

20 essentials for every employee communicator

By Paul Barton

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1. Strategic communications help a business achieve its objectives. That is their purpose.
2. Effective communications are those that produce measurable results, and they can be a competitive differentiator.
3. There are costs associated with communicating, but there can be costs associated with not communicating as well. Internal communications seek cost-effective and creative solutions to solve complex communications challenges.
4. Employees are drowning in information, but starving for understanding. Our job is to make the important interesting.
5. Credibility is the foundation upon which effective communication is built. Unless it is believed, a message has no worth.
6. Face-to-face communication is the most desirable form of communication because it is immediate, personal, and interactive. Most employees say their immediate supervisor is their preferred and most credible source of information about the business.
7. Communication is, by definition, a two-way process. Feedback mechanisms must be part of every employee communication.
8. Communication is a management responsibility. Internal communications supports leaders by serving as consultants, facilitators and resource partners.
9. As in any effective strategy, form should follow function. The medium is the message.
10. Employees should learn of important events affecting them and their company from an internal source rather than an external source. Well-informed employees can serve as informal ambassadors of the company.
11. The more important the information is personally to the receiver, the fewer exposures are needed to make an impression. Make your communications relevant.
12. True effectiveness in communication is the ability to influence and change behavior. Changing behaviors is a long, slow process; therefore, measurement of effective communications must be taken over time.
13. The case for change should be found in the marketplace. For change to occur, employees must move through these stages: awareness, understanding, acceptance, and commitment. You cannot skip a step. Formal communications (particularly written communications) are most effective in promoting awareness and understanding. Informal communications (leader behaviors,

unwritten rules, management decisions, openness, risk-taking tolerance, etc.) are necessary to reach full commitment.

14. External sources are de facto employee communications; therefore, external messaging should be aligned with internal strategies. Likewise, employees are informal ambassadors of an organization, so internal messaging should be aligned with external strategies. Every internal communication should be written as if it will be read by the news media.

15. Rumors are created to fill communication voids. Fill those voids with valid information. A phrase such as, "Unfortunately, we have more questions than answers right now but we're aware of the problem, we're working on it, and we'll keep you updated with any news," goes a long ways to keep the rumor mill from grinding out of control.

16. Well-defined communication processes and procedures are the foundation for creativity. Key message libraries, templates, crisis plans, etc., free up time for creativity and continuous improvement.

17. The overall tone of employee communications directly reflects the relationship an organization has with its employees. The best tone for strategic communications is the Voice of the Brand, which is primarily what the company is but also what the company is striving to be.

18. With better information, better business decisions can be made. Employees need to understand the "what" and the "why" to be fully engaged.

19. Well-informed employees are more satisfied, more creative, more productive, and more committed.

20. A common trait among successful companies is open and honest communications with all their key audiences, especially their employees.

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