Director Henderson: "I'm the one who decides what's best for the crew. They deserve to know."

NASA Director Sanders: "Once there's a real rescue plan, we'll tell them…"

A dead fish smells worse at week's end than at the start. If your brand is in a crisis, don't delay telling staff until you have a complete solution. Avoid going off half-cocked, but don't make the common mistake of unduly keeping staff in the dark up to the point where they are first told about a major problem.

Hang a lantern on your problem before someone else does. If someone else exposes the crisis, you lose control of the message—and staff feel disenfranchised.

Employees aren't in space. When there's a crisis, staff get wind of it and word gets out. If no message is sent to staff, it leaves an information vacuum that is quickly filled with rumor and misinformation. If staff communications are poorly executed, it can be a bit like sending a signal into deep space: The message can be lost or become distorted.

Timing Counts

If possible, don't spring all the bad news on staff at the 11th hour. Employees often need some warning that an announcement is to be made about a major issue that could change their professional lives. A sudden and unexpected cascade of bad news can hit employees hard. If possible, help them prepare by giving a heads-up about a significant announcement.

Flight Director Henderson: "Mark Watney is still alive…We found out two months ago and…decided not to tell you."

Crew: "Two months? Oh my god."

If you can't give staff all the information because some aspects are still being worked out, say so and explain why.

Seven Words to Work By

The next seven words are important: Honesty and transparency build trust and engagement. This always is true, but especially in a crisis. There's a reason I put honesty ahead of transparency. As we see in the film, NASA can't be completely transparent since not every detail should be shared.

If you can't give staff all the information because some aspects are still being worked out, say so and explain why. If possible, outline when those details will be made available. Even if managers can't communicate hard facts or updated information, regular contact with staff will demonstrate the reassuring values of goodwill, honesty and transparency.

Don't just communicate the management decision—communicate the reasons for it too. A major announcement sometimes follows weeks of discussion at management level, but staff aren't aware of that. Be sure to provide clear and comprehensive reasons for a large change that responds to a crisis. Be clear, factual, consistent and honest when explaining the reasons for company decisions. Outline the process that's under way to respond to the problem, explain what happens next and be clear about what you need employees to do.

When it comes to staff communications in a crisis, it's better to regret what you did rather than what you didn't do. It is far better to overcommunicate than to undercommunicate. Repeat your decisions and the reasons for them. ■

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6

Communicating With Different Generations of Employees

Discovering the 'Y' in Generation Y: Key Learnings on How to Integrate Millennials

By Jennifer Barrett and Anthony Melito

Today's workforce is comprised of five generations: Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y (Millennials) and Gen Z, which presents either harmonious inspiration filled with unique opportunities or a cacophony of challenges seeded with assumptions. This dynamic environment demands malleability in how to effectively and efficiently recruit, integrate and retain. One generation that has been simultaneously applauded and criticized is the Millennial segment. Should they be considered as the complex "others" or rather exalted as an essential asset that is necessary for long term business planning success?

Approximately 50% of Millennials expressed a deep commitment to their personal values and stated that they would resign if the organization's values were misaligned to their own views.

The Millennial generation consists of individuals who are born between 1980 and 2000.[1] Within five years, it is estimated that Millennials will form 50% of the global workforce.[2] This presents a challenge to managers to understand the nuances of this generation's needs in order to translate them into success for their organizations. This generation has been praised as "the most educated generation in history, ambitious and eager," but also has been criticized for being "undependable, not committed and difficult to manage."[3] Since perception becomes reality, let's explore how managers can create synergy in an intergenerational workforce.

What Moves Millennials

This generation values the philosophy of more. They seek faster career advancement; a flexible work environment where the office is no longer a physical confined area; utilizing technology not only as a tool but a key channel of communication; and real-time feedback in order to motivate and inspire.[2] Each generation is and has been directly impacted by societal trends. One impactful evolution is technology. Technology is a tool to enhance their world, not necessary to solely create their world. It is part of their identity and helps to form their worldview. Technology should be utilized in recruitment, training and retention. About 59% of Millennials have expressed that when seeking a job opportunity, access to state-of-the-art technology is a key consideration in choosing an employer. Moreover, 79% noted that access to their preferred technology is responsible for an increase in effective output.[2] Managers should leverage these insights to engage their employees by incorporating a variety of digital communication tools. Blogs, instant messaging, video on demand and wiki pages all enable instant connections and collaboration resulting in enhanced productivity. As a result of incorporating these tools with digitally motivated Millennials, their potential and drive can exponentially grow.

Communication is a foundational element of a successful team. Millennials gravitate toward social media and digital channels to communicate. Many assume that this generation would prefer to live in a completely virtual world devoid of human-to-human interaction. Managers should be cautious of this fallacy. This generation craves connection, relationships and instantaneous information.

To manage internal communications and intergenerational team expectations, it is important to explore and define what is considered good communication. For example, Millennials do not consider geographic barriers or time zone differences as constraints on productivity. Rather, they are flexible and adaptable to utilizing technology platforms to achieve the best approach for their clients. Approximately 71% of Millennials expressed a desire to work abroad, citing that international experience is a vital element to a successful career.[2] Since Millennials desire more, the ability to effortlessly connect to resources globally satiates their innate need for being part of a larger, global network, rather than limiting themselves to a finite and smaller, localized unit.

Training Considerations

Many Millennials desire a combination of training and ongoing learning. They are eager for personal development and career advancement. It is advantageous to develop learning and development methodology specific to this generation to retain talent. 35% of Millennials said they were attracted to employers who offer pertinent training and ongoing development activities.[2] Therefore, it is beneficial to modify training tactics specific to this generation. Managers should consider a blend of traditional and modern learning modules. E-learning, formal classroom training sessions, academic courses and rotating job roles/responsibilities are all crucial for continued learning. Since Millennials are well versed with technology, digital trainings are preferred in this generation. Online learning platforms, webinars or interactive game-play lend well to educating this group. In addition, coaching and mentorship is also seen as an important opportunity for learning. Senior employees should be a resource for newer employees, passing along earned knowledge and experience. Reverse mentorship can also benefit teams to achieve optimal inter-generational team success. It is imperative that each generation respect and learn from each other's strengths regarding technology and process based on experience.

Tips for Managing Millennials

The Do's:

1. Be flexible and adaptable
2. Utilize the latest technology for training and work processes
3. Provide purpose, not incentives

The Don'ts

1. Utilize the same strategies for each member of an intergenerational team
2. Discourage new ideas and thought processes
3. Limit opportunities for career advancement

Value Systems

A key element to retention is aligning value systems. Almost 95% of Millennials stated they strive for a work-life balance and tend to value this flexibility as more important than financial rewards.[2] Since they utilize technology and value seamless and instantaneous digital connections, many prefer to focus on the quality of their work rather than the location when executing the tasks. Millennials place integrity over the expectations of corporate responsibility. Approximately 50% of Millennials expressed a deep commitment to their personal values and stated that they would resign if the organization's values were misaligned to their own views.[2] Another important value and motivating factor for this group is the desire and need for career progression. 52% said the potential for rapid and transparent career advancement is a main appeal in choosing an employer. Implementing clear corporate structures and highlighting advancement opportunities helps to create unity between Millennial and corporate values.

Millennials encourage society to reevaluate traditional business models and practices. They are not interested in how things used to be done but rather, what can be done? And why? A deeper understanding of the *why* is imperative to create future business success. This generation has the ability to create and redefine. One could argue that Millennials should be valued as complex "others" and simultaneously as an essential asset for long-term planning based on their multi-dimensional value system and their limitless thirst for achievement. ■

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How to Spread Information to Different Generations of Employees During a Crisis

By Robert S. Fleming

The success and survival of any contemporary organization require that it assemble and manage the necessary resources to operate effectively and efficiently in pursuit of its mission, in a manner that fully meets and, ideally, exceeds the expectations of various stakeholder groups. An organization's employees are considered one of an organization's most important stakeholder groups given the role they play in its successful operation.

This article will consider the importance and challenges of communicating with employees during times of crisis. It will focus on the realities of communicating with different generations of employees during the challenging times that an organization and its employees may face during a crisis situation. Through understanding the characteristics of different generations of employees, as well as appropriate communication tools and technologies that are effective in reaching the various generations of employees on which the successful organization relies, a comprehensive communication strategy can be developed and implemented that addresses the challenges associated with disseminating information to the various generations of employees within an organization.

Importance of Effective Communication in Times of Crisis

The crucial role that internal communication from an organization to its employees plays in determining organizational success has been well documented. Successful contemporary organizations routinely disseminate information regarding their day-to-day operations to their employees. This information serves to clarify the expectations that the organization has for employees and thus provides essential guidance to these employees. Effective communication contributes to motivation and empowerment of an organization's most important resource: its people.

In addition to defining an organization's expectations, effective formal communication avoids the undesirable consequences of such informal communication as rumors and gossip. Through regular formal communication an organization can prevent the inaccurate, confusing or misleading information that can surface at any time within an organization, but will certainly be prone to arise if an organization does not engage in a proactive communication strategy during times of crisis, when employees often will have numerous questions which only their organization can answer properly.

A proactive approach to disseminating information to employees during a crisis situation is a prudent strategy that contributes to organizational resilience, as well as demonstrating that the organization values and cares about its employees and thus wants them to be fully informed at all times. A proactive approach that is responsive to the informational needs and expectations of employees is called for in crisis situations. A successful communication strategy must recognize the challenges of communicating with particular groups in the workforce, including different generations of employees, through the use of appropriate communication tools and technologies capable of successfully reaching all employees with important, time-sensitive information from their organization.

Employee Expectations Regarding Information Dissemination

Employees have a standard set of expectations regarding information dissemination that include that information they receive from their organization be accessible, accurate, complete, credible, professional and timely. While these expectations are always important, they take on increased significance during crisis situations that impact their organization and themselves.

Employees expect to be kept apprised of all relevant information they need during a crisis. Ideally, pertinent information will be available through a number of communication tools and technologies that, in addition to "pushing" information to them, enable them to "pull" information from available information resources. The provision of readily available information minimizes the need or inclination for employees to buy into incorrect, confusing or misleading information they may learn about through other sources, including rumors.

Employees expect that all information they receive from their organization throughout the crisis will be factually correct. It is in the best interest of an organization to keep all of its stakeholders, particularly its employees, properly informed throughout a crisis impacting them and their organization. While they not only expect but often require relevant information, such as whether to report to work, in a timely manner, they do understand that the information they receive in the early hours of a crisis may out of necessity be general in nature, with more specific information being provided through later periodic updates.

Employees expect that their organization will make available to them all relevant information they need to know about the crisis and its impact on them. It is essential that they be provided with necessary information regarding what the organization expects them to do (as well as refrain from doing) at particular times during the crisis. This information might relate to whether or not to report to work, whether employees should report to an alternate location or work from home and compensation arrangements during the crisis.

Employees expect that their organization will designate appropriate, qualified representatives who fully understand what has happened, what is currently happening and what is likely to happen to coordinate the preparation and dissemination of information to employees. This expectation is typically addressed through the appointment of a public information officer who has the ability to represent the organization credibly in communicating to employees and other interested stakeholders. They also expect that all information will be prepared and disseminated in a professional manner that demonstrates empathy and concern for those impacted by the crisis, including the organization's employees.

It is essential that those responsible for communicating with an organization's employees meet and, ideally, exceed the above employee expectations. An essential element in ensuring successful communication to all employees is developing a thorough understanding of the communication challenges associated with the various worker demographics, including different generations that comprise an organization's workforce and associated effective communication strategies.

Informing Employees of an Office Closure: Then and Now

While the reasons an organization may find it necessary to close a facility or change normal working hours or locations will vary, there will be times the leaders of an organization will determine such an action to be prudent. A weather-related event, natural disaster or fire at the business premises are typical reasons for making such a decision. As important as making a prudent decision in a timely manner is, an equally important challenge involves ensuring all involved employees are properly informed of this decision and how it impacts them and their work responsibilities.

While a proactive approach has always been essential in communicating with employees in these challenging situations, the available methods for doing so and resulting information-dissemination strategies have dramatically changed over a fairly short period of time. Veteran employees will likely remember being notified of such situations by receiving a call on their landline telephone from their supervisor. Other organizations found the use of telephone call lists an effective and efficient manner of getting the word out to all employees. While having employees pass the word on to other employees contributes to timely notification, it does have the inherent potential for information distortion, whereby inaccurate, confusing or misleading information could be disseminated on behalf of an organization.

Technological advances have revolutionized communication within society, including how employers communicate with employees in crisis situations, whether while at work or during their non-working hours. Most enlightened organizations utilize multiple tools to communicate with their employees during crisis and emergency situations. Thus, an employee might receive notification of a fire at work that has caused a shutdown of their building and instructions to report to another work location. This notification could be sent utilizing landline telephones (both office and home), cell phones, the internet and social media. A comprehensive communication strategy thus enables an organization to communicate with employees at any time, regardless of their present location. Thus, such an approach can also be used to notify employees who are at work of important real-time information, such as the need to evacuate a building.

Advances in Information Dissemination Technologies

Numerous advances in communication technologies and tools in recent years have significantly enhanced the ways through which a contemporary organization can disseminate information to its employees during times of crisis. The past location-based limitations of communicating with employees at work or home through landline telephones have been addressed through the advent of cell and smart phones that feature enhanced portability and information-sharing capabilities.

The internet and social media have furthermore revolutionized contemporary communication and serve as valuable information dissemination tools available to organizations. These communications tools have transformed communication patterns and frequency and have provided for instantaneous communication and information dissemination. They have contributed to increased expectations for timely information, particularly in times of crisis. Their use by various demographic groups continues to grow.

Depending on the nature and scope of a crisis, information may become readily available from other sources such as governmental agencies and the traditional news media. Many of these organizations now disseminate time-sensitive information through the use of websites and social media. While employees may look to these sources for general information about a crisis situation, it is incumbent on an organization to take ownership for communicating necessary information to its employees, as well as to monitor these sources in the interest of identifying and addressing any inaccurate information regarding their organization being disseminated by the news media.

The Multigenerational Workforce

The workforce of most contemporary organizations is composed of individuals representing various demographic groups, including a number of generations. Just as an organization should seek to communicate effectively with employees based on other demographic factors, the importance of doing so greatly increases in importance when disseminating information during a crisis. Developing an effective communication strategy begins with understanding the different generations represented in one's workforce.

The provision of readily available information minimizes the need or inclination for employees to buy into incorrect, confusing or misleading information they may learn about through other sources, including rumors.

The workforce composition of an organization can be categorized into four groups based on employee age. *Traditionalists* are individuals who were born before 1946. These older employees typically bring a wealth of experience and expertise to an organization. Significant events occurring during their lifetime include the Great Depression and World War II. *Baby Boomers* were born between 1946 and 1964. The Korean and Vietnam Wars occurred during this period. These individuals had the fortune of living during a time of economic prosperity.

Gen Xers were born between 1965 and 1980. During their lifetime television became a primary tool in disseminating news to the public. There were many technological advances, including the computers that paved the way for the communication technologies and tools of today. *Millennials*, also called "Dot Coms" or "Nexters" were born after 1980. These individuals grew up in the information age and have interacted with computers and other technologies throughout their lives.

Challenges of Communicating With Different Generations in Times of Crisis

While understanding the various generations of employees within an organization's workforce is a logical starting point in the development of an appropriate information-dissemination strategy, it is also important to understand the access that the different generations typically have to information-dissemination tools, including the internet and social media. It is also important to understand that some individuals who have access to available technologies may not have a high comfort level in their use or may rely on other information-dissemination sources.

Many Traditionalists have limited access to new technologies, such as the internet and social media. They also tend to have a limited understanding of the use of these communication tools. In contrast, most Baby Boomers have access to the internet and social media, as well as a reasonable understanding of their use.

Gen Xers possess both a comprehensive understanding and ability in the use of the internet and social media. Individuals from this generation have access to these communication tools. The use of state-of-the-art communication tools is a hallmark of Millennials. These technology-savvy individuals grew up in a technological age and use technology and

Redundancy Is Essential When Communicating With Employees in Times of Crisis: Messaging for Various Mediums

A proactive communication strategy must be designed in a comprehensive manner that ensures its ability to effectively and efficiently communicate to all employees in an accessible, accurate, complete, credible, professional and timely manner in the event of an emergency or crisis situation that impacts them and their work responsibilities. An organization's communication strategy must incorporate the necessary redundancy to ensure that necessary information disseminated by the organization is available and accessible to all impacted employees.

There are two crucial reasons why redundancy is necessary when disseminating important information during times of crisis. The first relates to the intended audience to which information is disseminated, while the second relates to the availability of various communication tools during a crisis.

The workforce of most successful contemporary organizations is composed of a cadre of individuals who possess the required knowledge and skills to enable the organization to succeed in fulfilling its mission. The typical workforce within an organization will be multigenerational. It is therefore imperative that an organization understand and utilize an array of communication tools and approaches to ensure that any information that it disseminates is available to all intended employees.

While most employees will typically have access to and utilize computers at work, their access to the internet while not at work may vary based on generational demographics. An older employee, for example, might not have internet access at home or access to any of the various social media platforms. The importance of utilizing a comprehensive set of communication tools, such as home or cell phones, is thus obvious.

A second factor that dictates the need for redundant information dissemination approaches is the reality that at any point in time, one or more routine communication tools may be unavailable, as in the case with infrastructure issues or the ability of an employee to get to a location from which he or she can receive essential information from the organization. Once again, the necessity of employing multiple communication tools is justified. It is essential to consider the ability of the various generations of employees to receive various forms of communication in these situations.

social media as part of their everyday lives. They demand that information be immediately available when they desire it, and thus typically utilize a number of information-technology devices. Millennials prefer to receive information electronically rather than through more traditional means.

Strategies for Communicating With Different Generations of Employees

A successful crisis communication strategy must ensure that all employees receive necessary information in a timely manner. It must incorporate different communication tools in accordance with the differing access that different generational groups have to contemporary communication tools such as the internet and social media. It is likewise important to acknowledge that while someone may have access to these information-dissemination tools while at work, they may not have similar access outside the workplace.

It is also important to recognize that there may be times when these valuable information-sharing tools are unavailable, and organizations and their employees may have to rely on more traditional technologies such as landline and/or cell phones to disseminate important information to their employees. Many organizations utilize reverse-calling systems to send telephone alerts and messages to their employees.

Traditional information-dissemination tools such as landline and cell phones are more effective in reaching many Traditionalists. While most employees from the Baby Boomer generation can be effectively reached through the internet and social media, some members of this generation are more effectively reached using landline, cell and smart phones. While Gen Xers can be reached in the same ways as Baby Boomers, many prefer to receive such information through social media and the internet. The most appropriate and preferred method for disseminating information to Millennials is through the internet and social media.

Developing, Implementing and Evaluating Your Crisis Communication Strategy

As with any successful communication strategy, an organization's strategy for communicating with its employees during a crisis requires a proactive approach in developing, implementing and evaluating this strategy. Fully understanding the audience to which messages will be sent is crucial; thus, understanding the different generations present in the workplace and appreciating their access to information-sharing tools and their knowledge and skills in the use of these tools is of paramount importance in ensuring a comprehensive communication strategy that ensures all employees receive necessary information during a crisis.

It is important that the level of comfort different generations of employees have in the use of each communication tool, as well as their preferred method for receiving crisis information, be considered in developing your crisis communication strategy. While the use of multiple, redundant communication tools and technologies is always important, this is imperative when communicating with employees during a crisis. In disseminating initial information and periodic updates, an organization must ensure this information meets the informational needs and expectations of employees. Your crisis communication strategy should "push" information to employees through various types of alerting systems, but should also provide the functionality that enables employees to seek or "pull" information through a communications medium available to them during the crisis.

Once a crisis communication strategy has been developed and implemented, it is essential that the organization periodically test its effectiveness in communicating with employees. It is also important to evaluate this communication strategy periodically and consider ways in which its effectiveness could be enhanced, including through the incorporation of new communication technologies and tools. ■

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From SMS to F2F: How to Make Different Generations' Preferences Work for You

By Christian Hunter

These days, PR and communication professionals are so immersed in the latest technologies to keep track of client demands, we often forget that our most valuable asset is in maintaining effective communication within our organizations to our internal audiences: the employees. But with the overwhelming number of apps and platforms for managing team projects, what's the most effective method for communicating with different generations of employees?

This article will weigh the use of technology and apps, like **Slack**, **Trello**, **HipChat** and email, to discover some of the most effective ways for communicating with internal audiences of different generations.

I believe one of the most important functions for internal communication professionals is to know your audience and the makeup of who is included, whether it's in a large organization of thousands of employees or a start-up with just a few employees. The strategies for communicating are going to be very different, but the principles remain the same.

For the sake of this discussion, the focus will be to differentiate the audiences through the generations they were born into. We live in a time where multiple generations, between four and five (depending whom you ask) are simultaneously working together. This can make internal communication even more challenging, given the nature of how each generation was raised and how they were trained when they entered the workforce.

To know the nuances, we must first know whom we are talking about. The four largest generations in today's workforce include the Baby Boomers (generally born between 1946 and 1964), Generation X (born between the early 1960s to the early 1980s), Millennials or Gen Y (born between the early 1980s up to 2000); and finally Generation Z (born in the mid-1990s and early 2000s).

Without stereotyping each generation into those who use technology and those who don't, it's important to "move beyond the labels" to determine the unique communication style and preferences of each employee. One method to do this is through keen observation. For example, I tend to conduct research in meetings by studying the technology and communication behaviors of employees to determine how each person take notes, talks to each other, plans their follow-up and reports back to the group. Do they use tablets and phones, or stick to pen and paper? How do they suggest following up on an activity? Are they the go-getter, assigning to-do's right away through an app like Trello or Slack, do they want to send meeting notes in an email a day later or do they suggest another in-person

Regardless of generational follow-up strategies, the higher the importance, the greater the need for face-to-face communication.

meeting? These styles are insight into their own preferences and how they want to be communicated with.

The Struggle Can Be Real

There are definite challenges to learning employee behaviors.

- Hard to do in large organizations with hundreds of employees
- Time consuming and can be difficult to remember
- Cannot always be observed, and may need to be asked directly
- Greater reliance on technology when working remotely or with multiple office locations

On the Bright Side

The benefits of investing time into learning employee communication preferences can be extremely powerful. They will result in:

- More tailored communication
- Better relationships with employees
- Easier decision-making
- Quicker and more efficient work accomplishment

Once we get into how we will plan our communication efforts, there are certain strategies and approaches to take to effectively communicate with employees across different generations. Through qualitative research and interviewing a number of coworkers across multiple generations, I found that with technology, the younger generations (Millennials and Gen Z) are quicker and more familiar with texting and will experiment with using new apps for internal communication. Gen X is particularly good with crafting email communication and will also pick up the phone to talk. Baby Boomers prefer to use the telephone first, followed by short emails, and they are not too interested in using apps. However, each generation understands that meeting in person is always the most effective way to get the message across and get work accomplished in the quickest manner.

Each person I spoke to, in each generation, said to get their work accomplished each day, they create some form of a checklist. Whether they quickly sketch it out on a sticky note, enter it into an app on their phone, send themselves an email or write it out on a legal pad, people create checklists! So how should you follow up after the initial outreach has occurred in order to get your desired action onto someone's checklist? Here are some of the most effective tactics for communicating with each generation (after an initial meeting or face-to-face communication occurs):

- **Gen Z:** If these employees are using apps for internal communication, it is best to follow up on the app being used. This will not only timestamp the communication you send, but if you enter a due date, the app will automatically send notices to the employee that a certain action is required of them. If an app is not being used by employees in this generation, and you have their mobile number, sending a text reminder can generally be a useful approach.
- **Millennials:** Again, if apps are utilized for communication, then those will be the most effective for this generation. However, if not, email follow-ups are next best, followed by text message reminders, then finally picking up the phone if urgency is required.
- **Gen X:** This was the first generation to use email, which is still going to be the best approach for following up, followed by a phone call, and finally a text reminder if an action is needed immediately. If employees in this generation are tech savvy and use apps for communicating, then those will most likely be the

most effective strategies for follow-up.

- **Baby Boomers:** Try touching base again in person and reiterate that you will send a quick note via email. If possible, try to include a timeframe when the email will come though. This has a greater chance of being read and responded to in a timely manner. Depending on the action needed, a phone call to that person can be a useful reminder a day or two after the email.

Regardless of generational follow-up strategies, the higher the importance, the greater the need for face-to-face communication. So if you don't need an action to be taken in a couple days, feel free to use the soft reminder touches listed above. If an action requires immediate decision-making, it is advisable to meet with the person to communicate directly on the matter.

The cross-generational skillset is not one that communicators may naturally possess, but it can be learned and developed with a little training and focus on employees. ■

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How to Recruit, Retain and Engage a Millennial Workforce in Public Relations

By Stephanie A. Smith

It's almost impossible to turn on your TV or pick up a periodical today without seeing a story about Millennials. Often described as "selfish," "entitled" and "enigmas," this generation has left quite an impression. Figuring out how to communicate with the largest share of America's workforce is perceived as a difficult task unless you can speak to them using 140 characters or less. Millennials are one of the most well-educated cohorts of all time but also graduating during one of the toughest economic periods (PEW, 2014; Twenge, 2006). This poses a problem for both Millennials and employers looking to hire and retain recent college graduates and all of those "twenty-somethings."

Although development programs can be expensive, organizations that use them see a higher retention rate among employees and thus save money because they spend less time recruiting.

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, Generation We, Generation Next and the Net Generation, are young adults between the ages of 18-33 and the largest U.S. cohort following the Baby Boomers (Strauss & Howe, 2000; Tapscott, 2009). They have several defining characteristics such as higher education levels, more debt and less conservative viewpoints than previous generations, making them a unique cohort (PEW, 2014). Since today's college graduates comprise one of the largest cohorts, they are of particular interest to organizations looking to hire employees to replace those who retire. In addition to their other defining characteristics, Millennials also have specific career-related expectations that influence what they expect and desire from their employers, causing a shift in recruitment and retention communication strategies for employers.

Millennials in PR

The field of public relations is grappling with how to adjust to the changing workforce, particularly because PR professionals are taking on increasingly important C-suite roles. However, this leaves a need for recruiting and retaining a younger workforce, and also puts younger people into leadership roles earlier in their careers. Millennials have great strengths that make them well suited to careers in public relations. For example, having been raised by leaders, three-quarters self-categorize as leaders themselves (Pollak, 2015). Millennials have grown up with a global perspective and are optimistic about their future career opportunities, while also being civic-minded and technologically savvy (Raines & Arnsparge, 2010). Trends in changing leadership within the field of PR contribute to the opportunities Millennials have to change the nature of the profession, as well as the leadership within it. Therefore, a better and more practical understanding about how to leverage the unique attributes of Millennials for recruitment, retention and engagement is warranted.

Recruiting Millennials

Millennials are applying for jobs at higher rates than any previous generation. This is commonly attributed to the fact that upon graduating college, many Millennials take on jobs below their qualifications simply to earn a paycheck, due to their overwhelming student debt. Unfortunately, this leads to Millennials being branded as "job hoppers." Nonetheless, understanding how to recruit a Millennial workforce is essential to the success of any organization. Based on their unique attributes and expectations, there are three main areas employers should focus upon when recruiting Millennials: growth potential, culture and corporate social responsibility and compensation packages.

1. Growth Potential. Knowing that Millennials already think of themselves as leaders, it should come as no surprise that they want a similar job title. A common misconception about Millennials, though, is that they want to enter organizations as leaders. This is false. What Millennials actually want is the opportunity to grow within an organization through promotions and changes in job titles and responsibilities.

Organizations should highlight in job postings and during interviews the opportunities that may be available to Millennials should they be hired. Giving the names of other employees who have been promoted is also a good idea because it can encourage interorganizational networking. If there is relatively little opportunity for growth within an organization, that should also be made clear to Millennial prospects during their interview process.

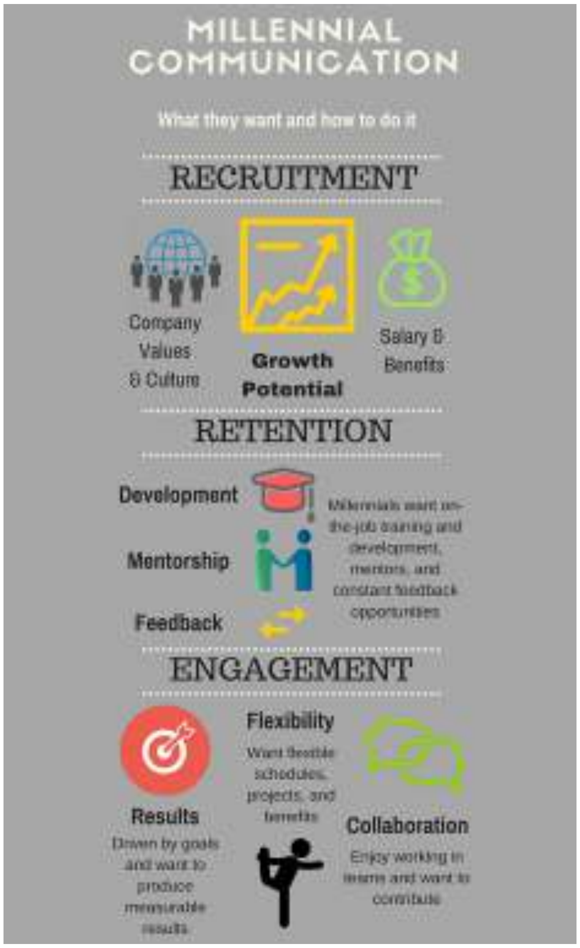
2. Culture & Corporate Social Responsibility. Millennials are civic-minded and view their jobs as a form of personal enrichment and fulfillment (UNC, 2012). Millennials also want the opportunity to make a difference within their jobs, and not in the traditional sense. Instead, Millennials want to feel connected to a larger social issue but also feel like their job is an integrated component of their life.

Employers should highlight their corporate social responsibility efforts clearly on their websites for hiring materials. Millennials identify strongly with organizational missions and want to help execute the mission upon employment. Additionally, Millennials want to understand what a typical day in the life is like as an employee and the organizational culture should also be highlighted. Cultural norms such as flexible work schedules, no dress codes, pet friendly offices or on-site amenities are very attractive to Millennials. This information can easily be shared online through employee testimonials and videos on recruiting and social media websites.

3. Compensation. On average, Millenni-

Who Are Millennials and Why Do They Matter?

More than one in three American workers today are Millennials (adults ages 18-34), and they have surpassed Generation X to become the largest share of the American workforce, according to Pew Research Center data. Millennials have never known a world without electronics and live an online and socially networked existence. While optimistic in general, this generation faces a future leaving them less economically successful than their parents. Although they are the most highly educated cohort of all time, they also have greater debt than any preceding generation. Many Millennials find themselves employed in unrelated fields or underemployed, leading to them often being classified as "job hoppers."



als have about $20,000 worth of debt (UNC, 2012). Therefore, compensation is very important to this generation. However, compensation does not just include a salary. Millennials expect compensation packages to include paid time off and money for professional development, as well as traditional things like health insurance and retirement funds. **GE** is now allowing Millennials to customize their compensation packages to enhance their recruitment of Millennial employees (UNC, 2012). Employers should be aware of Millennials' need for financial compensation, but also provide opportunities to personalize other benefits.

Retention and Engagement With Millennials

So now that you've hired a Millennial, how do you get these notorious "job hoppers" to stay with your organization? The key here is engagement, just as it is with employees from other generations. Leveraging the unique attributes of Millennials helps illuminate strategies for retaining and engaging this group. The biggest misconception with regard to Millennial retention is that Millennials do not want to stay with organizations long-term. This is false. They spend a great deal of time researching organizations they want to work with and take the recruitment period seriously precisely because they intend to stay with an organization. However, when an organization cannot meet their needs, they leave, again, just like any other employee does. Here are three ways to better retain and engage a Millennial workforce. Be mindful of the fact that these strategies work best for Millennials but can be beneficial to employees of all ages and implementation of these tactics can often lead to increased intergenerational workplace communication and collegiality.

1. Development and Collaboration. Millennials have spent their lives learning and critically thinking about how to solve problems. Often referred to as the "trophy" generation, where they get rewarded just for showing up, they are also accustomed to working with others and collaborating. Therefore, Millennials place a premium on collaboration and development (UNC, 2012). Millennials expect their employers to provide on-the-job training opportunities so that they can gain new skills and perfect existing ones. Employers can also encourage teamwork and collaboration for brainstorming and problem-solving initiatives. Although development programs can be expensive, organizations that use them see a higher retention rate among employees and thus save money because they spend less time recruiting (UNC, 2012). Courses such as goal setting, giving and receiving feedback and conflict management are highly desired by the Millennial workforce.

2. Mentorship. Raised by "helicopter" parents, Millennials seek support, especially in the workplace. Mentorship programs are an inexpensive way to help Millennials feel connected and engaged with an organization. However, Millennials are not the only generation to want opportunities for open and honest communication. Baby Boomers and Traditionalists have also expressed a desire for mentors in the workplace, but the Millennials are the group to demand mentorship opportunities (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). Before you go pairing up senior leaders with Millennials, though, try a new approach, like reverse mentoring. Reverse mentoring provides an opportunity for a Millennial to mentor someone in senior leadership to better understand the needs of today's consumers and employees. At Burston-Marsteller, this program has been a success at bridging experiential divides and engaging their workforce (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). Some other ideas for mentorship opportunities include group mentoring and rotating mentors.

3. Feedback. This is often seen as the classic Millennial attribute, but commonly misinterpreted as Millennials wanting to hear positive reinforcement around the clock. What Millennials actually want is regular, honest, open feedback, whether or not it is positive or negative. This is a generation driven by results (UNC, 2012). They find pleasure in meeting and exceeding goals and benchmarks. They like to know where they stand and want to know how to measure success before they take on tasks. Employers should maintain annual review processes, but also make their expectations clear throughout every project so that Millennials can assess their own performance regularly.

In sum, Millennials are unique, hungry and excited employees. They have high hopes and expectations not only for their employers but also for themselves (Meister & Willyerd, 2010). They are thoughtful in their choices about where to work, despite their economic strains, and are looking for jobs that can seamlessly integrate into their lives. Since they are such a highly connected generation, they expect their employers to engage them and maintain their interests, otherwise they will find another employer who will. Understanding how to recruit, engage and retain a Millennial workforce is essential for future success in public relations. ■

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Cultivating the Intergenerational Workplace Paradigm: 5 Key Factors

By Jamie Ward, Regina Luttrell & Karen McGrath

Each day, members of the next great generation of leaders are joining the workforce. And by the year 2020, this generation, Millennials, will make up 40% of the world's professionals.

Each generation has its own set of values, ideas, beliefs, expectations, ethics and culture. Employers must understand these differences to better meet the varying needs of their employees. Millennials represent the newest group of thinkers and doers with evolved ideals to adapt to, just as Generation X, Baby Boomers and Traditionalists did before them. While generational differences have always existed, for the first time, we have four and sometimes five generations living and working together. Many leaders, who represent organizations across the U.S., encounter major obstacles when trying to connect this generation with older generations. Millennials are an optimistic, energetic, kind-hearted and often idealistic generation. These characteristics can make connecting difficult.

Consider focusing on these five areas when developing an intergenerational workplace.

1. Teamwork and Innovation

Most Millennials learn more effectively in collaborative work environments and have tremendous confidence in their abilities. They don't necessarily subscribe to the "climbing up the corporate ladder" method. It's up to employers to make them feel engaged, part of the change and respected within the company.

This generation is accustomed to innovation and discovering alternative ways to complete the same tasks. A misconception about Millennials is that they like to work in teams, when in fact, they don't. Their preference is to work on teams. While this may seem like an insignificant difference, the implications of work productivity and intergenerational harmony are profound. Working on a team means they enjoy being part of a larger group working toward common goals, but each piece is separate and they receive acknowledgement for their individual contributions. By not involving Millennials in the framework of ideas for corporate change, organizations run the risk of losing employees who may leave their organization or become competitors themselves.

Millennials are the most tech-savvy generation to date. Providing them with the most up-to-date tools allows for the greatest efficiency. In many instances, they may be responsible for suggesting new technological advances. The key is to listen and to not discount their ideas. They are digital natives and often view technology as a key to success.

2. Customized Employment and Professional Development

Millennials tend to thrive in environments that offer customized employment opportunities. Customized employment is a flexible process that allows for the relationship between the employee and employer to be personalized in ways that meet the needs of all involved. It is more of an individualized process than

Working on a Team vs. Working in a Team

Working on a team means that individuals are part of a larger group, all working toward a common goal, but each person is responsible for a separate aspect of the project. As such, accolades are given to individuals for their contributions rather than the team as a whole.

Working in a team means that individuals are working or contributing as part of a whole, collaboratively, to achieve a goal with dependencies and interactions on and with others. Acknowledgements and praise are given to the group as a whole, not individuals on the team.

traditional recruitment. Conventional options that human resources departments might offer don't apply anymore. Millennials are comfortable customizing everything. Allow them to take courses or develop opportunities/incentive packages that will broaden their horizons and add lateral value to their positions.

Millennials need to feel as though their skills are being well utilized and that they are given opportunities to develop through support and training opportunities.

Millennials often do best with employers who offer consistent, meaningful feedback and provide opportunities for training and professional improvement. Receiving constructive feedback allows them to enhance their skillset and to better define their goals as well as their purpose within the organization.

Exposure to professional organizations and involvement in groups outside work will allow them to learn from industry leaders and grow in new ways. Ideally, curiosity and creativity will take over, and soon they will be promoting their big ideas to the organization.

3. Freedom

A Millennial's interpretation of freedom is the right to work from wherever they would like. In today's technologically driven society, employees don't need to be chained to a desk. The nine-to-five business model has, in many instances, become obsolete. Millennials have come to realize the benefits of an improved work-life balance. Remember, Millennials are working to live, not living to work as previous generations did.

Since they are so tech-savvy, they are always connected. And they never really "leave work" for the day as they are extremely results-oriented. They tend to work diligently for a few hours and then come back to it later after they have completed a different task. Millennials seek freedom and flexibility in working hours because they realize that business often requires results beyond the bounds of a traditional working day.

In addition to unconventional hours, they're usually open to working not only from their desk, but also from home, on the road, at **Starbucks** or anywhere else.

4. Mutual Respect

In traditional workplace environments, an older, more senior-level colleague tends to command more respect than someone of a similar age. And many organizations are quick to dismiss ideas from a 20- or 30-year-old employee, which is a difficult concept for many Millennials.

Because Millennials are digital natives, they bring their technological prowess to the workforce, ready to enact progressive ideas. A generation that grew up with unprecedented access to technology, Millennials are often better than other generations at using these new tools. They can also bring a different outlook to situations and contribute meaningful work within the organization. In addition to regular training, they need room to flourish.

Problems often arise when this generation believes that someone or something is holding them back. While a majority of Millennials (90%) say they deserve their dream job, that

Riding the 7Cs: Millennials' Characteristics

Confident—Millennials often have high self-esteem or feel self-assured because they have been "built up" to think of themselves as capable on all fronts. How did this happen? Parents often set the tone and no longer hover like helicopter parents, but pave the way as snowplow parents.

Connected—Access to others via electronic devices and the internet as a whole has created a generation that is tethered to an online world. It is difficult to pry a smartphone, tablet or screen of any type away from Millennials because they have FOMO (fear of missing out) more than any previous generation.

Committed Change Agents—Millennials can and often do set the tone for change and commit to causes either in person or via hashtag activism.

Contradistinctive—Millennials believe they are not only unique, but also "complete opposites" of previous generations. With this in mind, Millennials are "contradistinctive" in these ways: their connectedness, definitions of "friends" and "friendships," amped up social anxiety, their level of tolerance and even acceptance of diversity, delaying marriage and families until later and their workplace expectations.

Cavalier—Millennials want to be out in front of trends and consider themselves cutting edge in many areas. This is how the food and craft beer industries grew. Millennials wanted something unique, not the "same old."

Collaborative—Millennials enjoy working alongside others toward a common goal, with individuals being recognized for their work independent of the whole group.

same 90% will be increasingly productive and loyal if they feel they are fully contributing to the success of the organization and being challenged. If they don't feel as though they are being challenged, they have no trouble searching for other opportunities or creating their own path to success.

5. Fun at Work

Lighten up the environment, and sit back and watch how it brings out the best in Millennials. Simply providing four walls, also known as "cubeville," and a slew of computers no longer defines the standard infrastructure for running a successful business.

Often, Millennials want to work for a company that parallels the principles of this work-life balance. Fun and self-described weirdness that promotes a relaxed, cooperative work environment can help them work harder, improve morale, and promote happiness.

Are these ideas easy to implement? No, they can be quite difficult to take on since an open mind and company-wide changes are necessary to create an environment that cultivates the young Millennial.

Keep in mind that this generation will be leading our country and organizations and defining our content someday. It is up to current management to understand and cultivate today's employees into tomorrow's leaders.

Millennials are the change. Embrace them, embrace what they have to offer and then watch your organization surpass the competition. ■

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5 Ways to Build Better Coexistence Between Millennials and Managers

By Heather Harder

It seems organizations publish articles and release studies regarding best practices for connecting with Millennials nearly every day. It's not often, however, that there are studies and articles sharing what Millennials can do to mesh with other generations.

In a *Fast Company* opinion piece, two Millennials asked other generations to "stop treating Millennial employees like enigmas." Yet the problem wasn't that the authors asked for more opportunities to provide meaningful feedback and have dialogue with senior leaders, it was that they failed to discuss what Millennials can and should do in return.

It doesn't make sense for the Millennial microscope to be a one-way device. As Millennials' workplace saturation increases, so does the need for Millennials to understand how to work with managers from other generations and to work with other generations in general. After all, Generation Z is just around the corner.

Here are ways the parties can coexist:

1. Millennials: Learn and Understand What Managers Want and Why.

While there may be better ways of doing things, there also may be logical reasons why things are as they are. If you question something or have an issue, ask—but do so with an open mind.

"The sense of entitlement in our generation often leads many, but not all, of us to believe the customer-is-always-right mentality applies everywhere, including our jobs," says Jess Noonan, **PRSA** new professionals section chair. "Millennials I've seen succeed recognize that an entire company cannot change everything…to adjust to a single generation."

Smart businesses will learn how to attract and retain Millennials, but they also will know how to generate results. And that may not entail meeting every Millennial demand.

2. Millennials: Contribute to the Culture Without Attacking It.

Managers' top criticisms of Millennials in PR include that they are self-centered and disrespectful, according to a report by the **Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations**. To avoid being seen that way, recognize what the organization is doing well, and ask questions before jumping to accusations.

The report also revealed that managers want to hire Millennials who will contribute to an organization's culture. That's right: Companies are looking for young, talented leaders to make a difference in the business. If you look at the bigger picture, this provides an opportunity.

"Instead of expecting the company to completely change its culture, Millennials should look to influence culture in small ways that make the company better for every generation," Noonan says.

3. Managers: Communicate What You Are Doing.

You've heard Millennials want transparency. That means sharing what good you are doing already. You may host internal focus groups and facilitate an employee mentorship program, but if Millennials don't hear about it, they may not think it exists. Internal communication is critical for any type of work, but it is especially important when working with PR pros.

Regardless of generation, everyone likes to feel valued and appreciated. Establishing regular communication isn't just good for the people you manage. Gathering feedback regularly can help you learn how to better motivate staff and improve results from your team. It may even draw your attention to issues you've never noticed.

Instead of considering how to connect with Millennials, consider how to best serve all employees, no matter where they are in their careers. Different generations have different values, but so do different people.

4. Managers: Recognize This Is More Than a Generational Issue.

"I believe it's up to leaders and managers inside the organization to create an environment where employees at all levels, and particularly at the entry level, can share thoughts on how to better drive business performance," says **MasterCard** CCO Chris Monteiro.

Focusing on one generation at the sake of losing other generations' attention will get you nowhere. Instead of considering how to connect with Millennials, consider how to best serve all employees, no matter where they are in their careers. Different generations have different values, but so do different people. While mass employee engagement surveys may not deliver insights into individual employees' thoughts, ensuring that every single employee has the opportunity to check in with his or her manager to provide and receive feedback is a necessity.

"To best capture ideas in a timely manner, organizations should make a variety of channels and methods available to employees allowing them to use the manner that is most comfortable based on personal preference," MasterCard's Monteiro adds.

5. Managers: Hold Millennials Accountable.

All you hear about is what Millennials want and how to cater to their needs. Don't let our generation off easily. Millennials should enter your company understanding that they have a responsibility to learn what the company is doing to engage its employees and to respectfully speak up if they feel things could be done differently. Make sure Millennials understand what is expected of them so that everyone is meeting, and perhaps setting, the expectations.

When it comes to employee communications, it's all about having an employee-centric focus, regardless of the generation. In the end, connecting with Millennials is not an issue of generational differences, but of something PR pros have been dealing with for decades: two-way communication. ■

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HR's Collaboration With PR

Driving Change: A Case for Partnership Between HR, Communications and Strategy

By Katie Fitzgerald

You know that phrase, "Our people are our greatest asset"? In the employee engagement and change profession, this expression comes up a lot. But one has to wonder—what do organizations and their leadership truly mean when they say it? And what can employees expect in return when they hear it?

By definition, an asset is something of value; something or someone that contributes to success.

So when the decision is made to transform a business, a process, or an entire culture—a change that must be driven by the people within it—which area of the company should be responsible for facilitating the change and safeguarding that asset to ensure business performance and continuity? Which functions need a seat at the table? Who should be accountable for ensuring the messages get through and support the organization's ability to change?

FTI Consulting's 2016 Global Employee Confidence Study, conducted with nearly 8,000 employees across a variety of industries worldwide, shows that answers to these questions have significant implications on the effectiveness, influence and sustainability of communications in driving the business forward.

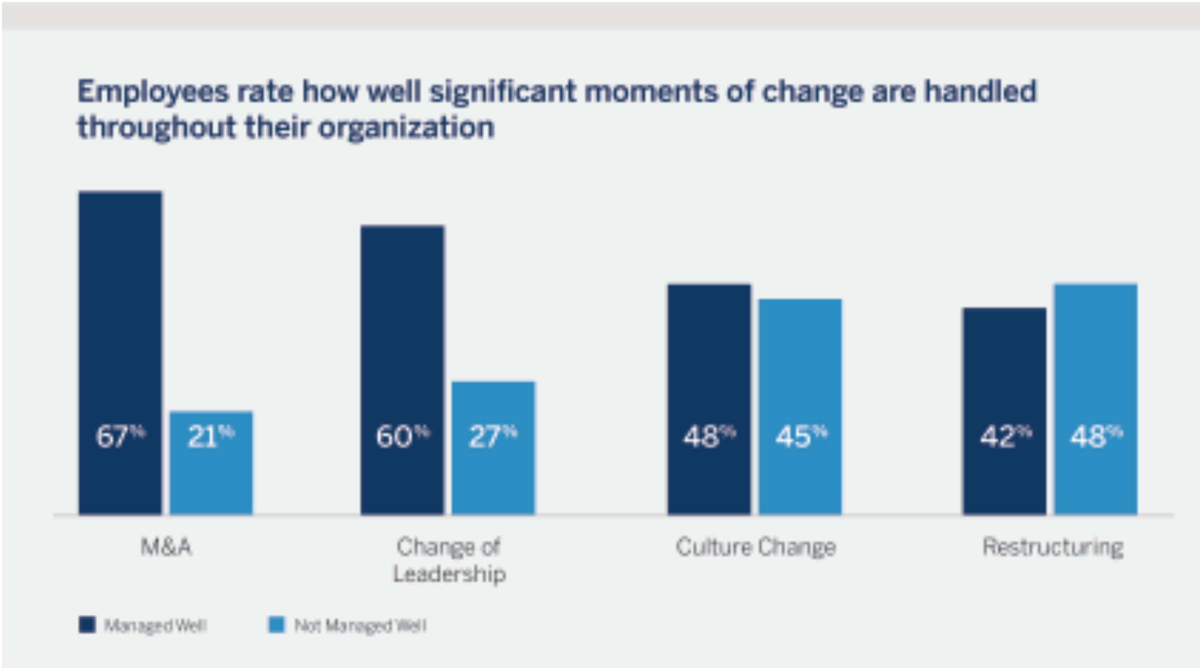
Collaboration across the organization's business and support functions is critical for achieving business objectives and skillfully navigating moments of change. During any significant corporate event or transformation, the people side of change can be one of the most difficult to manage, but it is essential for employees to engage for businesses to fully realize their transformation objectives.

Research shows employees are watching. The FTI study found varying results in employees' perceptions globally of their companies' ability to manage past changes, such as mergers and acquisitions, restructuring, change of leadership or culture change.

Employees have easy access to all external statements and announcements, and every one of them has a mouthpiece, online and in their local communities. An organization's employees have more power than ever to sink or salvage a business at critical moments of change.

Many Seats at the Table

In today's age of increasing transparency, scrutiny and change, any time a business is facing transformation, it is critical that changes are designed and executed from a comprehensive point of view. Employees will quickly recognize inconsistencies in approach and misalignment among leaders if what they see and hear from HR, strategy, internal communications and PR contradict each other. Today, employees have easy access to all



external statements and announcements, and every one of them has a mouthpiece, online and in their local communities. An organization's employees have more power than ever to sink or salvage a business at critical moments of change.

This means two things for businesses:

- They must plan for the "people side" of the change just as rigorously as—and in close collaboration with—the operational side of it; and
- Internal and external communications plans must fall from the same strategy and be consistent in message.

Breaking it down further, to drive meaningful change within an organization, the following players need to have a seat at the table:

- **Strategy:**
  - o Before: Strategy executives and business partners need to define the business case for change, clarify how it fits into the organization's larger purpose and business strategy, and set the tone for how success will be measured
  - o During: Actively support the change, acting as advocates within their respective areas
  - o After: Champion the results of the change (as appropriate), highlighting the work done by the business and the ability to achieve measureable results
- **HR:**
  - o Before: HR leaders and business partners strategically inform the change, based on the structure of the organization and their knowledge of employees' capacity to evolve by considering whether or not talent is equipped and enabled to perform in line with expectations in the new environment
  - o During: Partner with the business at the local level to monitor adoption of the change, answer questions, support employees and provide feedback to leadership to continue informing the communications strategy and tweak plans as necessary
  - o After: Continue to maintain a pulse on the organization, understanding and

Defining the Needs Your Efforts Must Address

Whether your job responsibilities are in PR or managing internal stakeholders, or you are a member of the C-suite, a support function of a business, you share in the responsibility to consider the employee journey during times of change.

When change is on the horizon, consider the following questions to help you further define how a cross-functional group can most effectively address the needs of the organization:

- If they saw it on the news, would employees have the context to understand the business case for change and the consequences of not changing?
- What is the business context in which employees are operating today?
- How is employee morale?
- Are major changes necessary to meet objectives or targets set by the business?
- What would a change mean for employees—new job roles, behaviors, skill sets, or processes?
- Have employees resisted change in the past, or are they currently?
- Are leaders aligned and prepared to actively champion the change?
- Can the current culture deliver on the new business approach or strategy? If not, which new attributes need to be identified and infused into the organization?
- Does the organization have the necessary communications and change leadership competency?

connecting how future changes may impact or fall into the context of the past one

- **Communications:**
  - Before: The communications function creates a strategy to translate the business case and objectives into meaningful, compelling terms and a plan for cascading information to various internal and external stakeholder groups. More specifically:
    - Employee (Internal): Partner with PR and HR colleagues to articulate the business case for change to employees, and in doing so, ensure the necessary expectations, focus and behaviors are set to drive business performance
    - PR (External): Timing is key, and PR professionals share in the duty to balance what the organization is promising to investors and customers via the PR engine, with the messages it is delivering internally
  - During: Facilitate a roll-out plan to reach internal and external stakeholders via multiple channels and touch points, with a cadence that builds awareness, understanding, action and advocacy
  - After: Measure and reinforce messages and principles of the business case, progress and benefits of the change (as appropriate)

The FTI study shows employees put a lot of confidence in these areas of the organization. In fact, of the survey respondents experiencing change, 68% are confident in their HR department and 61% are confident in their strategy department.

In these same instances, 77% are confident in the leader/CEO. Employees with confidence in their senior leadership team are more motivated, perform more effective work and have higher engagement levels, which affect employee morale. They also recognize the importance of communications in these instances, as 92% of them said they better understand their role and what is expected of them with effective communication, and 88% mentioned they are motivated to deliver their best results with effective communication.

Walk the Talk, Act as a Team

Ensuring collaboration across leadership, HR, strategy and communications is key to maximizing results in times of change. A guiding principle should be to ensure that employees hear about the change from leaders before they learn about in the local news or on social media, and that the story is the same inside and outside the organization. The external world can help shape, validate or contradict employees' perceptions of what's going on internally. To maintain their confidence, engagement and overall commitment to business performance, PR professionals should take the initiative to collaborate with other change leaders to ensure the experiences of colleagues—the company's "greatest assets"—are managed effectively. ■

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How to Create a Winning Employee Social Media Advocacy Program

By Dawn Lassiter-Brueske

When social media began making its way into the business world, HR staff steered clear of it and PR teams did not know what to make of it. At many companies, employees were told that they could not post things about work on social media for fear of retribution by the HR department. Corporations had policies in place stating that staff not be on **Facebook** while using their computers in the office, nor could they mention the company name anywhere on their own personal pages. Companies did not even join the social media bandwagon until a half dozen or so years ago when it became obvious to the PR and communications professionals that it was a good place to be, particularly to reach customers basically for free.

Suddenly corporate policies were being changed, allowing for companies to have their own Facebook pages. Things have grown so far that we're seeing corporate names branded with hashtags in front of them. Now, with social media redefining how companies do business, particularly how they communicate with the outside world, we're faced with an interesting problem: How do you get employees to feel comfortable going from A) You're going to be in trouble if you do this, to B) Please do this—go on Facebook, **Twitter**, **LinkedIn** and **Instagram**, and talk all about us!

My organization went through this very thing. **Marklund**, a nonprofit located in Chicago's western suburbs, serves children and adults with profound developmental disabilities. Its three locations are tucked off the beaten path. Historically, the organization's mentality was to provide specialized loving care to the residents without drawing too much attention to itself. Staff came to work each day to do what they did best. Volunteers stepped in to lend much-needed assistance, and donors wrote checks from afar. Few articles appeared in local newspapers, and when they did, it was usually to promote fundraising events. People in the towns where the organization was located knew of "The Marklund Children's Home" or "Marklund Day School" but really had no idea what it was.

Create excitement around the announcement of the winners. Include a large eye-catching post if possible in internal communications, such as the payday newsletter. That will serve as its own incentive to get staff to look through that piece as well.

Fast forward to 2011 with the arrival of a marketing-minded CEO who added development and marketing directors to his senior team. Once in place, the team worked on creating a new strategic plan, which just happened to mention the words "increase presence on social media."

Jumping to the present, Marklund's social media footprint has exploded, with the number of Facebook followers increasing 252% in three years. The same has happened with its pages on Twitter, Instagram and **YouTube**.

Getting senior-level staff, particularly those who established the former policies toward social media, to accept the idea of pushing a company into the social media world and asking employees to help make it happen, is not necessarily an easy or fast-moving task for anyone in PR. Strategically planned baby steps are going to need to be taken.

But it is so worth it.

First Things First

In order to be successful at changing the mindset of employees at all levels, you need a plan.

First thing on the plan: Change policy.

Policies need to be rewritten to allow staff to comment on the company's social media sites and, as long as it's done in a professional manner, to mention the company on their own personal pages. Individual companies and organizations can decide to include in their policies whether staff may be allowed to access social media sites using company computers while on the job, or to still keep that as a no-no. Some allow it during breaks; others do not for fear of viruses. There is no way to stop it altogether with the advent of smartphones. Policy should also indicate that while you can mention Company X on your social media page, you must still follow policy about not sharing proprietary information. In addition, policy can indicate that while staff may or may not take their own photos of things going on at work, they can share any photos that the PR staff posts on company social media sites. Once it's out there on the web, go ahead and share away!

With policies updated, the next step is to inform the staff. This can be done at staff meetings, via internal communications, on posters and flyers hung throughout work areas and even on the social media sites as well.

A Step-by-Step List Toward Social Media Advocacy

Getting employees on board with following a company's social media sites may sound like a no-brainer. You would think that most people would be eager to "Like" their company's Facebook page or follow it on Twitter. But today, staff are generally initially afraid to connect their personal sites with their company's. The fear is, "If I can see the company, then the company can see me." Earning their trust is the first step. Working together, HR and PR must educate staff that there is no underlying reason for wanting staff to follow their social media sites—nothing will be used against them. Then, move forward with a well-planned, well-executed strategy, with responsibilities shared by HR and PR teams.

Follow these basic steps to begin the process.

1. Update policies with HR staff
2. Publicize policy changes to staff
3. Set program goals
4. Offer incentives/create the challenge
5. Publicize program via many means to reach all staff: internal communication, posters, flyers, intranet
6. Provide education to those in need
7. Announce winners with flair
8. HR keep staff lists updated
9. Keep it going—new goals, new incentives

When Your Word Is Not Enough, Incentivize!

Giving people the go-ahead to like, share, tweet, retweet and comment may not be enough to get them to trust that they still won't somehow be jeopardizing their jobs. Some social media enthusiasts may stick their toe in to test the water and find that all seems fine. But leaving the growth of your social followers to that kind of organic growth can be, as they say, as slow as rush-hour traffic during construction season in Chicago.

To really get the attention of a larger percentage of employees, especially younger staff or those who fall within the lower half of the salary range, what often works best is the chance to win an incentive.

Creating and managing an employee social media advocacy program is fairly easy, albeit a bit time-consuming.

Start by having the program's parameters all in place. Get buy-in from the senior team, the HR director and the CFO, or whoever manages company budget and expenses. Promote the program at staff meetings as well as regularly in internal communications, such as payday memos, as well as on flyers posted in employee areas and on the company's intranet. Non-management staff may not always read company emails and newsletters, so you need to reach out to them in various ways and often.

In our program, we decided that the top two most-engaged employees on our company's social media sites would receive $25 gift cards to **Target** or **Walmart**. All staff had to do was first, follow their site of choice (or all the company's social sites), and then like the posts, perhaps retweet or share them and maybe even comment on them. Each action of engagement was worth a point.

For example, if Brittany Baxter, a teacher's aide, started to follow our page, liked the post on Friday, commented on it and then shared it on her own page, she earned four points. Megan Hart, the recreation therapist, can earn three points for liking a tweet, retweeting it and replying back to the tweet.

Easy peasy!

Educate Those Who Need a Little Help

Even though it seems like everyone is on social media these days, it is not necessarily true. There are folks out there who have resisted joining the throngs, seeing it as a waste of time or being unsure of how to do it, and others who because of personal circumstances do not have access to smartphones and computers. Reach out to these individuals by offering easy training at various times of the day/week and in various locations around your organization's sites. You can even include step-by-step instructions of how to join the different social sites on your company's intranet—again prompting staff to open those pages. When writing these steps, keep them very basic as if you are writing them for people who are first-time computer users.

Throughout the year, HR staff can introduce the program right off the bat at new employee orientation sessions.

The time-consuming part is keeping track of the activity. Designating staff members on the PR team to keep a running tally is the easiest way to tackle this. Divide and conquer. Don't give all sites to one person. Give Facebook and Twitter to one, Instagram and YouTube to another, and so on. Then at the end of the month, add the totals together.

HR has to be involved to keep the PR team informed of staff changes. New hires and terminations need to be reported to the PR staff monthly.

Create excitement around the announcement of the winners. Include a large eye-catching post if possible in internal communications, such as the payday newsletter. That will serve as its own incentive to get staff to look through that piece as well. We announce the winners in the monthly leadership meetings also. It's fun to watch managers puff up with pride if one of their team is crowned most-engaged. Hand-deliver the gift cards and make a big show when presenting the employee with their prize. Having other staff see this happen makes winning even more tangible to them and encourages more participation.

In our case, the first few months saw repeat winners, but after that first quarter, things took off. The competitive spirit kicked in and departments wanted to outdo each other. Even staff members who did not have social media pages got on board just to try their hand at winning.

The Final Outcome

With a goal of having 200 of 325 staff members following our social media sites, we were ecstatic to find we not only reached it by the year's end, but surpassed it by an additional 12%. Our staff embraced the challenge and ran with it. The bigger goal, however, was that more people now knew of our organization since 200-plus employees were promoting it through social media conversation.

Moving Forward

Don't stop now just because the strategic plan goal is met; the PR and HR teams can keep the excitement going with new incentives. Having one winner per month will still keep the challenge out there. Add a little newness to the program by announcing Grand Winners at the half-year and year-end points, and offer additional prizes.

Implementing the program not only resulted in employees becoming bigger advocates of the company via today's biggest tools of communication, those staff members from the old regime were able to realize that social media is not a big scary enemy. When packaged up with policies that were acceptable by HR, and monitored by PR staff for misuse, the idea of using social media as a way of bringing staff together for a common good turned out to be a win-win. ■

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HR Plus PR for Effective Employee Engagement and Employer Branding

By Melony Shemberger

Human resources and public relations differ greatly in their functions and responsibilities. HR directors oversee employee hiring, policies and procedures. PR professionals concentrate on media relations, campaign strategies and other functions.

The two offices have a common ground. Both fields share one of the most critical stakeholders for companies and organizations: employees. Because of this commonality, HR and PR should strive to work together in employer branding and employee engagement.

> **Essentially, HR and PR have similar goals but different ways of getting there. It is critical to combine those paths as much as possible.**

Employer branding goes beyond the brochures and recruitment kits. Employees should play a key role in an employer's branding campaign. Increasingly, organizational leaders and their PR associates are recognizing the importance of improving internal communication with employees. Internal communication is important for constructing a culture of transparency between management and employees, and it can engage employees in the organization's long-term plans. This article discusses how PR and HR staffs can advance an organization's goals by connecting together in employer branding and employee engagement efforts, offering a refreshed model for business today.

HR-PR Collaboration Is Key

Typically, both HR and PR offices work in silos. HR directors often lead employer-branding efforts during times of employee recruitment and orientation. That is, they share with prospective and current staff all the reasons why the organization is a desirable place to work. Meanwhile, the PR team, as experts in creating strategic communication plans and compelling content, generally assist in creating promotional materials such as brochures or videos to convey a sense of employee engagement as part of the employer brand. PR practitioners know how to design effective messaging that is engaging to current and prospective employees.

However, the scope of PR's work in employer branding and employee engagement should go beyond the simple creation of materials and messages. Those who work in public relations are qualified to make significant contributions to employer branding. Collaboration is needed from both PR and HR to ensure that the employer brand and a company's master brand complement each other and to attain key business outcomes such as profitability and quality customer service. One way to begin this collaboration

Jump-Starting a PR/HR Relationship

Forging a solid partnership with the human resources staff takes time. The development of successful employer branding rests on this dynamic. However, if time is of the essence because of an upcoming employee recruitment campaign, apply these helpful notes immediately.

- Discuss with HR what message would attract new employees and resonate with them. For instance, if a company wants to hire recent college graduates, a case study of a graduate who joined the organization could be a part of the campaign.
- Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a concept sometimes overlooked, but the service activities that organizations do to promote an issue, cause or charity can be valuable in PR strategy, especially when showcasing a company's values to prospective job candidates. Work with HR to include CSR.
- Recruit current employees as company PR ambassadors. The HR office can identify a pool of talented and hard-working employees that the PR staff can tap into if employees' success stories are needed for recruitment materials.

These action items can help foster a team spirit between HR and PR in the goal toward employer branding. However, after the recruitment campaign or event, both the HR and PR staffs should debrief and consider long-lasting goals and objectives as part of an overall communication campaign that would improve employer branding and employee engagement.

is by identifying core values that an organization's employees have. Employees are brand ambassadors, and they exemplify core values through their interactions with customers and the public—and among themselves.

These core values can be discovered through informal approaches and programming that HR and PR could design and plan collaboratively. One idea is to work with an organization's leaders to provide frequently scheduled "coffee and conversation" events as open and casual forums for senior management and employees to meet and talk about ideas and concerns.

A second way to build employee engagement and employer branding is through a recognition program. This can be a formal award such as Employee of the Month, a structured incentive program or a planned outing (company picnic, family day, et cetera) that recognizes employees' commitment to the organization.

A third approach would be organization-sponsored service opportunities, such as volunteering, which also could help employees engage in an organization. These experiences would give employees a chance to collaborate and work together in new ways. In addition, skills in team building would be honed through volunteer work, which can strengthen an organization's employer brand.

Finally, continuing education is a need for employees, and as such, deserves attention. HR and PR must be champions of employee engagement in this area. Employees who do not obtain adequate continuing education units or lose licenses or certifications can leave a negative impression on the organization. Moreover, companies could offer employees open-source educational opportunities that would allow employees to advance their knowledge base and participate in learning communities.

Tips for HR-PR Collaboration

To bring these or other efforts to life, collaboration between HR and PR is a desirable attribute for organizations to grow their brand. Here are some tips to help both teams work together in all aspects of employee engagement and branding.

- **Recognize that both offices have the same goal.** Essentially, HR and PR have similar goals but different ways of getting there. It is critical to combine those paths as much as possible.
- **Define roles and responsibilities.** People work better together when they know what their role is.
- **Strive for authenticity and deal with conflict.** Conflict is inevitable whenever people work together on a common goal. Embracing this aspect will allow both HR and PR teams to manage difficulties more effectively.
- **Use digital technology in employer brand strategy to reap data and information.** By digitizing a company's employer brand strategy, both HR and PR would gain valuable feedback and insight in how prospective and current employees are responding to messages.
- **Measure impact.** Having assessment and evaluation measures in place to measure efforts of employee engagement will help both teams reach progress toward their goals or meet their objectives in employer branding efforts.

Conclusion

Employer branding increasingly is a priority for management and a top goal for human resources. Public relations must become a partner in this endeavor, not merely exist as a creative service to provide copy and design. By having a partnership with a solid foundation in collaboration, an organization's HR and PR staffs could develop a level of consistent employee engagement that would lead to a successful employee-employer brand. ■

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Corporate Restructuring PR: How to Manage When Layoffs Loom

By PR News Editors

For PR pros whose portfolios center on internal communications, we asked experienced communicators on the brand and agency sides for insight about best practices for handling restructuring, both for employees who are about to become jobless and for those who remain. Are there potential pitfalls to avoid? Should PR be involved in such dicey communication or let HR handle the burden alone?

Brian Ames

Corporate VP, Communications, Boeing

Employees Front and Center: An internal communications specialist, Brian Ames subscribes to an employee-centric philosophy when communicating with employees in good times and bad. "Respecting the workforce" should be paramount in all communications, including announcing restructuring. Best practices include telling employees first, or when regulations prohibit that, at least informing staff at the same time investors are told. This assumes you "have time" to polish your communications. "Often there's very little time to set all that up." That's where the amount of credibility management already has with staff is important. Should management "have the foresight to have established employee-centric communications" years before, restructuring should go smoother, Ames says. "A restructuring is a hard time [for management] to begin building a relationship with employees."

Those Left: "What employees [who still have jobs after a layoff] want to know is how will this change their lives, my workload, my team and the company, in that order," Ames says. Management that has "the smart humility" to engage employees in plans for "where the company is going...is the best scenario." When employees feel disengaged is when "they check out" or become marginalized.

What to Avoid: Using jargon and business-speak in restructuring communications. "This really falls flat," he says. Yet he admits "getting brevity, candor and simplicity" to be part of communications is far from easy. "You need someone who's championing these things," he says. "There can be a lot of inertia in big companies," he says, and some very bad writing. Remember the debacle that was **Microsoft**'s July 2014 restructuring letter? You know, the one from then-EVP Stephen Elop that began "Hello, there" and then heaped on 10 long paragraphs of corporate gobbledygook before announcing 12,500 layoffs in the 11th paragraph.

Collaboration: For Ames, restructuring communication must be a multi-functional effort between nearly all parts of a company, although "the biggest partnership should be between HR and internal communications."

Christopher Hannegan

EVP, U.S. Practice Chair Edelman, Employee Engagement

PR Leads: Hannegan says communications should lead restructuring announcements, "but with active participation from HR, impacted business unit leaders, site or plant leadership and the executive team."

Best Practices:

- **Go High-Touch With Remaining Employees and Critical Talent:** "Be sure to have one-on-one conversations, preferably in person, with these people immediately following the organizational announcement, reinforcing their importance to the company's future."
- **Focus on the Survivors:** Hannegan agrees with Ames that it's important to keep remaining employees engaged in the process of shaping the future of the organization.
- **Clearly Articulate the Support the Company Is Affording Departed Employees:** "Not only is severance important to those receiving it," he says, "remaining employees will watch how the company treats their former colleagues to predict how it will treat them in the future."
- **A Timeline Is Critical:** While there likely will be unknowns during the restructuring announcement, provide a clear timeline so employees know when they will receive more information, such as "when the company will make staffing decisions, how long it will take to transition responsibilities and at what point the process will be complete," he says. "Employees need to know when they can stop bracing for more cuts, at least in the short term."
- **Leaders Should Be Seen:** There are few things worse than a leader "laying low" during announcement day and the transition. This is critical to credibility, he says.
- **Outside-In:** It's important to communicate layoffs as unfortunate but necessary, explaining the reasons for cuts. "Conversely, it is equally important to address what factors did not contribute to reductions."
- **Strategize**: "News and stories employees tell about" restructuring can "live for years...online and in employees' minds." It's critical, therefore, to "make sure things go smoothly...decide upfront what collective actions will guide...internal and external communications."
- **Other Do's:** Treat people with respect by letting them know they've lost their jobs in person; share frequent updates; ensure managers always receive advance notification; limit knowledge of downsizing plans to need-to-know list; segment the workforce down to the individual, into those who are leaving, those who are staying for a defined period of time and those who are staying; and provide external-facing employees with appropriate information.
- **Don't:** Never let media know of restructuring before employees. Sounds obvious? **Intuit**, a financial software firm, in 2008 issued a press release about layoffs before informing employees. Also: Never let employees know they are losing their jobs by phone or email (**Radio Shack** did in 2006); likewise, avoid sending restructuring notices during holidays or when large segments of the workforce are out of the office. ■

8

Your Brand Evangelist Plan

The First Follower Within Your Organization: An Advocacy Analogy

By Joshua M. Habursky

If you attended a conference or a **TED** Talk in the last several years, you are probably aware of the 2010 **YouTube** sensation "Leadership Lessons From Dancing Guy" by American entrepreneur Derek Sivers. The video [youtu.be/fW8amMCVAJQ] chronicles how to build a movement through the lens of a guy dancing by himself at a music festival ("the lone nut") who is joined by "the first follower" who breaks the stigma of openly dancing in public. Swarms of people join the movement that all began with one person accepting the informal invitation to join in with "the lone nut" dancing. The focus of this story illustrates the importance of the first follower in leadership, but can be more broadly applied to other concepts such as employee advocacy and internal engagement.

Whatever the ask or appeal may be for a particular communication should be part one of a communication coming from the 'first follower,' with the second part being the encouragement to promote the ask to others within the organization.

Whether you lead internal employee communications efforts or hold a human resource position at your organization that handles employee activation, you may be tasked with engaging employees or getting employees to enthusiastically take positive action to promote the reputation or brand of your organization. David Macleod of **Engage for Success**, a group that promotes the understanding of employee engagement, defines the concept as "how we create the conditions in which employees offer more of their capability and potential" [bit.ly/1XNi2li]. One can only hope to build a movement from basic employee advocacy efforts, and often the toughest challenge is finding that "first follower" to promote the organization or brand first internally, and then externally to the general public.

All too often, organizations focus on getting employees to fulfill the obligations of the nine-to-five without taking the time to recruit advocates within or encourage pride or loyalty in their organization. For many organizations, the viewpoint on both sides (employee and employer) boils down to getting the job done and collecting a paycheck. In this business sense, this is a realistic approach, but a little investment in time and treasure can trigger talent to rapidly grow the notoriety and reputation of your organization. Reputation management starts with employee advocacy and employee advocacy leads to positive public relations. Employees that are engaged as brand advocates advance the public perception of an organization through word-of-mouth marketing, individual social media channels and often in both earned and paid traditional media. Employees that are disengaged or dormant brand advocates stall, or worse, are a detriment to, influencing the general public's perception of an organization.

Identifying the First Follower

It all begins with the "first follower" as outlined in Sivers' scenario. The "first follower" can be a catalyst for employee engagement or can be the bane of employee engagement. In organizations of various sizes and geographic locations, the "first follower" isn't necessarily limited to a single individual, but can be the prevailing sentiment of an organization from a formidable bloc of employees. As the sentiment gains traction, it becomes a movement and the bloc grows into a plurality or even the majority of employees.

As the person tasked with identifying the "first follower," you will have to seek this person out using different communications mechanisms that encourage or trigger employee advocacy. These communications should not be cumbersome, complex or coercive. The call to action should be customizable and be able to be shared across different mediums and promoted on platforms online and offline. The call to action to get other employees engaged in advocacy should be directly linked to a purpose or mission. Sporadic communications that are off message will result in the employee going off brand. Consistent and timely appeals to employees to promote the organization or reinforce positive traits about the organization will be most effective. As with any employee engagement program, patience is key. It is important not to retreat too early. By default, as the coordinator for employee advocacy, you are the "lone nut" waiting for the "first follower" in a society that yearns for communications that are instantly gratifying.

Tips for Communicating With Employees for Advocacy

Employee Advocacy Communication Should Be:

- Easy to follow
- Easy to share
- Easy to customize
- Easy to fit within organizational culture
- Easy to cross-promote online and offline

Employee Advocacy Communications Should Not Be:

- Generic or formulaic
- Forceful or coercive
- Complex or multifaceted
- Without a clear mission or purpose
- Medium-dependent

Utilizing the First Follower

The overall public perception of an organization can undoubtedly be linked to employee engagement. When a communications professional identifies the "first follower" in their organization, how should they capitalize off this discovery? One of the best tactics to employ when you have an engaged employee identified as a brand advocate is developing peer-to-peer messages. Instead of having communications with the call to action coming from a person whose salary is dependent on internal communication, getting other employees at different levels, responsibilities, and from different regional, ethnical and cultural backgrounds can go a long way in developing a holistic employee advocacy program. Having the ability to vary the signatory of messages creates the atmosphere of a movement or that the idea has caught on beyond one person.

Messages drafted by other employees should follow the same convention as activation messages that are drafted by communications staff, but can be more personalized. Employees that read these communications should be able to connect with their colleague's story and want to join in on the movement. These messages should not be forceful or coercive, but can be a little more direct because this person has been identified as a volunteer brand evangelist. The call to action should be even more compelling and twofold. Whatever the ask or appeal may be for a particular communication should be part one of a communication coming from the "first follower," with the second part being the encouragement to promote the ask to others within the organization.

Other Ideas to Consider:

- Employee ambassador program
- Peer-to-peer recruitment/activation messages
- Highlighting the "first follower" in outward-facing promotional materials
- Ways to transition employee activation into community involvement

Keeping It Going

When you reach the movement stage, never cease your efforts on recruitment. This should be a constant process, as employees will become disinterested, change jobs or may just be focused on a particular area where they decided to become activated for a singular purpose. However, you will also need to develop communications for retention. "The first follower" is going to get tired and needs to feel some sort of admiration for proliferating the movement. Creating an ambassador program that provides internal brand evangelists a vehicle to tell their story not only promotes your cause, but also gives "the first follower" a set of expectations and a sense of involvement in the outcome of positive public relations for your organization. Rewarding "the first follower" with attention in organizational publications that are internal and external can induce greater activity and solidify commitment to the movement. The movement may not hinge on "the first follower," but having an internal brand evangelist that is seasoned can spur others to stay committed to the organization's public relations efforts and continue to take action on the various appeals.

Identifying "the first follower" is instrumental in creating a functioning and effective employee advocacy program. Without "the first follower," you will be doomed to tracking open rates of communications that you send out. That is a dramatization, but finding "the first follower" is also important to your role as an overall communications professional. It solidifies your ability to go beyond informing and enter into the world of activation and outreach. It is personally gratifying to be the person that identifies an internal brand evangelist and is a rite of passage. With "the first follower," you are no longer "the lone nut" and are well on your way to creating a movement out of an employee advocacy program. ■

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New Ways to Communicate Values to Employees and Turn Them Into Advocates

By Maree Jones

From an HR perspective, communicating a company's values to potential and existing employees can often feel like reciting a motivational poster on a wall rather than a real, tangible way to express those qualities present in a particular company culture. But for employees to become true brand ambassadors, it is important that they not only know what a company does but also what it stands for, so that they can communicate that message to other employees, their friends and family, potential employees or other external stakeholders.

How Can Communicating a Company's Values Contribute to HR Success?

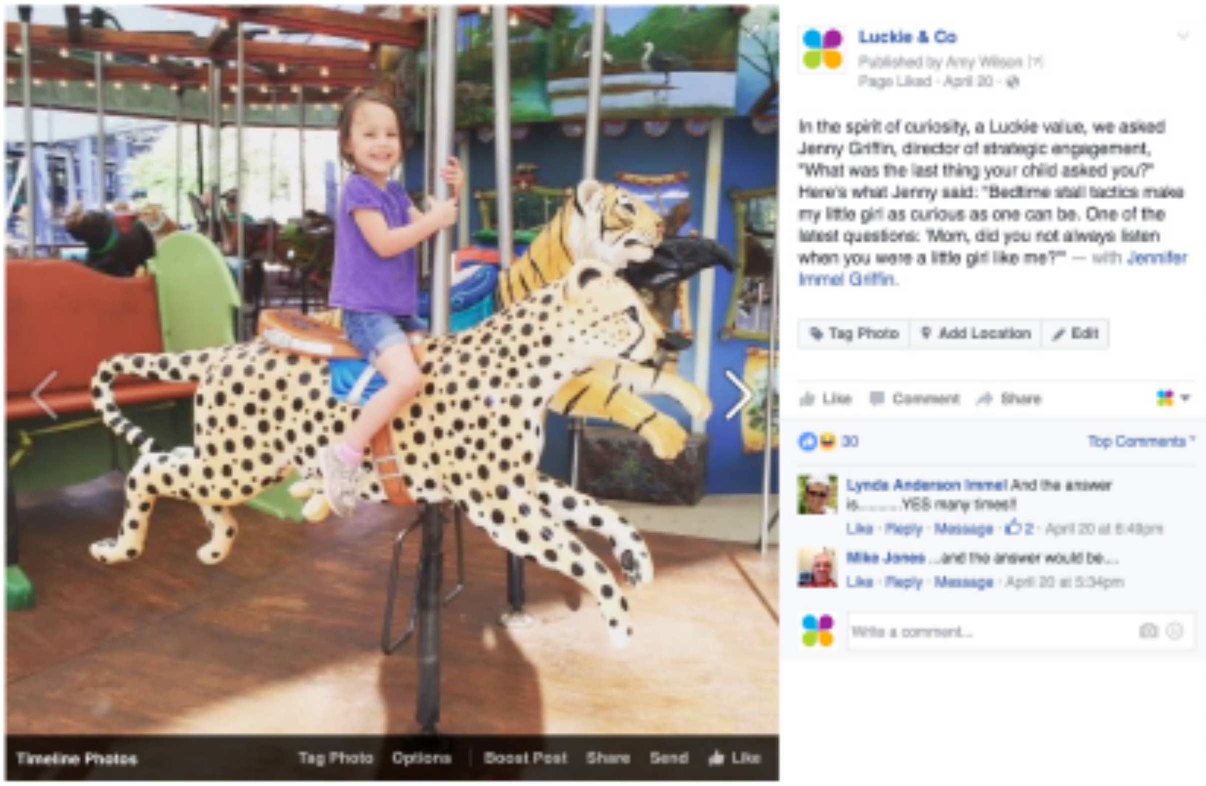
Communicating values internally in an organization can impact human resources in two ways: First, employees internalize and begin to demonstrate these values when they can talk about them on their own. However, they must be inspired to do so. Making it personal to an employee's work life brings more credibility to others when they see it. HR can talk about values in meetings and memos, but it's not real until the employee owns it. Second, on the recruitment front, it can be an extremely valuable tool. Candidates can experience part of the culture before they ever set foot into an interview. The employee experience becomes alive with quotes and anecdotes to provide a glimpse into a day in the life of an employee. The job candidate walks away from the experience with a greater understanding of company ideals and a better idea of whether or not the place is the right fit.

Reminding employees of common values helps build internal relationships on a solid foundation that moves the company forward. It helps employees hold one another, as peers, accountable for the way each one behaves.

Why Is It Important for Current Employees to Know Company Values?

Reminding employees of common values helps build internal relationships on a solid foundation that moves the company forward. It helps employees hold one another, as peers, accountable for the way each one behaves and pursues individual and company goals. Communicating these values internally makes sure that everyone, whether new to the company or a 25-year veteran, gets off on the right foot (and the same foot).

When employees talk about company values in their own language, it can lead to increased levels of camaraderie, boosted momentum and morale, a sense of teamwork and cooperation and an ownership of company culture. As values communication inter-



An example of a Facebook post conveying a brand value.

nally can impact HR's outreach to potential employees, current employees can be inspired to share the company's value messaging with outside stakeholders, friends, family or even on their social networks. This simple act turns your employees into influential brand ambassadors.

Key Tactics for Building a Values-Focused Outreach to Employees

1. Create a social media editorial calendar, if you don't have one already, and lay out each value week by week or month by month to make sure the most important information is accounted for. From there, create individual tactics, guidelines and deadlines for employee contribution. In this step, you can decide which channels are most important. A mix of internal channels (**Slack**, **Facebook** groups, etc.) and external channels (social networks, company blog) are recommended for maximum impact.
2. Conduct interviews and use quotes from real, current employees, stating company values in their own language and using anecdotes from their own experiences. Direct quotes ensure that each employee personalizes the information that's important to them and can be a powerful use of storytelling. Allow every employee to have a voice in shaping the culture and encourage everyone to use that voice. Quotes show what the values mean to each individual and are the most authentic human expression of them.
3. Incorporate a mix of videos and still imagery for maximum impact on social media channels and to cater to employees' preferences. Utilizing video, imagery, quotes and other types of content, your company can be seen as creative

Quick Tips on Turning Values Messaging Into Shareable Content

1. Create a social media editorial calendar, if you don't have one already, and lay out each value week by week or month by month to make sure the most important information is accounted for. From there, create tactics, guidelines and deadlines for employee contribution.
2. Use quotes from real, current employees, stating company values in their own language and using anecdotes from their own experiences. Direct quotes ensure that each employee personalizes the information that's important to them and can be a powerful use of storytelling.
3. Incorporate a mix of videos and still imagery for maximum impact on social media channels and to cater to employees' preferences. Some employees prefer Instagram, while others mostly use Facebook. Find out where your employees would be most comfortable sharing and encourage them to do so.
4. Feature and tag individuals from all levels of the company, not just leadership. While messages from leadership can often feel like a mandate, incorporating various levels of employees can make this effort feel more authentic. This leads to increased ownership by employees and engagement levels, as well as additional exposure for your brand on social networks.
5. Share on internal and external social networks. From Slack to private Facebook groups, it's a great way to make sure employees know what's being featured that day/week/month.

Measure its impact. Create reports measuring social media engagement levels before and after this activity. Identify the KPIs that show you whether or not you're successful and communicate those to leadership and HR teams.

and human, and it makes the content easier for employees to share on their own networks. While some employees prefer **Instagram**, others might mostly use Facebook. Find out where your employees would be most comfortable sharing and encourage them to do so. Some employees may be wary of sharing information from the company on their own networks, but the right content will inspire them to do so naturally.

4. Feature and tag individuals from all levels of the company, not just leadership. While messages from leadership can often feel like a mandate, incorporating various levels of employees can make this effort feel more authentic and genuine. This leads to increased levels of ownership and engagement, as well as additional exposure for your brand on social networks. Find ways to highlight various employees, as well as their contributions to the organization, through this effort.
5. Measure the impact of this activity. Create reports measuring social media engagement levels before and after this initiative. Identify the KPIs that show you whether or not you're successful and communicate those to leadership and HR teams so they can see progress and ROI in the form of sentiment, reputation management, online mentions or anything else deemed appropriate.

Challenges to Internal Employee Outreach and Advocacy

Like many internal and external communications efforts, this does not come without its challenges. It is important to note each of these as a potential barrier to success and find ways of working around them.

A tweet featuring an employee advocate.

1. Authenticity: Exposing the company's culture in a very calculated way can look forced, especially if during the interview process the answers seem too guided. One way to work through this is to make these types of interviews a regular occurrence, each time bringing in different employees to offer their own perspectives on company values.
2. Introversion: Many people aren't comfortable being put in the spotlight or being interviewed on camera. Some prefer not to be photographed, either. It is important to take into consideration what your employees would feel comfortable with prior to the creation of any content. Open communication, including expectations, can help to alleviate any hesitancy or shyness when it comes to being interviewed.
3. Geography: Organizations with more than one location can present their own unique set of challenges. It is important that all locations be taken into consideration before beginning this program to ensure no one feels left out or that their location doesn't matter to the overall company mission.
4. Production: Video equipment, cameras and other resources are an important part of the content-creation process. Many organizations are well-equipped to handle this kind of production in house, while others may need to outsource or hire teams to help make this happen.
5. Time: For our organization, it is difficult to find the time to market ourselves when there's other work—client work—that often takes priority. A certain amount of lead time must be given to circumvent any prior work or tasks that are going to be taking place at the same time. It's normal for an initiative this size to take weeks or even months to get off the ground due to busy schedules.

Is a Values-Focused Communications Program Right for My Organization?

Having a common set of values we all live, work and hire by is a key component in creating your company culture. It helps set expectations, empowers our employees and demonstrates the importance we put on character. We live our values every day.

Our organization found that when we communicated our values through videos, social media posts and other content, it kept our values part of our day-to-day conversation and helped us celebrate people who are embodying them in their work and actions. From an ROI standpoint, it can also lead to increased levels of engagement on internal and external channels—completely driven by employees themselves.

If company values are an important part of your company's culture, creating a similar program is a must-have for any organization. Through careful planning and consideration of employees' time and contributions, these tactics can not only boost awareness of said values, but they are also an important step in turning your employees into powerful brand advocates. ■

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Brand Ambassadors: Using Employee Social Media Channels to Get Brand Buzz

By Anita O'Malley

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness…"

— Charles Dickens

The art and science of communicating on social media channels has never before made or broken so many organizations. Introductions are made and forgotten, prospective buyers are educated, sales deals are initiated and closed and even new babies are showcased before colleagues and staff alike.

We communicate faster and more accurately, across wider distances and with more people than at any other time in history. According to a study published by **Statista**, by 2020 one-third of the earth's population will be using a social media platform to communicate [bit.ly/2cc85xI]. And that's a flexible, dynamic and fast environment.

Organizations that get this really get it. They expand their brand reach in a fraction of the time it would have taken just a decade ago. How? Their employees are all on at least one social media platform, and they tap into that power like never before. They create a team of doers, not just titles—people who are passionate about their company.

Even when company leadership understands this, it's important that any initiative like a brand social effort is met with acceptance from all the ranks.

Just how important is this? In the United States alone, according to Statista, nearly 80% of the population in 2016 has a social networking profile on a site.

But that's not all. Most recent business communications research proves that employees today are no longer passive, but are active communicators in creating their company's brand—and that an organization's identity is what its members believe it to be. But that makes it more vulnerable to influence at every level of the organization. This presents a dichotomy: What is the brand identity the organization leadership would like to have, and what is the actual brand communicated by its employees?

In order to unite the two, a process must be put into place that not only enables but also empowers employees. Branded content created by the organization is all well and good, but it's the employees that will decide if and what they would like to share. So it's up to you to make the information your organization is posting worthwhile, relevant and enticing to the employee.

This article will discuss best practices for empowering employees to become your brand ambassadors using social media.

The Brand Ambassador

Have you ever been to a store that spends a lot of money advertising to entice you into the store to purchase, only to find that once you're there the salespeople or the cashier are unhelpful or rude? This is a perfect example

Case Study: How One Company Increased Its Brand Engagement Over 1,000% in Under Two Months

A mid-size IT firm had challenges growing its social media following, increasing its brand reach and enrolling employees as company advocates on social media. They decided to use a process that included a tool-based method for employees to share thought-leading social media content within their networks. The turnkey program used a combination of customized company-branded, marketing, manufacturer and industry content together with a mobile app that pushed the firm's select approved content to each participant. It leveraged each employee as an advocate, using his or her social connections to effortlessly promote content and engage.

The first step of the program included a kick-off email that created excitement and called for participants to volunteer as ambassadors. Next, those who agreed to participate received step-by-step instructions on how to install the app onto their desktops and mobile phones. The social media team curated and scheduled appropriate and relevant content for ambassadors to begin sharing. Once the posts became available, employees received a notification alert, at which point they could choose whether or not to use it, when they wanted to use it and on which social platform.

Through this amplification, the firm successfully leveraged the power of employee advocacy through social media, which resulted in an increase in its brand reach by more than 1000%. The program drove more content views, likes, reposts and shares than any of the company's previous digital marketing programs. On Twitter, it saw an average of 50 additional followers per month. With the removal of all social media barriers, ambassadors no longer had to worry about finding the time to master social media, write content and post consistently, as it was done for them. Many participants also reported satisfaction with the content they were now receiving because it supported the type of thought expertise that they wanted to share with their customers, prospects and colleagues.

With 25 employee ambassadors, one average month included 265,000 impressions (opportunities to be seen), 225 reactions (outside likes, comments, retweets) and 500-plus link click-throughs. Everyone was a winner: The firm saw a significant brand boost that rivaled costly digital marketing programs and the employees received relevant, thought-expert content to grow their own follower communities.

of how an employee's behavior communicates the organization's brand at its most fundamental level.

Now more than ever, when it comes to branding, it's critical that your organization takes advantage of social media, as it can impact your brand greatly. As such, you'll want to create an ideal environment that will turn employees of every rank into brand ambassadors for your organization.

You'll want employees to not only speak well of your company, but also to share company-produced content. That's where amplification happens. Think of it this way: If one of your employees has 500 followers on **Twitter**, (in many cases these numbers are higher than the company's own) and they share a company video or blog post, you just increased your brand reach. Now multiply that by 50 employees and the numbers explode. So instead of your video or blog post being seen by just your company followers, now they get a chance to be seen by the network and followers of 50 employees, and if each has 500 followers—well, you do the math. The reach is exponential.

Here are four critical steps to include when you want to increase your brand reach using employees' social media:

1. Training

Social media training should be an integral part of any organized effort by an organization to increase brand reach by employees. Used properly, instruction for employees on any social communication site is a sure win. Used improperly and without training, the message may be altered for design, media and content—and not always in an optimal way.

A strategic rollout works best when the time is taken to use the appropriate tools and process—and when people's attitudes are ideally poised to accept the rollout.

An informed staff is an empowered staff. If you're creating great marketing content in the form of videos, blogs, white papers, e-briefs, etc. and your employees don't know about it, how can you expect to get maximum benefit and reach from it?

For senior leadership to communicate their intentions for the brand, training is an absolute must. It's a key ingredient of being connected—to employees and stakeholders alike. Training could include best practice social practices, expected behavior representing the company, where to access company content for posting, a social policy and even how to grow an expert following that benefits the employee and company alike.

While you're training on best practice social methods, stress the importance of the brand as a whole and explain why it is not to be abused. In other words, try to integrate your training and social policy together. Whatever your training platform, it's best to include key points from the social policy so that it's not simply a blindly signed document.

The best time to train is at the time of onboarding. A repeatable process will ensure that employees understand what is considered acceptable. Building a great brand requires a good sense of membership and encourages the acceptance and promotion of brand values. According to the social information-processing model, a popular communications theory, people who use social media heavily outside of work are also more apt to use the technology while they're at work.

2. A Realistic Social Media Policy

Today an organization's social media policy is critical in that it can act as a conduit to positive communications on behalf of the people representing the company. "Every company employee on social media has the potential to add to or erode a company brand," says Alyssa Hall, AVP, marketing, **Computer Design & Integration LLC**, a B2B technology provider. "We review our policy, which is mostly best practices on social media, with each employee that comes on board, and they are provided with a written copy that they sign," she adds.

Put a formal social media policy into company guidelines. It can be as brief as one page. Get the most socially active people to create it, own it and act as internal champions. Distribute it as new employees come on board. You'll be setting expectations for accountability and good behavior, as well as enabling your employees to make better decisions as to how to behave in any situation that may arise.

In "Social Media Affordances and Governance in the Workplace: An Examination of Organizational Policies," by Emmanuelle Vaast and Evgeny Kaganer [bit.ly/2fxgHDb], 74 social media policies representing various organization were collected and analyzed. The top areas that the policies addressed included issues like blurring personal and professional content, editorial post style recommendations, misrepresentation and disclosing com-

Helping Employees Be Ambassadors: The Social Email Digest

A web-based amplification tool can automate some of this, but if it's not in the budget, you can hand-create an internal social email digest that does the trick. It needs three things:

1. **Consistent Timing**
   Make sure that if you announce you are going to be sending out this email digest every Friday, you remain consistent. It will give you credibility and employees will know to look for it.

2. **Ease of Use**
   Suggest and write out posts for your ambassadors so they may simply cut and paste "posts of the week" into their own social platform of choice. Don't forget to include graphics, as they are a proven attention-getter on social platforms.

3. **Promotion**
   Build up your social brand ambassador employees in every employee communiqué, every executive and staff meeting, even your company newsletter or internal portal. Generate excitement and recognize folks who post the most, suggest posts and even help grow the company following. You can gamify this and incentivize the top poster of the month with a prize. Create an environment of competition and energy!

SAMPLE E-DIGEST

Widgets Inc. Weekly Social Postings for Ambassadors

Please share brand love on your social platforms. Below are suggested posts you can share/repost/retweet from your own social platform, or feel free to use any of our social platforms as well.

- Check out our HCAF hybrid #cloud automation framework solution for ultimate #IT agility www.xxxxx.com
- Our latest press release: Congrats to Michele Smith, Widgets new AVP, Client Services. www.xxxxx.com
- New video on Widgets new client wealth management solutions: No, we're not getting any younger. It's time to pick up and manage your #wealth investments

pany information, following company handbook rules and types of content not to post.

3. Internal Communications

An informed staff is an empowered staff. If you're creating great marketing content in the form of videos, blogs, white papers, e-briefs, etc. and your employees don't know about it, how can you expect to get maximum benefit and reach from it? That's why it's critical to establish a repeatable process for communicating company-published content not only to customers and prospects, but internally as well.

Social media introduces a whole new foundation for communication and its norms. Management can attempt to define the brand, but they need to identify with the organization as it is really perceived from the bottom ranks up. Workers who tend to identify strongly with their companies are going to engage in conversations socially that help promote and support the brand.

According to Kathy Dunlay, founder and social media expert at **New England Sales & Marketing**, "Many organizations we work with are using the power of their employees to showcase their brand content and message. The key to success is making it as easy as possible to help them post for value." She adds, "One idea is to provide the content itself to brand ambassadors as a way to guide and assist them in their efforts to post about the company. You can do this by manually emailing content, but even better, now this process can be automated, saving marketers and the ambassadors' valuable time."

As long as they are empowered through good, constant, repeatable communications for posting ideas, employees will easily adapt your company's content into their social media posting routine.

4. Tool/Email-Based Amplification

If you have a social media marketing budget, a good strategic initiative is to use a web-based amplifying application tool that helps you post your content and have participating employees amplify it on their own social networks with one click on their mobile device. But remember, to get maximum use from a tool, a process and person should be assigned to manage its function. Tools like this can be loaded ahead of time and posts scheduled by a social media manager.

A less expensive, "budget-free" way to go about amplifying your organization's brand post is to make a weekly social email digest for employees that allows them to share posts on their own social networks with a simple cut and paste (see sidebar).

The key is to tap into the power of your workforce to communicate what is being disseminated on your social sites. All of the resources and hard work putting together expert marketing content is only valuable when it's shared with your marketplace, and using the volume that social media affords is the top way to do it.

Here Comes the Buzz

Social media is a tool that manifests a strong communication of brand culture. Make sure that it matches what you want to be said about your brand so that your messaging remains consistent.

If you use 21st-century media as a powerful branding tool, your organization can maintain, and even enhance, the integrity of your company brand through your fundamental brand ambassadors: your employees.

Ultimately your employees decide whether and what information they will share. If you utilize these techniques, it is sure to create, as Dickens said, "the best of times" for your organization's brand. ■

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9

Recommendations for Organizational Structure

How a Fast-Growing Nonprofit Rebuilt Its PR Team Using Agency Principles

By Marisa Long

Whether you are managing and growing a team in house, looking to build better relationships with colleagues and senior executives or establishing the best way to work with consultants or clients, creating a PR team structure that produces results and meets demands is critical to success. PR pros must create a thoughtful plan, identify individual strengths, recognize weak spots and address change and challenges head on—all while creating compelling campaigns that produce results.

Growing to Meet Demands

At the **U.S. Green Building Council** (USGBC) we've had to navigate significant growth and find the right way to make sure PR was meeting demands. USGBC is a nonprofit dedicated to creating a healthier, more sustainably built environment. Our primary vehicle for this market transformation is LEED, the world's most widely used green building rating system.

Since LEED launched in 2000, it has grown to certify more than 5 billion square feet of space in more than 160 countries. Today, approximately 1.85 million square feet of space certifies every day. There are nearly 200,000 LEED-credentialed professionals and thousands of volunteers globally and more than 12,000 national member organizations, ranging from Fortune 500 companies to small businesses. When I arrived in 2010, USGBC had about half the 30-plus staffers that today make up the marketing department. USGBC had somewhat plateaued in attracting new audiences and was seeking to expand its reach. I was tasked with overseeing the launch of the Center for Green Schools, which reached beyond the B2B community and introduced us to consumer audiences. Over the past few years, our efforts also started expanding to new products and programs through USGBC's sister organization, Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI).

With so many B2B brands and B2C causes, disseminating information that resonates with the right audiences can be a challenge. The marketing department is responsible for growing USGBC's marketplace presence and making sure the message is clear and bipartisan for a variety of stakeholders that expect information, transparency and support. And we are mission-based; ultimately we are focused on advocating for a more sustainable future and providing solutions to create a sustainable environment for generations to come.

Creating a Plan

With such rapid growth, we filled gaps to meet demands. In the past few years, though, we've become more strategic in hiring staff that bring specific skill sets and in making sure existing staff are correctly deployed. When I worked on the launch of the Center for Green Schools my role extended from web and collateral development to media outreach, social media, overall messaging, event support and more. As a jack of all trades, I had to get scrappy and step outside my comfort zone to make sure goals were met. I certainly stepped on toes without a full understanding of who was responsible for what within our team.

Creating a plan on paper doesn't make it successful. Similarly, writing a job description doesn't make it your job—you have to work and let the results talk. It doesn't hurt, though, to create a plan that will hold you and your team accountable and create transparency around success.

As we continued to grow, USGBC's head of marketing, COO, myself and other leaders in the department started to implement changes, moving away from program silos to focus on subject-matter expertise. I was tasked with growing our PR and communications team, an exciting opportunity for a former PR agency executive who was somewhat new to the nonprofit world. I had supported the New York-based agency I worked at during a time of rapid growth. I knew some of the lessons I learned there would apply to USGBC.

I started thinking about how I could implement some of the practicalities of a high-performing agency structure for an inhouse team that supported internal departments, member companies and industry professionals as our "clients." In-house departments serve a similar function to an agency, but the priorities are different. At an agency, while you focus on client happiness and proving your value, your value also rests on revenue and the bottom line—you can make decisions and prioritize your level of support and staff hired for clients based on monetary value and a fee structure. In house, you certainly try to focus on the same areas, but prioritizing clients can be more challenging when your work isn't subject to a monthly retainer or hourly rate. This is when setting goals and prioritizing are most important.

Creating a plan on paper doesn't make it successful. Similarly, writing a job description doesn't make it your job—you have to work and let the results talk. It doesn't hurt, though, to create a plan that will hold you and your team accountable and create transparency around success.

When we began restructuring our PR team, I took a few weeks to create a 90-day plan that incorporated goals from our SVP of marketing and COO. I also met with my team and others in the organization who worked with our department to solicit feedback. These goals were clear and achievable for the time period. They included individual and team goals, such as increasing media coverage for the next quarter, streamlining our consultants' work, identifying clear roles for each team member and establishing new internal programs. In addition, I included my vision on the long-term role I wanted our team to play within the organization.

Establishing Adaptable Structure

For goals concerning how we wanted to expand the team, I took several steps to help inform the decisions we made toward growth:

1. Identify strengths and weaknesses: We looked at what was working from an individual, team-wide and organizational standpoint and played to strengths that allowed each team member to claim a sense of ownership over their work. For example, we focused some staff on media engagement, while others worked primarily on creating written materials.

We also evaluated where there were holes, such as being more proactive with media pitching and tracking and better leveraging our stakeholders. We created positions to fill these roles or identified how we could use our consultants more effectively.

2. Client feedback: As an in-house PR department, our clients include other departments and external stakeholders, so we talked to our business development, program and technical teams to see what support they thought was most crucial. This also helped identify what stories we wanted to tell through our PR campaigns. We talked to our member companies and local community leaders to assess their needs from us. For example, we decided to assign a point of contact within our team and increase the PR benefits we provide to member companies. We recognized the impact these stakeholders could have in the success of our PR strategy.

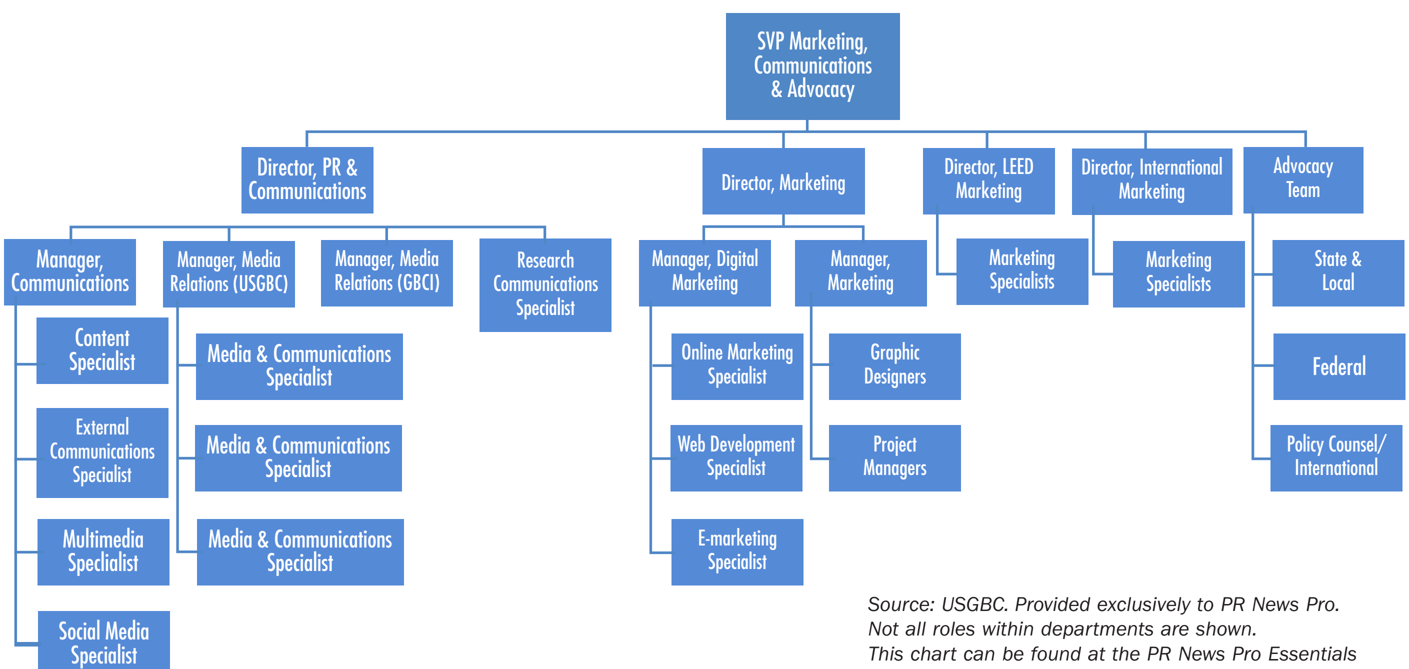
3. Anticipate and tackle turnover: Once we made a plan to grow our team and set ambitious goals and objectives, we realized this would shake things up a bit and that there was a chance not everyone would be on board. As with all change, it is important to be adaptable and create a culture that allows people to grow and feel secure. At USGBC, we use a feedback structure loop that identifies what's working and what's not on an ongoing basis. Accordingly we moved some staff into new roles that were a better fit for their skill sets.

Getting Organized

As our basic org chart shows, marketing now is organized to support our growing needs. The PR & communications team's responsibilities support the rest of the department, other departments and external stakeholders while pushing forward our PR goals.

Daily responsibilities: The communications team is primarily responsible for creat-

USGBC Organization Chart, Marketing & Communications



Source: USGBC. Provided exclusively to PR News Pro.
Not all roles within departments are shown.
This chart can be found at the PR News Pro Essentials page: prnewsonline.com/pr-news-pro-essentials/

ing messaging for USGBC and its programs. This includes maintaining editorial calendars for content distribution. Other responsibilities include: direct stakeholder engagement and external relations; content creation for USGBC's online channels; social media and multimedia management; management of USGBC+, the member magazine; management of an internal and external speakers bureau; management of research and public data; oversight of media relations at the local, national and global levels; and management of consultants and vendors.

Integrated marketing communications: We are closely integrated with marketing team members and support content creation for USGBC online channels. We create multi-faceted PR campaigns that include visuals and marketing materials, e-marketing engagement, advertising and more.

Public affairs: The communications and advocacy teams work closely to manage public affairs campaigns that help push our policy agendas. Much of our media work, particularly in the U.S., is based on where we see value from an advocacy and policy perspective.

Local, national and international engagement: Some of our best media coverage comes at the local level. Our media team is responsible for knowing the markets we are pitching so we can support local and national media as well as industry and consumer press. For international, we engage in-country/region-specific PR support for targeted campaigns that we manage. We also work with consultants for larger PR campaigns.

Campaigns: Our larger PR campaigns are heavily focused on stakeholder engagement, not just media relations and traditional PR. We know the best way for us to tell our story is to have our stakeholders share theirs. Each communications team member has a role in outreach, which fosters a culture of collaboration. We evaluate what worked and didn't on each campaign so we can make tweaks and improve efficiency. We also use a shared resource like **Google** Docs or **Dropbox** to make sure our campaign information and plans are in one place, and we create spreadsheets and work plans that assign responsibilities and move everything forward.

Reporting Results

When growing a PR team (or making the case for new staff or resources), metrics play an important role to showcase the importance of PR. As part of our restructure, we started to compile campaign-specific and quarterly reports that delve into results. Each component of our team is responsible for reporting out and evaluating their performance.

We also track media and social media coverage and sentiments daily. While the process can be tedious, this data showcases our team's contributions in a digestible way for senior leadership. In addition, providing staff with the opportunity to reflect on their work over a period of time validates individual contributions and successes as part of a team. If you have the budget, investing in external platforms/vendors that help track metrics, distribution and results will provide beneficial support and help rate subsequent campaigns. ■

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Brand Execs: Integrated Comms Leads to Data Sharing, Digital Transformation

By PR News Editors

Integrating communications and marketing is a great subject to talk about. Ask just about anyone in communications and marketing and they'll tell you integration makes eminent sense. Then query the same people whether or not communications and marketing are integrated at their shop, and you may find a lot of no's. The reasons for not integrating often have little to do with business objectives: turf wars, egos, culture and inertia frequently are culprits. Still, integration remains a hot topic.

It's so hot that **The Conference Board** sent its members a 60-page study, *Unlocking Value from Integrated Corporate Communications and Marketing*, which adds a contemporary spin to the argument in favor of integration: Integration allows companies to better adapt to realities of the digital age.

Based on interviews with 25 brand executives and including several case studies, the report says integrating communications and marketing can help boost the importance of data collection, sharing and analysis. The result, the study says, can be "transformational" for a company's strategy and operations.

The Conference Board provided a copy of the report exclusively to *PR News Pro*.

As companies struggle with digital priorities, the integrated unit is well positioned to make a case to the C-suite "for a digital, data-driven approach to business strategy, drawing on the technologies and tools that have typically fallen under their remit." On a practical level, the lines between communications and marketing have blurred such that both are collaborating more, regardless of structure, and are reaching throughout the company [see table].

For companies that already have embraced a digital approach, an integrated marketing and communications department can access data faster and more efficiently, the study says. Integration should remove many roadblocks to information flow. It also can improve agility, because the integrated unit will help companies find and solve problems faster as barriers to information and decision making are removed. "Showcasing this potential then puts the company on a path to digital transformation, where this speed and efficiency can be magnified," the study says.

Goals, Metrics and Budgets

Having communications and marketing under one senior leader also helps align goals, metrics and budgets, it says. The single leader imparts a consistent strategy, fosters goal sharing between communications and marketing and better understands how to deploy resources to reach them, as well as to establish the right metrics to measure progress.

When metrics are closer aligned to strategic business priorities, "the integrated function can make a stronger case for a larger budget because it can show more accurately the value it provides to the company," the study says.

As **Southwest Airlines** CMO Linda Rutherford says in the study, "Working in an integrated fashion, we're able to better leverage resources, get bigger bang for our buck, and garner more audience than if we were working independently."

Employee and Customer-centric Culture

Of particular importance to communicators is the report's take on how integration can influence culture creation. It argues an integrated communications and marketing function can better create a customer-driven business. Both communications, which often handles social media, and marketing want to engage customers and discover their preferences. The study says that having marketing and communications work together with the customer can result in "better insights from long-term engagement on social media… [that intelligence can then be fed to]…other parts of the company…[which can]…respond with meaningful content that sparks interest and continues engagement."

In an interview included in the report, **HP** CMO/CCO Antonio Lucio says integration has helped his company "develop end-to-end communication across the total customer decision journey. The experience we create for our customers— from search across to purchase—is no longer just about products." End-to-end communication has helped HP "bring our vision, mission and brand to life, make our company ethos...mean something significant and amplify the volume of product marketing/sales priorities."

The report also argues integration can better lead to an employee-centric culture, where employees become brand advocates. The integrated function can better provide "all employees [with] the values, narratives, messages, and platforms to represent the company accurately and meaningfully," the study says.

There's also a CSR angle to integration, Alex Parkinson, senior researcher at The Conference Board and the study's author, says in an interview with PR News Pro. While communications often is responsible for CSR activities, the effort sometimes "gets lost." Now that more consumers, particularly Millennials, are making purchases based on a brand's positive relationship with causes, marketing has been brought into the equation, Parkinson says. This has encouraged companies to acknowledge the importance of aligning business strategies with causes. As this trend has accelerated, corporate communications and marketing have begun to collaborate to ensure business practices, strategies and messages are ethically sound. With the rise of integration "CSR can rise from being an add-on in your annual report, sometimes, to underpinning a business strategy, determining how a brand comes to market," Parkinson says.

The integration of communications and marketing can help increase brand consistency across business units. The study quotes a **Weber Shandwick** report, *Convergence Ahead*, that says "the best-run brands…behave in a consistent way; they stand for one thing or a few things and consistently communicate that globally." A corporate narrative is tightly adhered to in such companies. In the study HP's Lucio says only companies with a well-integrated marketing and communications function can maintain the narrative.

The study also makes the point, however, that headquarters at large companies need to recognize regional differences and "allow enough freedom [for regions] to pursue their own communications and marketing endeavors."

4 Recommendations for Integration

The report acknowledges that integration, as noted above, often is easier said than done. It notes collaboration between communications and marketing can be an intermediate step toward integration. In addition, for

The Changing Roles of Communications and Marketing

Traditional roles and responsibilities		Integrated roles and responsibilities	
Corporate Communications	Marketing	Advising the CEO and C-suite	Working more closely with their C-suite contemporaries to coordinate stakeholder engagement, in order to provide better counsel and to shape strategic direction.
Communications policy	Advertising	Collecting, analyzing, and sharing data	Supporting the company as a whole in creating a better understanding of customers and employees (among other stakeholders) from information gleaned through new communications tools and technologies such as social media, so that the company can respond to their demands more effectively.
Communications strategy	Analytics	Crafting a consistent message	Taking the company mission to a broad range of audiences across a broad range of communications platforms. It's the integrated function's role to develop the corporate narrative based on a company's values and support all departments and employees in their dissemination of those messages.
Crisis and emergency communications	Branding	Creating content and storytelling	Directing investment to content-based engagement opportunities. As storytelling takes on increasing importance across all communications platforms, the integrated function needs to package data, insights, and other information so that it is digestible, memorable, and engaging for all stakeholders and then get it into the hands of the people who will be representing the company.
Employee (internal) communications	Content dissemination	Driving business strategy and growth	Thinking in ways that drive the business forward, not simply in ways that generate prospects. This means not only looking at strategic initiatives through the lens of marketing and communications, but also helping the company understand its place in modern society and how its operations and its products and services can contribute meaningfully to solving complex global issues.
Executive communications	Lead generation and sales	Engaging stakeholders	Supplementing in-house capabilities with external expertise in areas like behavioral economics, data analytics, and content creation while forging new partnerships with nongovernmental organizations that allow the combined function to better navigate rapidly changing social and environmental challenges.
Intranet communications	Optimizing distribution to customers	Leading a customer-centric culture	Building a long-term relationship with customers (at both B2B and B2C companies) that seeks to understand demand better. Whereas once marketing "pushed" messages to customers, now customers are proactively engaging with companies, and companies must respond quickly. That means that for companies that include social media in their marketing, the function is forced to undertake tasks that were historically in the corporate communications domain, such as handling customer complaints and stakeholder relations.
Investor relations	Pricing strategy	Leading business alignment	Becoming a change agent within the company and co-leading with corresponding departments on issues like employee engagement, diversity and culture, marketing and sales promotion, and building digital systems.
Media relations	Product and service development and management	Leading corporate culture	Understanding the importance of culture in the organization and the role CMOs and CCOs play in helping to shape a positive and productive mindset. This often means elevating the importance of company values and promoting their inclusion in company strategy and branding.
Public relations	Promotion	Leveraging social media	Putting social media to work for the whole organization. Communicators and marketers need to understand the potential that social media presents to companies not only as a dissemination tool, but as an engagement and data collection tool.
Relationship building	Sponsorship	Supporting risk management efforts	Using new communications tools and technologies to see ahead of the curve and predict risks before they emerge. Mining these technologies for information to understand customers and other stakeholders presents new risks, such as data privacy, which the integrated function needs to manage in partnership with the office of the chief legal officer.
Reputation management	Understanding demand and customers	Understanding market ecosystems	Monitoring environmental and market conditions and communicating findings across the enterprise, so that the organization can adapt in ways that yield competitive advantage.

Source: "Unlocking Value From Integrated Corporate Communications and Marketing," a report to members of The Conference Board and provided exclusively to PR News Pro.

companies attempting to integrate their communications and marketing units, it has four recommendations:

- **Go Slow**: Large companies won't be able to change overnight, it says. "There is a need to "fold in gently" between the two functions."
- **Top Down**: Leaders must head the integration charge to "establish cultural readiness throughout the company."
- **Look Both Ways**: Leaders and employees must understand how communications and marketing, separately and together, boost company value. Having the head of marketing simply subsume a communications unit into his department, or vice versa, will not work, the study says. Adds Parkinson, "the person at the helm of it all, the CEO, needs to understand both functions." In addition, leaders in particular must understand exactly how structural integration benefits the company.
- **HR's Key**: As companies move toward integration and siginficant change occurs to traditional business modes, HR must be supportive and serve as a sounding board for strategy and decisions. ■

For Truly Revolutionary Silo-Busting, Break Down the Wall Between PR & IT

By Kevin Kautzky

As a communications professional, I find myself in a constant daze when it comes to discussions, threads and trends when the subject is the digital landscape.

The irony for me is that after a 15-year career where I felt as if I had a decent handle on the craft of communications, I admit I sometimes know very little about certain parts of the tech side of the equation.

We most often hear of updates to the hardware and software platforms we depend on through a product launch, some early buzz about the next iPhone, updates to the **Microsoft** Office suite or early leaked photos and video of **Snap** spectacles. And no matter how many blogs, **Twitter** handles or newsletters you follow, it seems we are more often than not part of the consumer pool, hearing about these new things as they launch. We're then left scrambling to adjust our strategies and skill mixes to adapt and adopt so as to not be left behind.

We need to take a pause and really rethink some of the fundamental communications and IT roles. Rethink the paradigms of "us and them."

Communications vs. IT?

I often find myself thinking, why is it still the case in so many organizations that it is "us and them" when it comes to communications and IT?

Think about it. Name a scenario as a professional communicator where your strategy or tactics are independent on some level of a technology solution. Website? Yep, you need some tech for that. Social media presence? Yep. You need some tech for that. PowerPoint deck? Yep, you need some tech for that. Video streaming? You get the point.

Now more than ever, our craft hinges on our ability to access and better understand the smartphone in our pocket, the tablet on our table, the very laptop in which I am creating this essay—and all of the apps and programs on them and how they function most effectively.

If you channel your inner Neo and strip things down to the 1's and 0's of "The Matrix," it does really come down to a major tech dependency by professional communicators. And it's not a cliché or a clever quip of "I'd die without my (insert device/app name here)," it's fact.

And it's not just the next social media platform, or "what's hot" item such as virtual reality, augmented reality, or artificial intelligence that we need to be better versed in.

A New Way of Thinking

We need to take a pause and really rethink some of the fundamental communications and IT roles. Rethink the paradigms of "us and them," the very way we approach our craft. In addition, we should rethink the skills that we recruit, train and retain on our teams. The fundamentals—that communications is about well-written content and IT is based on a stable network—need to be seriously rethought.

An age-old challenge for professional communicators has been to prove the ROI of the function. What if instead of focusing on our outputs and actions, or our desires to be viewed as strategic partners rather than service providers, we truly engaged in the digital revolution as thought leaders rather than recipients?

The Nexus of Communications and IT

What if we identified early and often the opportunities at the communications and IT nexus that could shape the next killer app, rather than how to use that app once it arrives?

I am unsure what we'll find when we ask these questions. Fortunately, I find myself in an organization where communications and IT now share a spot on the org chart. On the other hand, I believe there's a powerful advantage to be found in what we are learning about each other's skills, priorities and challenges. This knowledge will shape what we are able to do for our company and augment our ability to prove our ROI.

But I also believe there is something bigger. It's something that can benefit the broader craft. Something that each of us brings to the table. So much is possible beyond what we have seen and done before if we dive in and ask, "What if we team up and do things a little differently next time?"

What if indeed… ■

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