WHAT'S NEXT →

9 ways to reinvent employee communication

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& COMPANY

WHAT'S NEXT →

FIND OUT

Foreword

In times like these, I turn to Dorothy Parker, the 20th century writer and wit, who famously said: "This wasn't just plain terrible, this was fancy terrible. This was terrible with raisins in it."

Sums up 2020, doesn't it? And for those of us who communicate with employees, there have been lots of raisins.

The good news is that we've risen to the challenge. We've helped leaders be more accessible and authentic. We've provided information that employees rely on and trust. And we've counseled our organizations about how to communicate change to keep employees engaged.

But—you knew there had to be a "but"—we can't rest on our laurels. Organizations' needs and employees' expectations are higher than ever.

So we've got to keep up the momentum. That's what this book is about. There's never been a better time to reinvent your employee communication program.

While Dorothy Parker wrote, "What fresh hell is this?", I'm going to turn to another writer for the inspiration we need to move forward:

Alison Davis
CEO

> **"I believe, that whatever good or bad fortune may come our way, we can always give it meaning and transform it into something of value."**
>
> **Hermann Hesse**
> *German-born Swiss poet, novelist and painter*

Contents
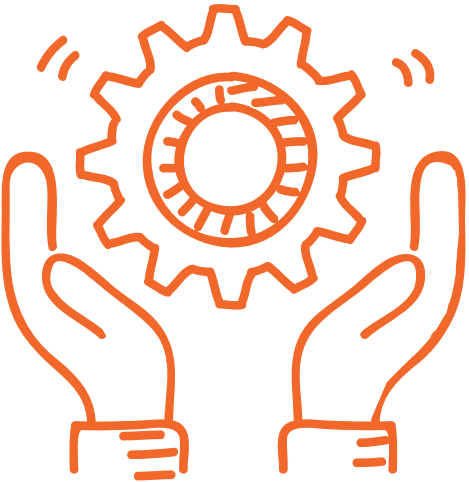
Introduction

Our world is at a watershed moment. From a **global pandemic to outcries for social justice,** the crises we're experienced have brought not only tremendous disruption but also opportunity for meaningful change.

The stay-at-home orders, economic downturn and widespread protests:

- **Accentuated long-standing gaps** for internal communication, such as reaching non-wired employees and making communication approachable

- **Caused organizations to adapt quickly**—creating lots of big transformations

- **Triggered great anxiety among employees**—from personal safety to job security

The result? Priorities for organizations changed dramatically, which shaped new communication expectations from employees. And shifts are ongoing.

THE IMPACT OF 2020'S CRISES

Organizations need to:	Employees are:
• Implement big changes more frequently; for example: reorganizations, supply chain workarounds, product changes, evolving relationships with employees (move to part time or freelance)	• Looking for definitive answers • Sharing new preferences, such as permanently working from home • Expecting straightforward and unvarnished communication • Asking how their organizations are responding to business, societal and safety challenges, and how those responses will impact them
• Be resilient against future disruptions	
• Uncover new ways to be innovative	• Feeling: - Exhausted by too much change - Frightened by uncertainty
• Deal with new increased scrutiny from employees, government entities and the public	- Concerned about how the deal with their organizations may change: pay, bonus, benefits, workload and balance

As the crises of 2020 emerged, employee communication became more important than ever. And in many ways it's changed for the better.

Many **senior leaders have had the courage to be vulnerable,** share their concerns and show great empathy when communicating with employees.

Internal communication pros have moved faster than ever before to meet the needs of their colleagues.

With these and many other improvements, employees' expectations are now higher than ever.

You can live up to those high expectations by reinventing your internal communication program.

YOU'RE INVITED TO DISCOVER WHAT'S NEXT

Join the Davis & Company team as we share nine strategies—each designed to help you think differently about employee communication and the work you do every day.

VIP PASS

ADMIT ONE

Chapter 1

Create purpose

During 2020, organizations have spent a lot of time communicating about what's happening now, when key changes are occurring and what to expect next.

But, while those details are important, you also need to focus on something more fundamental: purpose. Dictionary.com defines purpose as: "the reason for which something exists or is done," "an intended or desired result; end; aim; goal" and "determination; resoluteness."

All those definitions are appropriate for internal communication today. The idea is simple:

Create a shared sense of purpose by helping employees reconnect with their role in supporting the organization's success.

Create purpose
HERE'S HOW

✓ Reinforce company strategy
✓ Define expectations
✓ Update your company narrative
✓ Reinvent news
✓ Highlight success
✓ Show you care

Reinforce company strategy

• •

Early on during the crises, leaders stopped reinforcing messages about "Here's what we need to do this year."

Instead, leaders were almost entirely **focused on communicating about how the company was responding.** And employees spent so much time wondering what would happen that they lost sight of how to support the organization's success.

Now the focus is shifting back to the organization's ongoing strategy, while balancing the need to communicate about changes in the workplace.

> **"A strategy is necessary because the future is unpredictable."**
>
> **Robert Waterman**
> *Non-fiction author and expert on business management practices*

When it comes to corporate strategy, employees often tune out. They see strategy as a top-down process and believe their participation doesn't matter.

So, make sure to **reconnect your employees with your corporate strategy** by making it less of "this is what we decided" and more of "here's our direction and how you can contribute."

Here are three tips to help you ensure employees understand their role in supporting the company's goals:

Simplify, simplify, simplify

Strategy and corporate speak seem to go hand in hand: strategic imperatives, value drivers, aspirations, framework, etc.

Just because certain words and phrases are used in the C-suite doesn't mean you need to use them too.

For example, "strategic direction" can be conveyed as "how our work will change" and "aspirations" as "five-year goals." **Keep language approachable.**

Map it

Visuals are the perfect way to communicate complicated content. A graphic that represents all of the moving parts of a strategy—a strategy map—specifies how everything works together.

For example, show how the strategy supports the vision and how new processes will contribute to the strategy.

The best maps make cause-and-effect relationships explicit, so employees can **connect the dots between actions and results.**

Ask

To build understanding, you need to involve employees in dialogue. Involve employees in strategy communication by allowing them to ask questions, comment or offer ideas.

For example, after sharing your strategy map, **ask employees** how this direction will impact their department or team. What ideas do they have to help the company reach its goals? Post their thoughts for everyone to see.

Instead of:
"This is our corporate strategy."

"HERE'S OUR DIRECTION. HOW CAN YOU CONTRIBUTE?"

Define expectations

As things continue to evolve, employees need to know exactly how their roles will be impacted and **what they need to do.**

While senior leaders should provide a high-level outline of what the new expectations are, managers typically take the lead in targeted conversations with their teams.

When communicating updated expectations, make sure managers:

Are specific about what employees need to do. Help employees understand what the change means for them.

Focus on new behaviors. Encourage employees to look toward the future and begin to change the way they work together and individually. Reinforce "what we need to do differently."

Continually give positive feedback to employees who are embracing new ways of working and demonstrating desired behaviors. Provide constructive feedback to those who seem challenged to adjust to the current work environment.

Measure progress and be sure to regularly communicate to the team and individuals about how things are going.

Update your company narrative

The world has been shaken to its foundations and your employees have, too. Your company narrative needs to reflect this by engaging emotionally with employees and reassuring them that the **company's vision and mission haven't changed.**

Stories with emotion resonate across cultures, geography and time. That's why we still have empathy for Cinderella, Odysseus and Juliet centuries after these stories were created.

If you can make employees feel something, your refreshed narrative will be more effective. Some of the most successful stories ditch the corporate data and **focus on leaders' experiences.**

Consider this update to Chobani's company narrative based on the story of founder Hamdi Ulukaya.

THE REAL-LIFE JOURNEY
of Chobani founder Hamdi Ulukaya
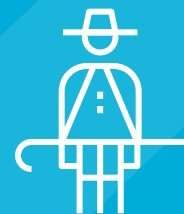
Ulukaya comes from a long line of nomadic farmers and shepherds in eastern Turkey.
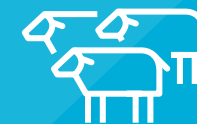
He enrolled in a business course in the United States.

When his father visited, Ulukaya wanted comfort foods available for him, so he started making his own cheese.

The idea took off, and Ulukaya started a business making yogurt. Now he leads a company of more than 2,000 employees.

When the crisis hit his adopted country, Ulukaya remained true to the company's purpose of "making universal wellness happen sooner" by launching Chobani Pantry.

For the foreseeable future, Chobani Pantry will continue to send a truck a day to food banks who need supplies across the United States.

This update resonates with employees' emotions and demonstrates how the company is remaining true to its D.N.N.A. (its stated purpose of providing "delicious, nutritious, natural and accessible" foods). Employees see this consistency and are reassured by it.

Reinvent news

• •

Internal communication was modeled after journalism. Yet much of what companies share through internal channels is not new.

Don't simply post or email a press release. Instead, **explain what the news means** to people in your organization.

Sure, your employees are smart, but they are processing so much information that it's often difficult for them to see the big picture. That's why it's essential to provide context, analysis and explanation, almost at the same time news is breaking.

> **"Our work too often instead reflects conventions built up over many decades."**
>
> **The New York Times 2020 Group**
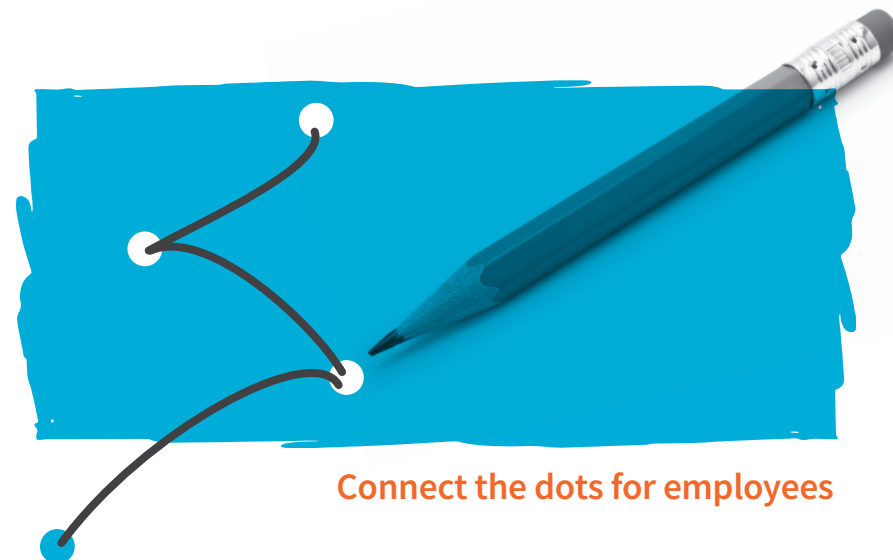
Connect the dots for employees

Create focus. What matters most in the organization right now?

Build community. What unites the organization? How can employees work together for a common goal? Develop a sense of "we're in this together."

Weave your purpose into your communication. Why does your organization exist? What sets it apart from competitors?

Provide a valuable service to employees by delivering information employees can't find anywhere else. **That means shedding light on issues, giving fresh perspectives and creating shared meaning.**

Highlight success

Now more than ever, employees want to hear about their colleagues and themselves.

Sharing employee stories creates connections and deepens relationships. Plus, it boosts morale to highlight achievements and let employees know that their hard work does not go unnoticed.

Create a series of **employee spotlights** for your intranet:

• **Highlight team achievements.** What challenges did the team face? How did they overcome these hurdles? What were the lessons learned?

• **Feature an individual employee.** What is a typical workday like? What was his or her first job? What would co-workers be surprised to find out about this person?

Spotlights can be articles or take the form of an interview with a set of questions and answers.

Follow these **writing tips** to make your employee spotlights stand out:

• Grab attention with a **great headline.**

• Write the way people **talk.**

• Get to the main point **fast.**

• Make it **easy** to read.

• Keep it **short.**

Show you care

Organizations have long recognized the power of charity for engaging the workforce. Employees value charitable programs because these types of programs **help them feel connected** to something larger.

But giving programs **need to feel authentic** to your company. Make sure you let employees know where your organization stands—its mission and values— and the connection between those elements and the causes you support.

70%
Employees
consider it very important to work for a company that supports a culture of charitable giving

87%
Companies
say there is an expectation to support causes and issues that are important to employees

Source: America's Charities Snapshot Employee Research: What Employees Think About Workplace Giving, Volunteering and CSR

Here are three ways you can **foster a sense of connection** through meaningful charitable programs:

Make it local. Nothing is more powerful than seeing the impact of your efforts on your community. Look for opportunities to connect employees with local causes, such as online fund drives for community food banks.

Make it social. Put your employees in the spotlight by showcasing your charitable efforts on social media. One way to do this is to put together a quick selfie video or slideshow of employees thanking frontline workers.

Make it personal. Highlight your company's unsung heroes by creating profiles of employees who go above and beyond.

Example: A client profiled an employee who flew his own plane to deliver relief supplies after Hurricane Maria.

So, look for opportunities to connect employees through charitable programs—it's not only good for your company, it's good for the world.

Chapter 2

Help employees be successful

Once employees understand *what* the organization is trying to achieve (that's right, purpose), it would be nice to think that everyone would know *how* to contribute to that success.

But, especially these days, it's not that simple. So many obstacles get in the way, including: competing priorities, lack of clarity and, of course, stress, stress and more stress.

You can help. Communication can help clear the way and put employees on a path to success.

Help employees be successful
HERE'S HOW

✓ Ensure employees know how to find information
✓ Provide useful, relevant content
✓ Trim the fat
✓ Encourage employees to ask questions
✓ Recognize individuals and teams

Ensure employees know how to find information

Surveys and focus groups reveal that **employees are fuzzy about what internal communication channels are available** and how one channel is different from another.

Employees often don't see the value of each, don't know how things are organized or how they fit together, and can't easily find information.

> **"Knowledge is of two kinds. We know a subject ourselves, or we know where we can find information on it."**
>
> **Samuel Johnson**
> *English writer*

Problem
Communication is confusing and complex, and employees haven't been reminded how the system works—assuming there is a system.

Solution
To be effective, internal communication channels must work together like a well-oiled machine. So create a cohesive internal communication system and promote it to employees. That way, employees know the purpose of each channel and how to access what they need when they need it.

How to
Start by thinking about your current system. While each channel may be a separate entity, consider how they work together.

Next, establish standards for each channel. These are your rules of the road. Follow them to deliver a consistent experience so employees know what to expect from each channel.

Educate employees by stating the channel's purpose right up front. Your e-news digest has a name, but it also needs a very explicit description, preferably right in the banner. Be crystal clear: "The weekly e-news digest for Ajax employees."

Promote your channels regularly in a variety of ways. Use other channels to tease interesting content on your intranet. Provide endorsement quotes from real employees. If your publication wins an award, share the good news.

Never assume that just because you understand how your channels work that employees will know and remember.

> **"Experts in every field agree on the transformative power of systems."**
>
> **Mark Joyner**
> *Internet marketer, author and founder of Construct Zero*

ESTABLISH STANDARDS FOR EACH CHANNEL IN YOUR SYSTEM

Objective: What is this channel for? By stating its main mission, you make it clear to employees what to expect.

Criteria: What makes content qualify for a particular channel? If the CEO is talking about a major organizational restructuring, that information requires more than an email.

Audience: Employees want information tailored to them. So specify your target audience(s)—the people who are interested in and impacted by the communication.

Frequency: Think about the cadence of your overall communication program. How often do you post new content on the intranet? Or send emails?
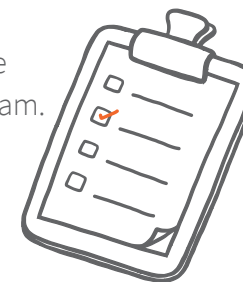
Provide useful, relevant content

· ·

Employees we've surveyed criticize communication for being too general. They seek **information that's specific and relevant.**

The mission of internal communication is to **help employees understand key issues.** It's about connecting the dots so employees see how their jobs contribute to the organization's success.

How? Try a technique used by great consumer media like Good Housekeeping, Men's Health and HGTV called **"service journalism."** Provide a service for employees by including practical advice.

This may sound quite different than traditional internal communication, but in fact much of the content shared with employees lends itself to this approach.

After all, you're sharing information that affects employees—whether it's the new company strategy or how benefits are changing—so it makes sense to **explain what employees should do in response.** Be sure to answer questions, solve problems and help them get things done.

Next time you're in the checkout line at the supermarket, look at the magazine headlines for inspiration.

Trim the fat

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When we conduct research, employees tell us that there's **too much information** shared in the workplace and they **don't have enough time** to process all of it.

Employees are confronted with non-stop news about how their lives have changed. At the same time, they are trying to process all the information that hits their inboxes.

Create content employees can easily digest.
Employees don't have time to sit down and consume an entire meal of information. They just want a bite (quick take) or snack (a little more substance) to satisfy their hunger for the topic.

Put your communication on a diet and trim as much as you can.

MAKE IT A SNACK

|	Then	Now
Video	10 minutes	90 seconds
Town halls	1 hour	40 minutes
Intranet articles	500 words	200 words
Emails	400 words	150 words
PowerPoint	Slides crammed with text	Slides with images and minimal text

Encourage employees to ask questions

Adults learn most effectively by asking questions and through dialogue. Employees' questions typically fall into three main categories, in order of importance:

1

How to do my job and be successful

What deliverables are expected from me this month?

What resources are available to me?

How am I doing?

2

The plans for my region/site/business unit

How does our region's performance compare to others?

How does our department contribute to the company's performance?

3

Our goals, our plan to get there and how we're doing

What is our purpose?

What are we trying to accomplish this year?

How will the company look five years from now?

How did we do this year?

Here's how to answer employees' questions:

> **"The greatest gift is not being afraid to question."**
>
> **Ruby Dee**
> *American actress*
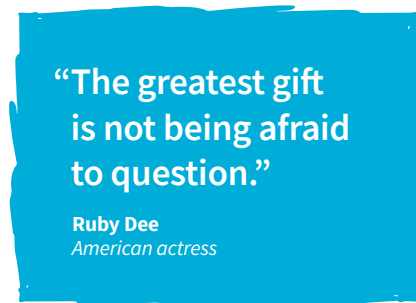
Prepare managers

Make sure managers are prepared with answers to common questions. In addition, **provide tools and training** so managers know what is expected of them and how to carve out time for questions from their teams. (See pages 78-95.)

Dedicate meeting time

Make sure senior leaders build time into meeting agendas to **answer questions.** If employees don't speak up in meetings, try more anonymous techniques, such as a question box or polling technology.

Use collaboration tools

Have a social tool like Yammer or Workplace? Dedicate space for employees to ask questions. Leaders should respond regularly to demonstrate that **questions are welcome and safe.**

Recognize individuals and teams

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Employee recognition plays a vital role in improving engagement. In fact, nearly 70% of employees say **they would work harder if their efforts were better recognized.***

When employees are passionate about their work, they **achieve better outcomes** and **help the organization succeed.** This is critical as companies face bottom-line pressures.

Unfortunately, **employers are falling short in delivering the recognition employees crave.** While 89% of employees say receiving recognition for performance increases engagement, 45% say they have not been recognized in the last six months.**

 * LinkedIn study
**E2E trends report

Managers are in the perfect position to give employees and their teams the acknowledgment and appreciation they seek. But giving praise may not be top of mind as managers grapple with the challenges of supervising teams that include on-site and remote members.

The solution? Coach and support managers with a game plan designed for today's evolving realities: Customize recognition to each situation.

Tailor recognition to the individual

Team member personality

Introvert	Extravert
Arrange a one-on-one virtual session or send a handwritten card to the employee's home.	Host a virtual celebration with the entire team. Ask the group to describe the guest of honor in one word and create a word cloud.
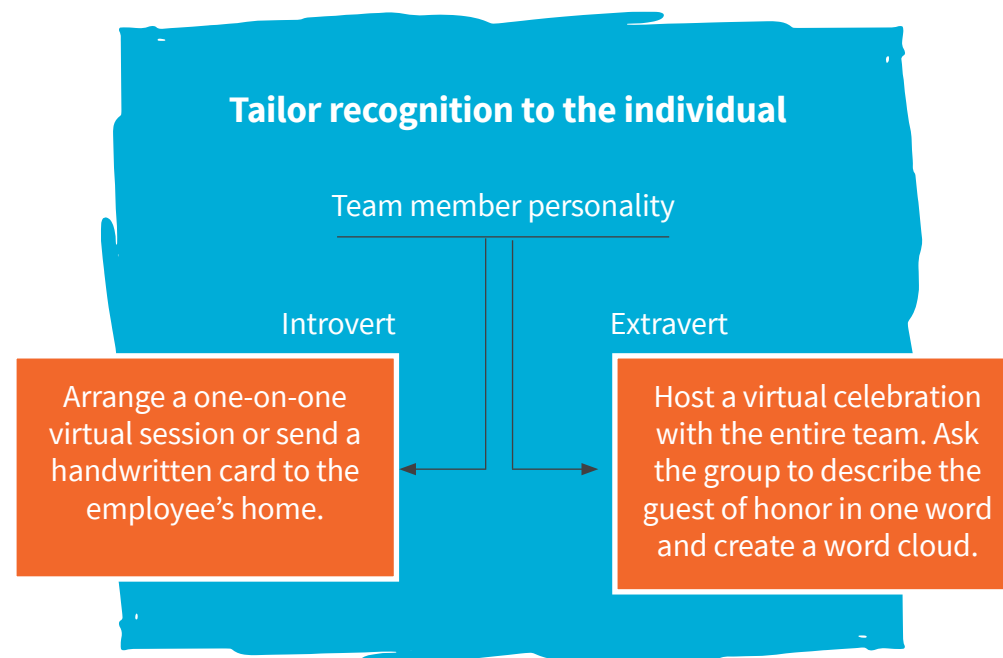
Chapter 3

Expand reach

You're well aware of the vital role internal communication plays (especially these days) to help employees:

- Stay informed about the business and industry.
- Embrace a new way of working.
- Maintain focus on business priorities.
- Feel inspired to keep themselves mentally and physically healthy.
- Understand decisions being made.

That's why it's so important to think differently about reaching employees—all employees—not just those who have easy access to electronic channels.

Expand reach
HERE'S HOW

✓ Conduct research
✓ Develop a comprehensive plan
✓ Focus on your intranet
✓ Rethink technology
✓ Reinvent town halls and large group meetings

Conduct research

• •

Research is a powerful tool. It puts you **in touch with your audience** in a meaningful and profound way. It provides you with ammunition—empirical evidence—to **make your case.** And it supplies you with the **knowledge you need** to launch a successful communication program.

It's true that often **research gets short shrift** because:

• **It takes time** (and sometimes money) to do well.

• **Analyzing data** (or—let's be honest— anything to do with math) does not come naturally to communicators.

• In many organizations, **senior management members don't really care** whether communication is effective—they just care that their message was sent.

But research is worth the effort.

Conduct research to **understand employees' needs, preferences and thoughts** about communication, as well as the effectiveness of your current program. This will help you create a plan with the right tactics to reach and engage your employees.

Research and assessment tools include surveys, focus groups, interviews and channel audits.

Example: We fielded a comprehensive survey for a manufacturer and learned that while awareness of the corporate strategy was high, deeper knowledge (employees know how to support it) was very low. The good news is when the organization launched an updated strategy, the communication team used this data to shape a program designed to increase knowledge.
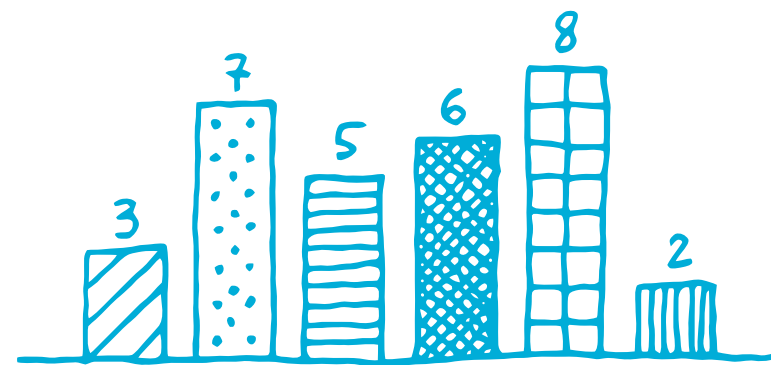
Take this quiz to assess your current measurement approach:

When was the last time you conducted a company-wide communication survey?

a. Within the last six months
b. Between six months and one year ago
c. More than one year ago
d. More than 10 years ago

When you conducted a survey last, how many questions did you ask?

a. Fewer than 25
b. 25–50
c. 50–100
d. More than 100

How often do you check metrics (for example, intranet, article, email)?

a. Every day
b. Once a week
c. Once a month
d. We don't track any

How often do you conduct focus groups?

a. Once a year
b. Every other year
c. We did once
d. Never

HOPE I ACED THE QUIZ!
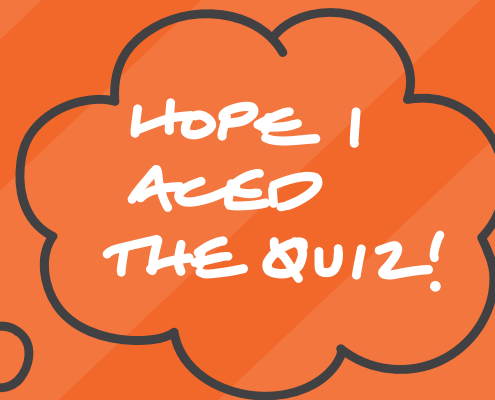
Mostly A's?
You're in great shape! Continue fighting the good fight.

Mostly B's?
You're in pretty good shape, but there is room for improvement.

Mostly C's?
You have some work to do. Get out there and ask employees what they need.

Mostly D's?
You need to take a step back to determine when and how you can assess employees' preferences, and measure your communication program. Start with a survey.

Develop a comprehensive plan

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The benefits of a communication plan are indisputable. Plans help communicators **stay focused on what they're trying to achieve** and how they'll get there over the life cycle of their program.

But internal communicators often find themselves reacting to lots of requests for communication support from leaders and other stakeholders. Without a proper plan in place, communicators too often **jump into tactical support** and **lose sight of their overall goals.**

> **"Someone is sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago."**
>
> **Warren Buffet**
> *Chairman and CEO, Berkshire Hathaway*

A comprehensive internal communication plan will be your blueprint to guide your focus.

Develop a plan template (like the one on page 53) in your favorite program: Word, Excel or PowerPoint. Create one page for each section: goal, audiences, objectives, messages, communication channels and a tactical timeline.

What do you want employees in each group to **know, believe** and **do** as a result of communication?

Then, set up bullets or tables under each section of your plan so it's easy to populate later. Use bullets to outline your audiences and a table to **capture objectives** for each audience group.

Don't forget to **list existing communication channels** to give you an at-a-glance snapshot of vehicles you can tap into to achieve your objectives.

When a new communication challenge arrives—like employees returning to work after a stay-at-home order—**take out your communication plan template** and map out the details.

Then **build in measurement,** such as surveys, interviews or focus groups, so you gain insights into the effectiveness of your efforts.

When done right, your plan will help you **prioritize your efforts** and be more proactive. Plus, you'll be sure to reach your employees.

THE HANDY-DANDY COMMUNICATION PLAN TEMPLATE

Goal	Audiences

Objectives	Messages

Channels	Timeline

Measurement

Focus on your intranet

• •

Once your have your plan, **take a good, long look** at your channels.

And what better channel to focus on than the one that gives so much bang for the buck? **Your intranet.**

If your intranet is managed well, it **can be the most used and highly regarded channel** in your arsenal, serving as an information hub for employees across locations and time zones.

Be sure to consider non-wired employees. If they don't have access, work with HR and IT to figure out how to include this important group.

> **"Simplicity and order are, if not the principal, then certainly the most important guidelines."**
>
> **M.C. Escher**
> *Graphic artist*

5 guidelines to ensure your intranet is ready

No	Yes
Don't get bullied into reactive communication—you should not accommodate every request to post on the homepage.	Develop rules for what gets featured on your homepage, or what's a news story versus a calendar event.
Don't publish high-level content, like strategy or values, without connecting the dots to what it means to employees.	Make sure content is focused on employees—what it means to them or how it helps them.
Don't allow jargon, acronyms and other corporate-ese terms.	Use only simple, clear language and key words that employees actually use.
Don't expect employees to read text-heavy web pages, long articles or rambling blogs—no matter who writes them.	Respect employees' time by enforcing word count limits and visual requirements.
Don't stifle employees' ideas with one-way communication.	Give employees an opportunity to provide feedback.

Rethink technology

So much has changed in such a short time. And the pace of change is not likely to slow down anytime soon.

With this in mind, it's time to rethink how we communicate with knowledge workers. And it's also a great opportunity to **solve the problem of reaching everyone,** including remote workers, field/sales force, manufacturing (non-wired) and satellite locations.

Technology tools, such as internal social media and apps, allow you to include all wired and non-wired employees. Given the complexities of launching new platforms in many organizations, success hinges on following a disciplined process:

- **Explore** the possibilities to determine what makes sense for your organization.
- **Collaborate** with colleagues in IT, HR and Legal, as appropriate.
- **Launch** the tool with a robust communication campaign.

- **Maintain** the momentum by keeping the information timely and relevant.

Yes, it's an investment. But it will pay off. With social distancing as a regular practice, you'll need to utilize those technological practices even while on-site.

Experiences have been transformed

MEETING

SOCIALIZING

COLLABORATING

Reinvent town halls and large group meetings

Another communication channel to **reconsider is large group meetings** (including town halls).

These big meetings—traditionally consisting of long, drawn-out presentations and almost **no time for questions**—were already a problem for employees. After all, it's **hard for employees to retain details** when they are deeply bored.

It's time to **reinvent these meetings.** First, we need platforms that allow for a large group of employees to attend at once. But the big question is **how do you keep employees engaged?**

→

THE SCOOP ABOUT TOWN HALLS

Focus on **one topic** for the entire meeting.

Incorporate **interactive activities** throughout.

Allow attendees to **ask questions** at any time (even privately to a leader).

Share successes and challenges.

Be **open** and honest.

Chapter 4

Increase senior leader visibility
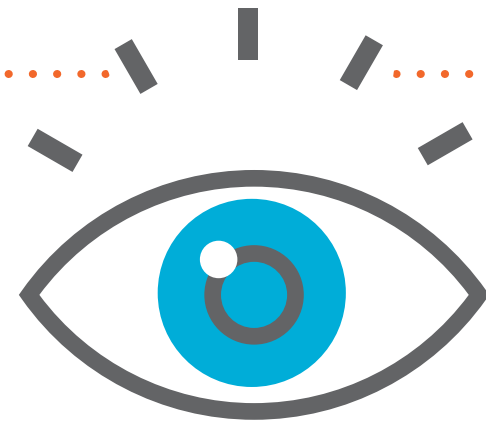
In some ways, employees' needs haven't changed. For years, they've been consistently asking for more contact with senior leaders.

But here's what is different: Employees need more from leaders than ever before. In a world upended by crisis and change, employees look to their organization's leaders for context and confidence.

There's never been a greater need for senior leader visibility.

Increase senior leader visibility
HERE'S HOW

✓ Define leaders' communication roles
✓ Create customized plans
✓ Coach leaders to be authentic
✓ Encourage interaction
✓ Increase frequency
✓ Move quickly
✓ Inspire and motivate

Define leaders' communication roles

If there's any good news in a challenging 2020, it's this: Most leaders suddenly understood **what an important role they play** in informing and motivating employees.

Way back when (say, last year), many senior leaders weren't clear on how important their communication was to the success of their organizations. But during the crises, most leaders stepped up.

Build on that momentum to articulate senior leaders' communication role going forward. After all, employees look to the CEO to **provide the overall direction of the company.** It's the job of senior leaders to make abstract, high-level information **concrete and meaningful.**

CEO	Senior leaders
Set vision and strategic plan	Reiterate big-picture story (objectives, strategies and results)
Articulate objectives and priorities	"Here's what this means for us"
Share results and celebrate successes	Create organization-wide focus

DOWN TO EARTH

Create customized plans

• •

Here's an amazingly simple tool to **encourage leaders to communicate:** a plan.

After all, leaders plan everything. So they appreciate a tool that helps them structure all their communication commitments.

Create a one-page plan template listing all the ways leaders can connect with employees, including posting on internal social media, hosting skip-level luncheons and coffee chats, speaking at town halls and creating video selfies.

Provide a few bullets with the following details for each possible tactic:
• Purpose
• Best practices
• Ideal cadence

Coach leaders on how to use the template. Then, each leader can **customize the plan template** with activities he or she is most comfortable with. And these events can all happen virtually.

Develop a timeline and work with admins to add the dates to leaders' agendas.

Example: One leader at a large pharmaceutical company gets his daily steps in by inviting team members to "walk with me." These walk-and-talk sessions used to happen daily on the firm's park-like campus. They are just as popular today thanks to smartphones and earbuds.

Leader's to do list

PICK UP SOME COFFEE AND CONNECT WITH MY TEAM

Coach leaders to be authentic

Employees want senior leaders who are genuine, **not corporate robots** who recite words from a piece of paper. The most effective leaders build trust by **relating to the audience,** usually through moments of vulnerability.

Some leaders may not be comfortable showing emotion. Organize a session to share video clips of public leaders answering questions. Point out when leaders **get personal or show emotion,** and coach leaders to do the same through personal stories of challenges or triumphs.

Follow up by offering these simple tips.

ADVICE FOR LEADERS

Don't	Do
Use corporate jargon	Be conversational
Read a script	Tell a personal story
Be vague	Provide specifics
Sugarcoat	Give the straight story
Be afraid to say "I don't know"	Admit it and commit to providing the information when available

"DON'T BE A ROBOT!"
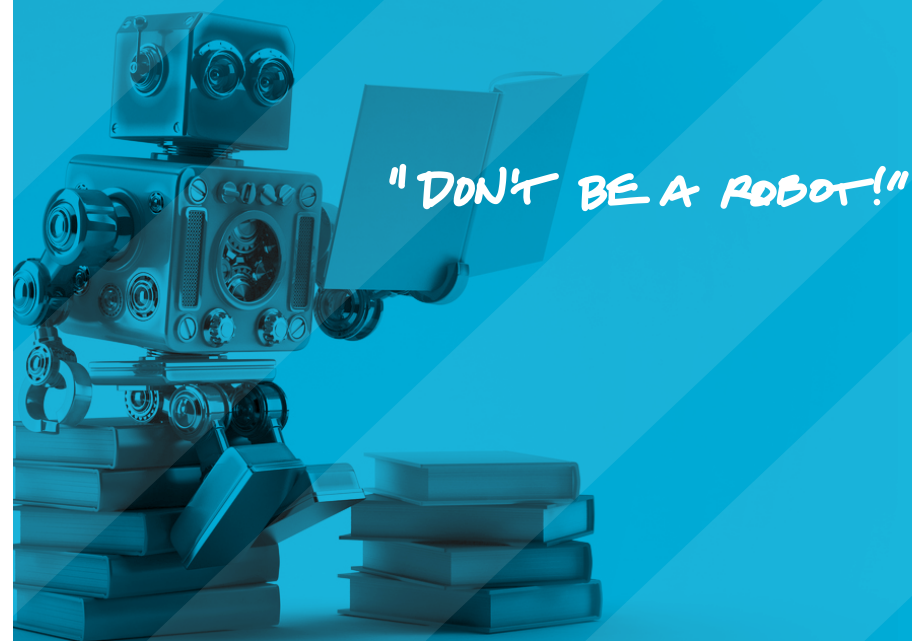
Encourage interaction

Remember in-person meetings? Designed correctly, those sessions were great for gathering feedback, generating ideas and connecting team members.

But now leaders need to **find new ways to connect** with employees and encourage interaction.

These touchpoints not only engage employees, but also give teams a place to share their thoughts about what's going on in the organization. And by continuing to offer these opportunities in a remote environment, employees are sure to know how much their **input is valued by leaders.**

| Instead of...	Try this...
Holding only large-group meetings	Invite a small number of employees (say, 8) to a 20-minute coffee chat
Being available only for scheduled meetings	Carve out weekly virtual office hours in which anyone can "knock on your door" to chat
Facilitating a verbal Q&A session	Use a social media tool to allow employees to submit questions whenever they want

Increase frequency

• •

In this time where many employees are not on-site, a **steady stream of communication** has become increasingly important. That's why leaders need to establish a cadence of their own.

Encourage leaders to take advantage of technology to **communicate in real time** by microblogging. They can share news, interesting articles or motivational messages whenever they choose.

Distribute a **weekly leader message** that updates employees on what's going on in the organization.

Hold monthly town halls. Why monthly? It's more current than the traditional quarterly schedule. Of course, that means changing the way you do town halls to make them simpler and more focused. Try piloting 30-minute sessions and ask employees what they think.

COMMUNICATE OFTEN

Is now a good time to communicate?

YES   YES
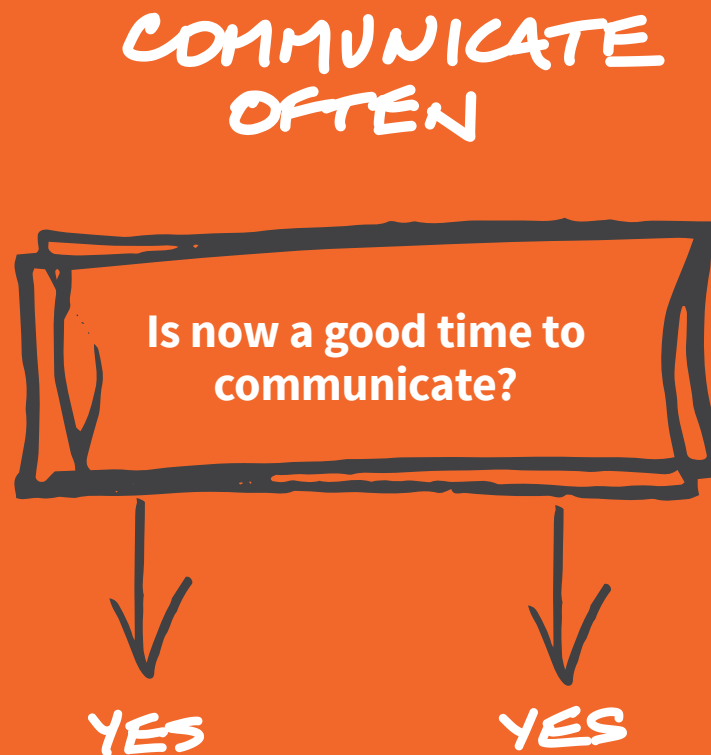
Move quickly

In today's fast paced and unpredictable world, companies need to have the ability to **quickly adapt to new situations—**and the same goes for communication from senior leaders.

Creating agile communication can be tricky. Not all channels allow senior leaders to quickly create and disseminate messages.

One solution? Selfie videos.

The benefit? Selfie videos can be shot quickly, at any time and from any location, providing timely updates to employees. Plus, these videos are very authentic.

When to use? These videos can be used for a variety of communication messages—from a simple hello to a summary of recent organization changes.

How to disseminate? Post videos on your intranet and provide a link via an email from the senior leaders featured in each message.

Keep your video under 30 seconds— employees don't have time to watch a 10-minute epic.

Employees say: "I CAN SPARE 30 SECONDS."
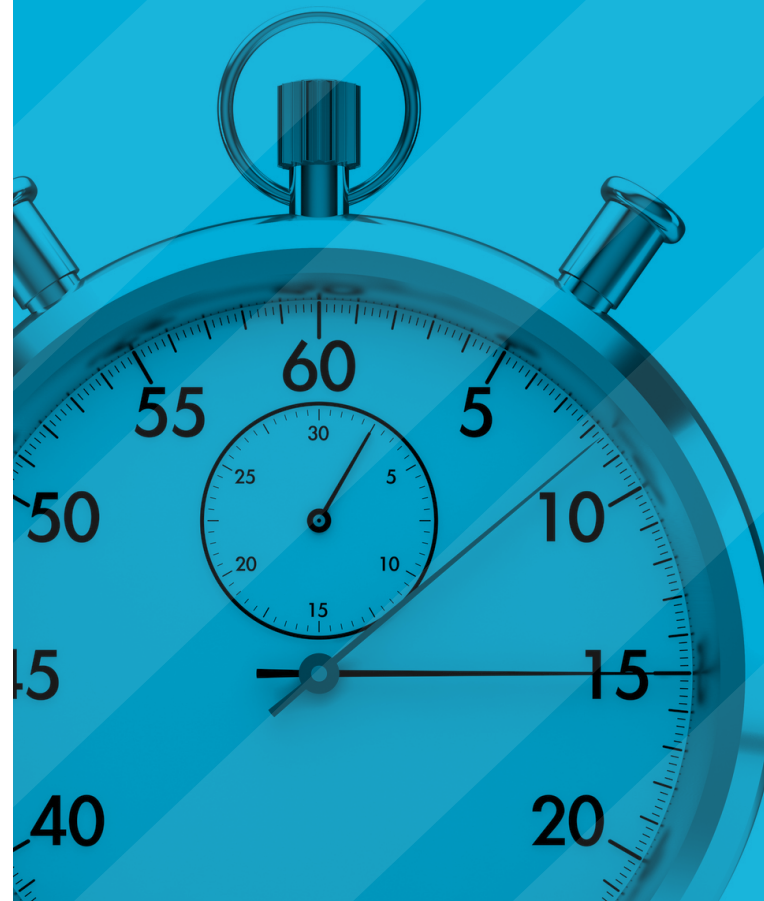
Inspire and motivate

Emotional intelligence. It's crucial to being a visionary leader.

Experts Daniel Goleman and Richard E. Boyatzis say **emotional intelligence is comprised of four areas,** each with a set of skills that enable outstanding performance. Studies show that having a well-balanced set of emotional IQ skills prepares leaders to deal with tough challenges.

It's no coincidence that New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo garnered so much attention across the U.S. for his daily briefings during the pandemic.

Cuomo demonstrated his emotional intelligence by **having the courage to be human and compassionate.** For example, he shared his concern for his brother, CNN's Chris Cuomo, who had contracted COVID-19.

Likewise, many CEOs exhibited their emotional intelligence skills as they adapted to conducting meetings from their living rooms, often accompanied by their toddlers or pets.

Encourage senior leaders to keep up the good work. That means communicating with **fewer facts and more personal stories.** We're hardwired to respond to stories. Sharing family anecdotes makes leaders relatable.

4 components of emotional intelligence

Self-awareness
• Emotional self-awareness

Self-management
• Emotional self-control
• Adaptability
• Achievement orientation
• Positive outlook

Social awareness
• Empathy
• Organizational awareness

Relationship management
• Influence
• Coach and mentor
• Conflict management
• Teamwork
• Inspirational leadership

Source: More Than Sound, LLC, 2017 ©HBR

Help managers engage their teams

Employees go to their managers first when they have a question, need advice or want to understand something better. In fact, managers are employees' preferred source of information.

Now, managers' communication roles are even more critical—and more difficult. Managers' ever-expanding responsibilities now include:

• Explaining new policies

• Translating sudden strategy shifts

• Helping employees navigate difficult life situations

• Calming employees' fears of illness, economic strife and social uncertainty

• Facilitating community building

• Communicating pay cuts, furloughs and layoffs

So here's the key question: How can you support managers?

Help managers engage their teams
HERE'S HOW

✓ Define managers' communication role

✓ Beef up interpersonal communication skills

✓ Encourage managers to embrace two-way communication

✓ Give managers tools to make it easy

✓ Advise managers how to translate messages

✓ Prepare managers to answer difficult questions

✓ Provide a one-stop shop

Define managers' communication role

Especially these days, managers can feel like they're **stuck in the middle.** They receive piles of news from their bosses and are expected to share everything with direct reports. At the same time, managers juggle questions from their team members and pass on feedback to leaders.

Here's what you can do: Relieve some of the pressure by helping managers clearly see where they fit in the organizational conversation.

With that clarity, managers can embrace their critical role in employee communication.

Senior leaders

Directors

MANAGERS

Team members

Beef up interpersonal communication skills

The most **successful managers** use their interpersonal skills to motivate team members to **do their best work.**

Of course, you know that the definition of interpersonal communication is the exchange of information between two people through **verbal and nonverbal methods.**

But think about the challenges managers face when communicating today. Nonverbal cues are harder to determine on a video call. Employees

> **"People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."**
>
> **Theodore Roosevelt**
> *26th president of the United States*

are under stress. And everyone is so busy trying to deal with a multitude of challenges.

That's why it's important to help managers with one important interpersonal skill: **communicating with compassion.**
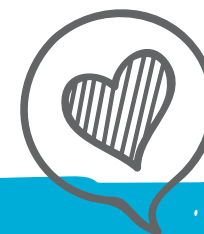
Share these 4 ways managers can communicate with empathy

Ask about workload and progress through quick check-ins, without micromanaging.

Show that you care about team members' development and achievements by sharing relevant resources.

Listen to what team members have to say and welcome their feedback.

Demonstrate you understand team members challenges—ask how you can help and offer guidance.

Encourage managers to embrace two-way communication

Studies have shown that one key factor in remote workers' success is how well managers communicate.

The key ingredients of communication? Frequent check-ins, face time, availability and relationship building.

Advise your managers to **schedule more time with their teams.**

You can also leverage ideas for leaders in the previous chapter

Share this advice with for managers about how to

Hold open, interactive meetings

- Tell employees you **expect participation.**

- Run a **quick poll** to break the ice, such as: "What's your favorite morning beverage?"

- Share your screen to **show visual aids.**

- Use a **virtual whiteboard** to brainstorm.

- Have employees use chat to **share ideas.**

- Allow plenty of time for **Q&A.**

- **Pose a question:** "What is our biggest obstacle to increasing sales this quarter?"

- Go around the virtual table and **ask each participant** to share his/her viewpoint.

Give managers tools to make it easy

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One of the main reasons managers struggle with communication is lack of knowledge. After all, you **can't explain something if you don't understand it.**

> **"If your only tool is a hammer, it's hard to eat spaghetti."**
>
> **David Allen**
> *Productivity consultant*

When the topic is important—such as new flex-work schedules or return-to-worksite processes—managers need a toolkit to help them:

• Understand the issue

• Have key points they can share

• Be prepared to answer questions

ADD THESE ESSENTIALS TO YOUR MANAGER TOOLKIT

• **Message from the CEO** to reinforce expectations, including how and when managers should communicate with their teams

• **Key messages,** including an elevator speech and talking points

• **FAQs** so managers can hit the nail on the head when responding to employees' questions **(see page 92 for details)**

• **Guidance** on how to communicate to encourage dialogue

Advise managers how to translate messages

· ·

It's always important for managers to **make sure their teams understand** the communication being shared—but creating that understanding is even more important today.

Employees have more on their minds—they are worried about their health, being able to meet the demands of the changing workplace and even the possibility of losing their jobs.

"Every act of communication is a miracle of translation."

Ken Liu
American author

For employees to pay attention and engage in communication, it needs to be relevant and reflect these concerns.

So, how do you achieve this?

Remind managers to keep this in mind when translating key messages.

Put yourself in employees' shoes, then ask:

What's in it for me?

What do I need to do?

How does the new way of working affect me?

What should I expect?

How does this impact my role?

What can I do to help the company succeed?

Prepare managers to answer difficult questions

• •

Without a doubt, uncertain times can put a strain on employees, so they need support from their managers. One thing managers can do is **simply answer employees' questions.**

The best way to prepare managers? **A robust set of FAQs.** Frequently Asked Questions provide managers with questions employees are most likely to ask, along with the answers managers can provide.

So when an employee says, "I have a question for you," managers are ready to respond.

The best FAQs include the tough questions and **avoid corporate speak**—they should sound like a real person.
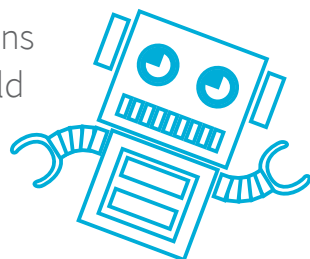
FAQS ABOUT MANAGER FAQS

What's the best way to develop FAQs?

Invite key stakeholders to a one-hour brainstorming session to uncover essential questions. Think like an employee and include questions they will ask. Consider how these questions impact employees' roles and how the answer will explain what's in it for them.

How specific should questions be?

As specific as possible. The more precise your questions are, and the more details you uncover, the better. Even if there is no definitive answer to a question, include it. It's OK to say the answer is still being worked out.

How candid should answers be?

Be as straightforward as possible. If the document becomes too watered down, FAQs lose their credibility and value.

Is there anything I should avoid?

Keep in mind managers are pressed for time. To guide them toward important information, make your FAQ list easy to scan with bold face key words and bullet points.

Provide a one-stop shop

Now that you know about all the tools to create for supporting managers, you need to think about where all of that information will live. And how managers can easily access what they need, when they need it.

The solution? **A manager intranet site**—a one-stop shop managers can visit to get all the big-picture stories and nitty-gritty details they need to support their teams.

> **"A place for everything, everything in its place."**
>
> **Benjamin Franklin**
> *U.S. founding father, inventor, scientist, author*

TIP

Organize by topic, clearly calling out key action items, and include an easy-to-use search function.

SEARCH FIELD →

KEY TOPICS →

LINKS →

TOOLS →

Manager resource center

3 things you need to know about returning to the office

Communication tools	Helpful links
Workplace safety	COVID-19 updates
Benefits/ wellness	Performance management
Training/ development	IT tools/ resources
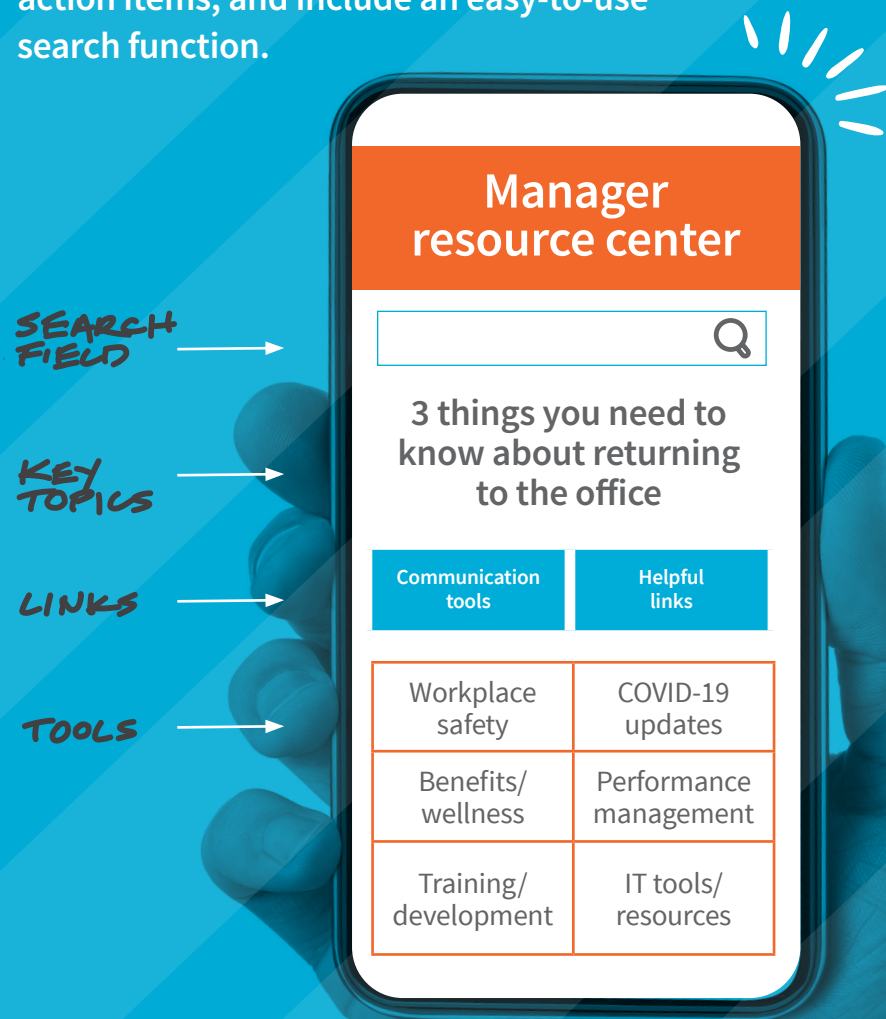
Chapter 6

Encourage collaboration

Leaders worry that two things will suffer because employees are working remotely: productivity and collaboration.

And with some employees at the worksite and others remaining at home, the ability to collaborate becomes even more problematic.

How will employees be able to replicate the informal problem-solving chats that occurred naturally when they worked together in one space?

You can help redefine the way employees interact.

Encourage collaboration
HERE'S HOW

✓ "Turn on the camera"

✓ Promote teamwork

✓ Don't overlook non-wired employees

✓ Make the most of social media

✓ Gather employee-generated content

"Turn on the camera"

When employees can't get together in the same room, virtual meeting tools are the next best thing. Although some people are reluctant to turn on their video, a phone call just can't compete with a **face-to-face experience.**

Even through the computer, eye contact is an important part of any dialogue. **Seeing the person on the other end** improves the quality of the conversation and lets you pick up on nonverbal cues.

Sure, you have to comb your hair and put on a clean shirt, but the effort is worth it.

No matter which meeting tools your organization uses, you can encourage employees to make the most of the features available.

Tips to share with employees

- Don't wait for your important meeting to **figure out the tool.** Book a few optional, informal meetings to freely explore the tool with your colleagues.

- **Learn the basics** before moving on to more complex features, like polling, whiteboards and breakout rooms.

- **Don't worry about your appearance.** If you're distracted by seeing yourself, you can hide the self view.

Promote teamwork

Getting everyone together in a virtual meeting is just **the first step.** With all the distractions of working at home, it can be **difficult to keep everyone's attention.**

Rather than having employees just sit and listen, **give them an active role.** Many virtual meeting tools have built-in collaboration features to keep participants engaged.

The **more interactive** your meeting, the easier it is for people to pay attention. Be sure to use breakout rooms to give people a chance to participate in small-group discussions or activities.

> **"Great things in business are never done by one person; they're done by a team of people."**
>
> **Steve Jobs**
> *Apple co-founder*

TRY A FEW OF THESE FEATURES

Chat
To ask questions without interrupting the meeting

Breakout rooms
To make collaboration and team-building activities easier

Poll
To reach consensus, gather feedback and assess knowledge

Whiteboard
To brainstorm and take notes.

Don't overlook non-wired employees

· ·

Some workers need to be on-site, whether in an office, warehouse or manufacturing facility. Face masks and social distancing can make them feel isolated.

"Focus on including everyone."

Wynton Marsalis
Jazz musician

That's why you need to give special consideration to **make these non-wired employees feel included.**

Employee apps

For some companies, mobile apps are an effective way to reach all employees. Explore these tools to determine what would work best for your organization. An app can be a good choice because it provides employees with mobile access to useful information.

Bulletin board or moveable whiteboard

Designate a space for free-flowing creativity. Leave it completely blank and encourage contributions. Leave out slips of paper, markers and thumbtacks.

Employees can write an observation, pose a question, make a suggestion, pin up a photo—no limits. Just remember to have hand sanitizer near the board.

Workplace communication

If you have digital screens, you likely have a lot of informative slides about procedures. Make the screens even more personal by showing employee photos with encouraging messages.

Print newsletter

Consider going back to print with a newsletter that's just for non-wired employees.

Interview employees to get them involved and make them feel invested in the publication.

Make the most of social media

"Chatting around the water cooler" may seem like a cliché, but the fact is that **a lot of important communication occurs when employees are in the same space.**

Internal social media can't replicate that experience, but it can help employees stay connected.

Work together to find solutions

Create a space that allows employees to share ideas and help each other solve business problems. You can kick things off by posing a question to employees about how a particular part of the business or workflow could be improved.

CREATE A VIRTUAL WATER COOLER

Use internal social media to:

- **Gather feedback** on a new initiative.

- **Collect success stories** for employee recognition.

- **Brainstorm** solutions.

- **Boost teamwork** by encouraging employees to share ideas.
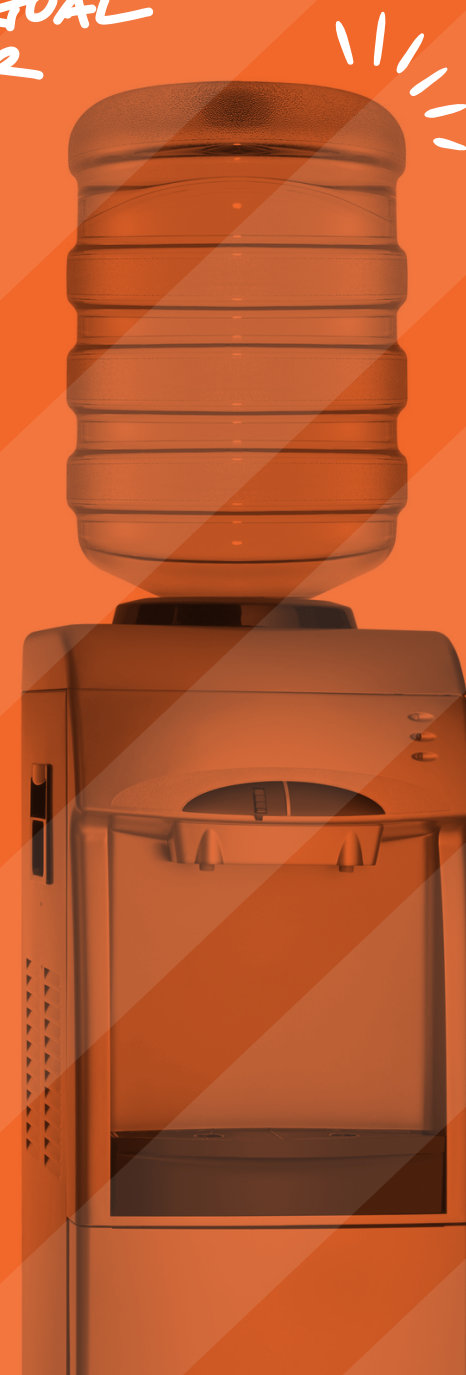
Gather employee-generated content

• •

If you're always looking for new content, try mixing things up **by asking employees to contribute.**

How can you help employees share their stories?

• Interview a colleague or team and **write an e-news article.**

• Ask employees to **submit smartphone videos** of their stories and post on social media.

• Host a virtual meeting and ask employees to **share one thing** they miss about having lunch with colleagues.

Just for fun: Assign a team member to jot down employees' thoughts and **create a time capsule** that you can refer to in the years to come.
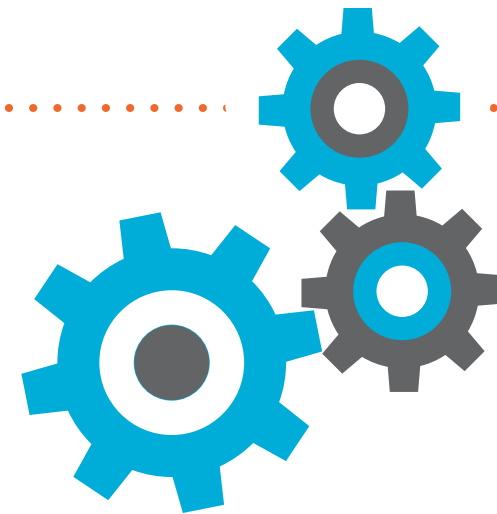
TIME WITH PETS

ENJOYING NATURE

BAKING FOR FUN

Improve change readiness

During a crisis or time of big change, many communicators scramble to answer the following questions:

- Who needs to be involved in the decision-making process?
- Are employees receiving the information they need?
- Are leaders and managers equipped to help their teams through this uncertain time?
- How will the crisis change short- and long-term goals?

The answers to these questions provide the foundation for a playbook that will prepare you for your next big communication challenge.

Improve change readiness
HERE'S HOW

✓ Develop a change Center of Excellence
✓ Know your audience
✓ Set the tone based on employee needs
✓ Craft meaningful messages
✓ Empower leaders and managers
✓ Recruit change champions

Develop a change Center of Excellence

When faced with a crisis, you're **much stronger as a group than on your own.** To manage change in the future, help establish a cross-functional team that includes Communication, Marketing, HR, Finance, Legal, IT and other critical departments.

The key to a successful Center of Excellence is to make sure each person **knows his or her role.** During the change process, host regular meetings to discuss the situation and identify action items. Assign someone as the team coordinator to capture next steps, set up meetings and ensure everyone is involved who needs to be.

Once you have a team in place, you're ready to **put together a playbook** to follow during future change management situations. The playbook should include objectives, the team's roles and responsibilities,

processes, best practices and key resources. Start by asking team members to capture information for their respective area.

When you have your team and playbook together, you'll be prepared for any change—or crisis—that comes your way.

Know your audience

• •

During big change initiatives, it's important that employees are engaged in what's going on. And it's your job to make sure that happens. The same way marketers **analyze consumer demographics** to understand how to be relevant with specific groups, you need to understand who employees really are.

When you know the impact the change has on different employee groups, you can create communication that **engages your workforce.** You'll move from messages that are too high level (and ignored by employees) to information that is specific and actionable.

Two ways to **better understand your employee groups** are by creating demographic maps and developing audience profiles.

Demographic maps
Consider attributes such as location, type of facility, (for example, office, remote office, factory), length of service and key job categories. This helps you **understand the types of employees** you'll need to communicate with and the best ways to do so.

Audience profiles
Broadly outline subgroups of employees (for example, sales representatives, factory workers and people managers). These profiles might include specific concerns or questions. Profiles help provide a clearer view of the change from the perspective of each employee subgroup.

Examples of audience profiles during COVID-19 pandemic

Company: Soap manufacturing company

Name: Dawn

Job title: Director

Department: Finance

Location: New Jersey

Type of location: Usually an office but working from home these days

Communication needs: Dawn reads email throughout the day and has access to the company intranet.

Concerns during COVID-19: Dawn has to manage changing budgets and needs because of the pandemic but can work from home full time.

Name: Mark

Job title: Line worker

Department: Production

Location: Minnesota

Type of location: Manufacturing facility

Communication needs: Mark works on the line for the majority of the day and has little time to check email. There are digital screens that he passes when he takes breaks and eats lunch. He also has daily production meetings with his supervisor and shift colleagues.

Concerns during COVID-19: Deemed an essential employee, Mark has to continue working under strict safety regulations. He is concerned for his health and well-being, while also trying to maintain production standards and expectations.

Set the tone based on employee needs

....

During the pandemic, it was refreshing to see companies communicate to employees with empathy. Keep the compassion going by understanding employees' emotional needs.

Whether or not your company is going through a crisis, **don't stop being human.** Craft communication with tone in mind and consider the unique circumstances and needs of employees. To do so, **be in touch** with employees' perspectives, attitudes and concerns.

While becoming BFF with the office gossiper will give you some insight, the most effective way to keep a pulse on what employees are thinking and feeling is through **ongoing measurement.**

LISTEN TO EMPLOYEES

Interviews → Focus groups → Pulse surveys → Q&A submissions

+

USE INSIGHTS

Empathic message

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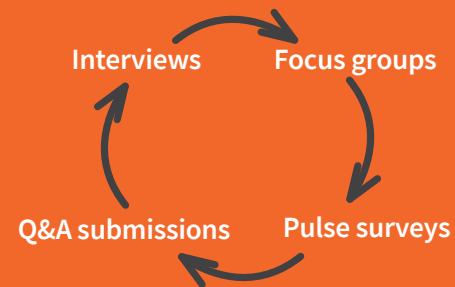
ENGAGED EMPLOYEES

Craft meaningful messages

While much changed during the COVID-19 pandemic, what has remained the same is this: It's all about the employee.

Employees want to know how an issue is relevant for them. To do so, create communication that has four essential elements: **L**ogic, **E**motion, **A**ction and **D**estination (better known as LEAD).

Logic. Share data that explains the reasoning behind company decisions. This will help employees understand the bigger picture.

Emotion. Appeal to employees' sense of identity and desires. Be honest and empathetic in your tone.

Action. Demonstrate how employees are impacted and be specific when outlining what steps employees need to take.

Destination. Reinforce how decisions will help the company. Try connecting the messaging back to your organization's core mission, vision or values.

The formula below will help you keep in mind employees' point of view and achieve the perfect balance to make your message meaningful and memorable. And the percentages may surprise you.
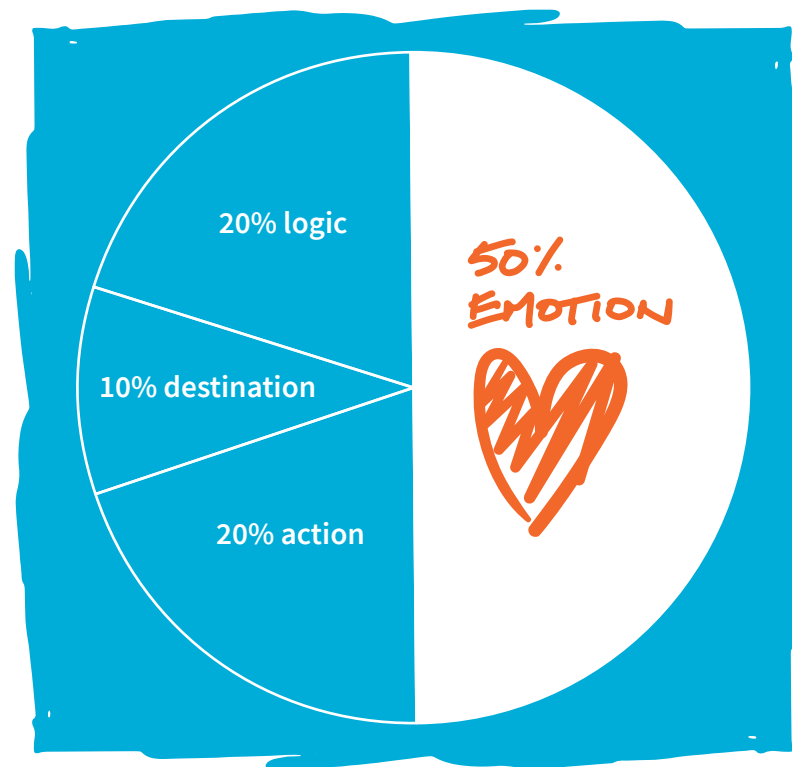
Empower leaders and managers

Employees look to leaders and managers to provide direction, stability and comfort.

To help leaders and managers fulfill this role, ensure they have the tools to explain the details of a change accurately and consistently. (See pages 60-95.)

> **"We measure success by the way we touch the lives of people."**
>
> **Bob Chapman**
> *Chairman and CEO,*
> *Barry-Wehmiller*

LEADERS WILL SHOW THE WAY

GIVE THEM THE POWER

Recruit change champions

• •

Champions—advocates chosen from across the organization—are **key to getting change to stick.** They learn the details of the change, share information with colleagues and gather feedback on how things are going. This network of employees is especially important during times of uncertainty, because they can help counter rumors with facts.

The most important part of creating a winning change champion program is **choosing the right mix of people.** Change champions should represent areas of the business, such as department, function, role or location. Consider people who are respected by their peers and are able to influence upwards and downwards. Instrumental change champions tend to be approachable, knowledgeable and possess strong communication skills.

Once you identify your champions, **prepare the team** by hosting a meeting to define their role, provide communication tools and answer questions. Then, keep the group engaged with communication tactics like a weekly newsletter, web meetings, a designated intranet site and a survey to gather feedback.

Champion
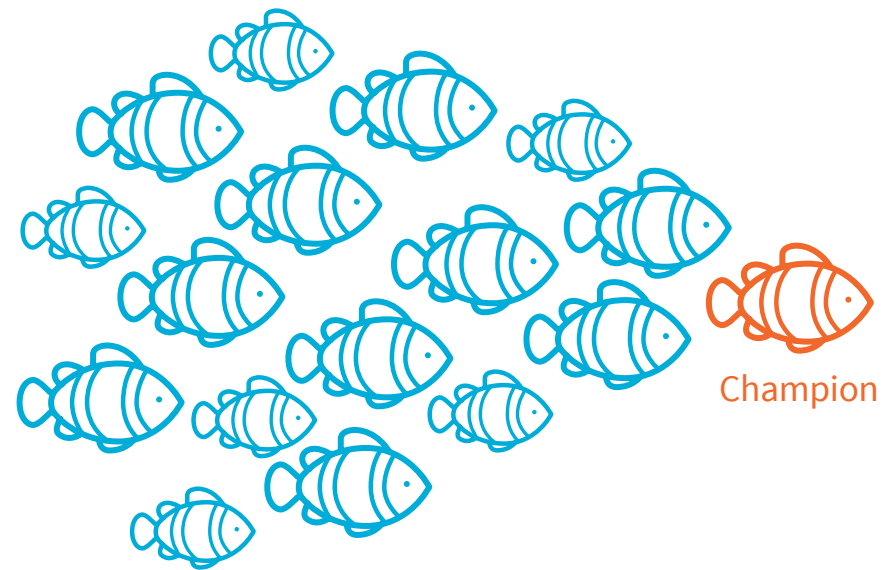
Foster a sense of community

It's always been important for employees to feel connected to their colleagues. When employees were working together in one space, that comradery "just happened" through dozens of daily interactions.

Now, however, we're aware of how separate employees can be. Even if they're in one location, employees may be social distancing to the point that they're disconnected from one another.

That's why we need to be intentional about creating community.

How? By creating experiences that help employees believe they're a part of something meaningful and that they're valued.

Foster a sense of community
HERE'S HOW

✓ Get leaders to step up

✓ Keep the lines of communication open

✓ Buddy up

✓ Get social

✓ Rally the team

✓ Make it personal

Get leaders to step up

Here's another important role for leaders: motivating employees and helping them feel valued. That's why it's important to ensure leaders **increase their visibility** and let employees know **how much they are appreciated.**

> "I have always believed that people flourish when they are praised."
>
> **Sir Richard Branson**
> *British entrepreneur, adventurer and philanthropist*

A simple "Thank you!" goes a long way. **Example:** Our CEO sent a handwritten note to each member of our team thanking us for staying positive and productive during the quarantine. It was a small, but **very powerful gesture** that showed she cares.

Remind managers that a shout-out at staff meetings or a quick post on internal channels is a **great way to provide positive feedback,** recognize the work being done and share with the rest of the team.

Keep the lines of communication open

· ·

Whether employees are working from home or in the office and social distancing, it's challenging to foster a sense of community. But there are still ways to help teams feel connected.

How do you do this? Encourage managers to schedule frequent check-ins—even for just 15 minutes—to get a pulse on what's happening with their teams.

But these sessions shouldn't be just about work. They're about giving employees the chance to:

• **Share what's going on** in their personal or work life (the challenges and victories)

• **Find answers** to their burning questions

• **Get advice** and support from their colleagues

(See pages 78-95 for more ways to support managers.)

Share this checklist with managers

Before the meeting:
☐ Take a minute to review notes from the previous meeting.

During the meeting:
☐ Listen to what employees have to say.
☐ Acknowledge their feelings and show empathy.
☐ Offer support.

After the meeting:
☐ Write down any important notes/prompts for your next session.
☐ Follow up and address any unanswered questions.

Buddy up

As the song goes: "We all need somebody to lean on." To help employees feel they **have someone to turn to when they need help** (or to just vent), encourage managers and team leads in your organization to start a buddy program.

How does it work?

Managers and team leads:

- Write the **name of each team member** on a slip of paper and put the slips in a basket.
- Pair up buddies by **picking two names** from the basket at a time.
- Encourage buddies to **touch base often** (see some fun ideas on the next page).
- Pair employees with a **new buddy each month.**

When employees know they have someone who has their back, they'll feel more at ease and prepared to take on the challenges ahead.

4 WAYS EMPLOYEES CAN MAKE A BUDDY SMILE

Talk about the **latest trends.**

Send an **e-card** with dancing cats.

Go on an outdoor **scavenger hunt.**

Mail a new **jigsaw puzzle** to his/her home.

Get social

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Employees are **missing the social aspects** of the workplace: hanging out with colleagues at lunch, celebrating birthdays or having a quick chat.

But social distancing doesn't have to stop employees from getting together to celebrate and have fun.

Start a conversation

Many companies have already been using social media. Now you can take your social media platform to the next level and make it a community hub.

How? Post a compelling question to encourage employees to start conversations with colleagues, such as:

- How can I work effectively with a toddler at home?

- What GIF describes how your day is going?

- What can I make for dinner using ground turkey and ketchup?

Raise a mug or glass

Encourage teams to organize a **weekly social event.** These can be done in person (following local guidelines), virtually or a combination of both to help employees relax and catch up with their "frolleagues."

Play a game

Host a virtual **show and tell.** Give team members one minute to share an object that's meaningful to them. This is a great way to get to know colleagues and boost engagement during virtual meetings.

6 things to try on social media

1. Post challenges.
2. Host a contest.
3. Create a top-10 list.
4. Share photos, photos, photos!
5. Post links to interesting articles.
6. Include just-for-fun posts.

Rally the team

Do you remember attending your first high school pep rally? The exciting feeling of walking into a room full of people dressed in school colors, **showing support** for their team?

You can capture this spirit and build enthusiasm by recreating opportunities to **boost employee morale.** Here's how:

> **"Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships."**
>
> **Michael Jordan**
> *American basketball player*

- Send employees something fun like matching hats or superhero bobble heads with a meaningful catchphrase.

- Host a spirit day and ask employees to wear themed clothing, such as pajamas, company swag, etc.

- Create a childhood photo challenge where employees submit favorite photos and give others an opportunity to guess who it is.

SHOW SOME SPIRIT!

Make it personal

Hosting team meetings and happy hours are great ways to help employees feel like part of the team, but it's also important to focus on **the individual experience.**

Encourage employees to really **listen** to their colleagues to understand what they're going through and what they need to thrive during challenging times.

> **"When people talk, listen completely. Most people never listen."**
>
> **Ernest Hemingway**
> *American novelist*

Show a personal interest in what's happening in a colleague's life. For example, if a co-worker's child just took her first step, give a shout-out on Yammer or send safety pads for those sharp table corners.

It's personal gestures like these that mean so much.

SAMANTHA'S FIRST STEP!

YAY!

Reshape your role

We've worked with many smart, dedicated communicators over the years—all with the **potential to be rock stars** in our profession.

But it's not easy. Communicators face a lot of challenges to be respected and recognized:

The leader conundrum. While many leaders believe in communication, they're not always sure how to work with communicators. Perhaps this scenario sounds familiar: Leaders ask for support with preconceived notions, making us feel like order takers.

Limited resources. How can we break out of the box with new communication methods if limited time and budget usually lead us back to using the old tried-and-true channels?

Relentless pressure. "Can you help me with this?" asked a client about a small but vital project. "I've been meaning to get to it all year, but I've been too busy doing my day job." With increased expectations and low headcounts, it doesn't seem that the pressure will let up any time soon.

Complicated business issues. Today's version of that old Mark Twain line about "not having time to write a short letter, so I wrote a long one" is this: "We didn't have time to simplify that complex subject, so we communicated anyway. And now employees don't understand what this is or what to do."

Everyone is a communicator. One client told us, "In my organization, everyone thinks they know about communication. They're convinced they're such great writers, editors, designers—how hard can communication be? What can I do to change the perception that they know everything (and I don't bring that much value)?"

Are you ready to channel your inner Joan Jett to overcome these obstacles?

Here's the last piece of the puzzle to reinvent employee communication: Communicators need to think differently about how they contribute. It's about moving from an implementation focus to strategic advisor.

Reshape your role
HERE'S HOW

✓ Set the mission of internal communication

✓ Apply design thinking to communication planning

✓ Be an internal communication rock star!

Set the mission of internal communication

Leverage our framework to develop a mission for your internal communication function. The framework includes a high-level mission statement, supported by key strategies and an operating principle, which forms the foundation. Here's an example:

Keep in mind, these aren't objectives. Think of your mission as how the function will contribute to your organization.

> **"Your focus determines your reality."**
>
> **Qui-Gon Jinn**
> *Star Wars Episode I:*
> *The Phantom Menace*

OUR INTERNAL COMMUNICATION FUNCTION EXISTS TO:

VISION			
Foster a sense of community.			

STRATEGIES			
Share the vision, business strategy (the plan) and results.	Engage employees in key initiatives designed to help the organization be successful.	Help everyone feel up to date about what's happening across the organization.	Make policy and program information accessible and easy to understand.

OPERATING PRINCIPLE
Bring the employee voice to every business decision.

Set your objectives

Now you're ready to set objectives. Keep them specific and measurable.

We believe you should have **objectives in each of these buckets:**

KNOWLEDGE OF KEY TOPICS

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION CHANNELS

CHANGE COMMUNICATION

LEADER AND MANAGER COMMUNICATION

Elevate the internal communication function by changing your focus and doing things differently

Do less of this	And more of this
Sending an email for every communication request	Prioritizing content and selecting the right channel for the job.
Writing 500-word articles	Packaging content instead of just writing articles. Covering the topic in a series of photos. Or creating a 60-second video of the CEO.
Linking to the external press release	Providing context and explaining why the issue is important to employees. Better yet, explain what they need to do.
Packing too much into a communication	Curating content and focusing on one idea. For example, explore a theme during a town hall rather than hopscotching across 10 topics.
Sending the same communication to all employees	Segmenting your audience and understanding the information needs of each group. Relevance drives satisfaction with communication.
Hitting the send button and believing communication is complete	Including opportunities for interaction and participation: from internal social media to group problem solving and feedback sessions.

Apply design thinking to communication planning

Let's say your job is to create a product—and your objective is to get customers to buy your product. Naturally, you'd want to learn everything you can about your customers so that you fully understand their needs and preferences. And then you'd design your product to meet those needs and market the product so customers understand how it benefits them.

Sounds sensible, right? In fact, that little description is the definition of design thinking, which Jennifer Brandel, CEO of the tech company Hearken, describes as "a way of understanding the needs of the people you're building a solution for and testing that solution with them before creating it."

If you've ever complained that employees don't read or watch the content you create, the problem may be just this simple: Communication is not meeting employees' needs. **The solution?** Use design thinking to decide what changes you need to make.

But when it comes to communication planning, here's the secret sauce: Frame your relationships differently. Think of employees as your customers and the VP of blah, blah, blah as your client.

> **"Be empathetic. Try to understand what people really value."**
>
> **David Kelley**
> *American designer*

Now you're set up to apply design thinking. You'll plan communication so it meets the needs of employees, not the needs (and wishes) of the VP of blah, blah, blah.

Of course, that VP is important. She is your client after all. But since you're **focused on what works for employees,** your role is to help her articulate what she's trying to achieve.
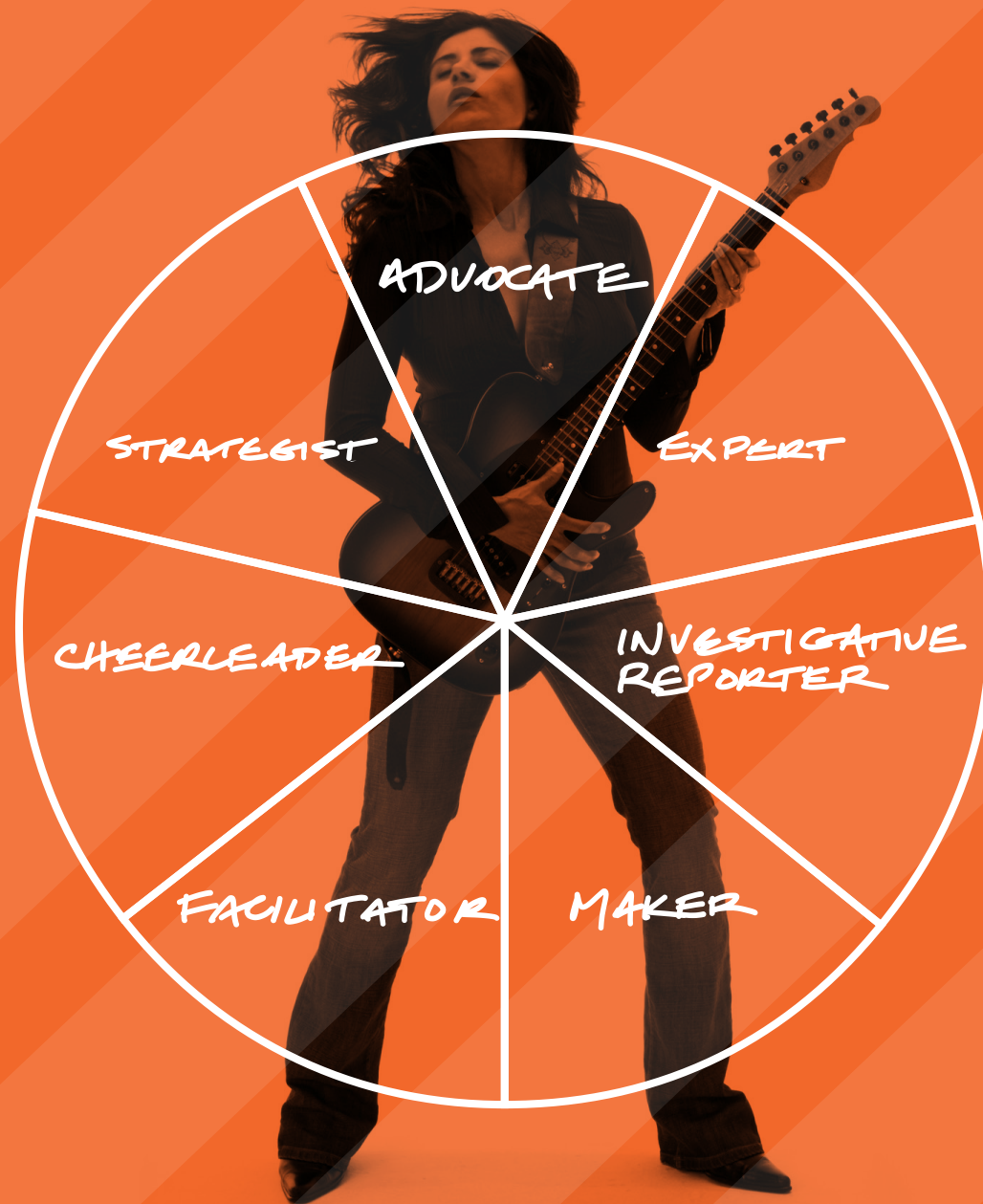
Be an internal communication rock star!

Today's organizations have big expectations for internal communication. You need to **play seven roles** to deliver a redefined communication experience for employees:

> **"You're braver than you believe, stronger than you seem and smarter than you think."**
>
> **Christopher Robin**
> *Winnie the Pooh*

Advocate

Use your seat at the table wisely. Bring the employee voice into the room and campaign for strategies that will encourage their engagement.

How?

- Consider the questions every communication will prompt from employees.

- Maintain a big-picture view of what is happening across the organization: The sales team is always busy at the end of the month, the product development group is struggling to meet objectives, etc.

Expert

Move from a tactician with an opinion to the communication expert who uses data and past experiences to influence.

How?

- Be confident about your recommendations. It's not, "What do you think of... ?" It's, "Here's how we'll engage employees in this effort... ."

- Know your data—from intranet e-metrics to survey feedback and qualitative research. Is "the percentage of employees who feel knowledgeable about the business strategy" on the tip of your tongue?

78%
OF EMPLOYEES
BELIEVE...

Investigative reporter

Don't accept the 100-page PowerPoint deck that is thrown your way. Investigate what it means for the organization and what employees need to do differently.

How?

Ask lots of questions, including the tough, uncomfortable ones that haven't been figured out yet. Then translate the answers into everyday, helpful language.

Maker

It's not enough to write a great paragraph. A superstar communicator is an editor, curator, event producer and techie— all rolled into a visual thinker.

> **"If you care about what you do and work hard at it, there isn't anything you can't do."**
>
> **Jim Henson**
> *American puppeteer*

How?

• Start every piece you create by asking, "What if this wasn't an email or a 300-word article?"

• Be a sponge and learn all you can about developing a great video storyboard or designing the best town hall agenda. You don't have to do everything, but that knowledge will help you give better direction so the entire organization can produce communication that breaks through.

• Make simplification your mantra.

Facilitator

This may be your secret weapon: knowing how to work the room—whether it's a table of senior leaders or a team of employees—so your audience feels engaged and ready to take action.

How?

• Ensure your interactions are designed to encourage participation.

• Focus on questions. They're often a clue about where communication needs to focus.

• Develop a set of on-the-spot facilitation techniques to help a group make a decision or arrive at the same conclusion.
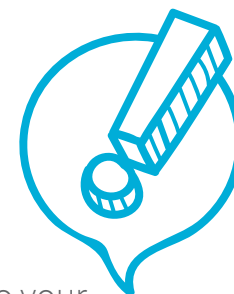
Cheerleader

Keep a pulse on the attitudes and morale of employees, so you can ramp up communication and address gaps when needed.

How?

• Collect data. What's on employees' minds? The questions they ask are a good clue about their state of mind.

• Celebrate wins, achievements and milestones—often.

Strategist

A strategist doesn't ask if you want fries with that burger, she asks about the problem you're trying to solve and how it impacts employees.

How?

Help others think more strategically about internal communication with two of our favorite questions:

• What's the one thing you need employees to know or do differently?

• What's the problem you're attempting to solve?

GO TEAM!

About the authors

Davis & Company's consulting team is passionate about internal communication. We bring a collective 250 years of experience to help clients with any employee communication challenge. True to the company's pioneering spirit, we continue to lead the industry with innovative solutions and fresh perspectives. We love helping clients deliver a truly awesome experience for employees, so they do their best work and help their organizations succeed.

About the art director

Janice Comes enjoys designing out-of-the-box concepts to solve client problems. She has more than 25 years of experience in the design industry and her work at Davis & Company has earned multiple industry awards. Janice holds a degree in visual communication from The Art Institute of Pittsburgh.