

Keeping communication lines open in a way that keeps employees well informed is a challenge at any company – large or small. The summer presents additional challenges due to vacations, changes in child care arrangements and organized sports for children and adults alike. This month's newsletter provides suggestions on how to develop a communication plan that keeps employees in the know and why it's important to the organization.

Note to AOL 9.0 users: Please add Carol_Bergeron@mail.vresp.com to your address book so you see all the great features of the newsletter.

DISPENSE WITH THE SILOS THROUGH BETTER COMMUNICATION

By Carol Bergeron

Employees who stay well connected within the organization are more likely to contribute in valuable ways, recognize areas that require immediate attention and increase their appreciation for the interdependencies between themselves and others. One way to proactively address the challenge of keeping employees in the know is to create and implement a communication plan with the assistance of employees.

Jump start planning efforts by using the following questions as a guide. You should be able to comfortably answer these questions and take comfort in knowing that once implemented employees will share and receive information that is important and timely. This approach considers everyone's schedule; communication preferences and information needs. The result will be a crisper organizational context within which employees operate.



1. What needs to be communicated?

Start with: organizational goals, product or service information, customer / market and industry information, business processes, policies & practices, organizational announcements, recognition of accomplishments, career development opportunities, benefits and tools available to employees. The list will reflect what is important to people in your organization.

2. With what frequency and when should it be communicated?

Consider the frequency of dissemination. Is there a time during the month, week or day that is better for communication than others? Get feedback from recipients on what frequency and schedule makes the most sense. Keep in mind that enough time must pass in order for there to be fresh information but not so much time that it is outdated.

3. What mode of communication should be used?

Consider multiple delivery vehicles: email, voicemail, web site, newsletter, one on one conversations, group workshops, sessions or meetings, etc. It makes sense to tailor the mechanism based on the type of information to be shared and the preferences of the recipients. Distinguish between communications proactively sent to employees, perhaps through an email, from communications available to employees through their own initiative - perhaps through a web site.

4. Who is responsible?

You will be more successful if the roles and responsibilities required to implement your communication plan are unambiguous. The source of the information should be clear as should the person(s) responsible for preparing, reviewing and sending the communication. Select people who are enthusiastic and skilled given the broad range of responsibilities. For instance, the writer of the message may be different from the person responsible for its electronic distribution. Don't forget to set an expectation among recipients on when and how they should access the communication.

5. How to measure effectiveness?

You will want communications to be sent out on a timely basis. Response mechanisms are key to determining if communications are not only received but understood. Simple conversation and the use of quick surveys can help discern effectiveness.

Additional Tips:

- Keep your message relevant, timely and concise. People will appreciate your respect for their time.
- Remember that communication is multidimensional.
- Some messages are so critical that they are worth repeating. Use multiple delivery vehicles to reinforce importance.
- Keep a record of your communications since some are likely to be seasonal or cyclical and can be reused in the future.
- Capture the communication plan in a matrix that is easy to understand and roles and responsibilities clear.
- Error on the side of action. Build momentum for success by implementing components incrementally rather than waiting for the entire plan to be fine tuned.
- Keep it dynamic by experimenting with varied approaches and adjusting based on feedback.

The implementation of a well thought out communication plan can often mean the difference between a well informed employee population and one that operates in silos. Once you get the hang of it, apply the approach to other audiences such as customers, stockholders and suppliers. Simply preface the steps outlined with: define your target audience. You may find efficiencies in common messages that go to multiple audiences.

Communication plans are as individual as business strategies. While there may be some common components across companies, the tone, delivery vehicles and content will vary. Make the opportunity to be thoughtful and deliberate in your communication. You may find that developing this new habit will pay for itself in no time by keeping employees well informed and current on important business matters. You will know it makes a difference by the way employees express their business acumen in day to day conversation and let it guide their actions.

RESOURCES

Additional resources you may find of interest:

2004 Schedule for Educational Workshops at www.bergeronassociates.com/calendar.htm.

Resource for Organizational Effectiveness Information

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Bergeron Associates
101 Middlesex Tpke, Ste 6, PMB 326
Burlington, MA 01803-4914
781-376-4071

carol@bergeronassociates.com
www.bergeronassociates.com

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