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Human Capital Management Solutions

Internal Communication Tips
for Engaging Employees

Healthy and effective internal communication has a direct impact on employees. It affects their engagement and, ultimately, their satisfaction level in their work.

When good communication is fostered, collaboration is easier and more productive, work is higher quality, and the atmosphere is simply improved. Creating an effective internal communication environment is not so simple, though. Consideration must be given to the structure of your team, the level of formality required for day-to-day work, the culture, and many other factors.

This guide is meant to give you ideas and strategies for improving employee engagement through effective internal communication, no matter your industry or business structure.

CHAPTER 1 - AN OPEN DOOR POLICY

The concept of an open door policy has long been talked about in the realm of business management, but implementing it is often not as well applied.

WHY IS AN OPEN DOOR POLICY IMPORTANT?

Leadership should be approachable. If there's a huge divide between employees and management it can not only cause miscommunications in everyday job duties, but it affects the identity of your workforce as well. These divides do not promote individuality or value in employees. Just as it applies to many other units, such as family-life or the field of early education, people view themselves through the way other people interact with them. Employees will be more confident and comfortable if they feel like they are in good-standing with their superiors. Even more so, if they feel they are truly valued!

HOW TO IMPLEMENT AN OPEN DOOR POLICY:

There are practical ways to implement an open door policy. A suggestion box is an age-old practice. As long as there's follow-through with the comments placed in a suggestion box, this can be an effective way to hear from employees from all levels and positions. Using an actual, physical box or not, you should create the space for employees to share their thoughts and ask questions.

Being able to ask for help through specific questions is another priority on its own. Asking questions and asking for help prevents malpractice. Good leaders are helpful. They should provide training whenever it's needed. The willingness to mentor is also a sign of great leadership. Finally, a leader should never be afraid of investing their knowledge for fear of someone rising through the ranks.

Here are other practical approaches to implementation:

- Take the policy literally - have set times of day or week when office doors are open and employees are free to give suggestions or speak about problems with the business' leaders.
- Start encouraging employees to share new ideas, whether they send them via email or drop them in a box. Just make sure you actually follow-up!
- Plan "planning meetings" specifically focused on how to enhance the experience of your internal culture.

All these recommendations speak into the overall culture of a workplace. Investing in your internal work culture has a direct impact on every aspect of your business model such as customer relations and branding. An open door is a relational approach. It conveys honesty and authenticity. These values can affect the course of your business in many positive ways.

CHAPTER 2 - HEALTHY TOP-DOWN LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION

This is similar to the first topic, however, there are times that a decision must be made that doesn't allow for a compromise. Still, it's respectful to hear from opposition. It's even more important to have a constant flow of communication from leadership. Good leaders don't bark out commands. They spend time with their employees, delegating through empowerment.

If employees don't receive clear communication from management, it leaves room for major assumptions, AKA workplace drama. If your workforce is accustomed to regular updates from leadership, it's less-likely they will be shocked when big mandates or changes are communicated, especially if they are done in a timely manner. Here are some tips for presentation as upper management:

- **Transparency** - Employees don't need to know every aspect of the deliberation phase of a decision, but once one is made, don't veil it. If there's tough news to deliver, there's a right way to say it that remains encouraging. Transparency is always better than deceit. A certain company was once hacked. This could have had a very negative impact on their clients, but rather than procrastinate telling clients while trying to fix it internally, this company informed their clients right away. This had a very positive affect on their public relations. They were appreciated for their honesty.

- **Timely announcements of changes** - Change management is a field of business all its own. The more you can prepare for a big change within your business the better. It's important to put emphasis on announcing the change, planning for the change, reminding about the upcoming change, and actually implementing it – it's best to over-communicate. Explain things verbally, express it in writing, and use all your channels to cover it. Offer to meet with people one-on-one in certain circumstances. Thoroughly prepare your workforce for the implementation process.

- **Allow response-approach to some decisions** - As we've said before, even if a decision cannot be changed, demonstrate that employees are heard. Allow them to give feedback.

- **Convey integrity, strength, and respect** - Employees WANT to follow leaders that live out these principles. Make this the foundation of your relationships with those you manage and they will have no trouble getting behind you.

CHAPTER 3 - HOST SOCIAL ACTIVITIES TO ENCOURAGE PERSONAL CONNECTION

Investing in employee support and satisfaction proves to generate happier and more productive workers. When Google took these initiatives, employee satisfaction rose 37%. Economists at the University of Warwick found a 12% spike in productivity in employees who experience feelings of happiness.**

These statistics show that employees who feel supported and connected to one another are more likely to be happy in the work they do. We should not diminish the value of casual conversations in the workplace. Allow employees to bring their personality and interests into the workplace while still encouraging professionalism. If they feel they are part of a bigger team and goal, it gives them comfort and motivation.

**https://www.fastcompany.com/3048751/happy-employees-are-12-more-productive-at-work

Here are activities that promote social interaction and deeper interpersonal connection:

- Retreats - Getting away as a team helps people connect in ways other than an average business transaction. Most adults have to be far removed from their daily responsibilities to feel laid back.

- Team-building games - Since it is a game, it promotes having fun and/or healthy competition among coworkers. These activities also improve performance and effectiveness in cooperation with others because the games encourage problem-solving, communication, trust, and more in order to complete them. Choose games that utilize these techniques and attributes.

- Breaks built into the work day - Speaking of Google again, you may have heard their ping pong tables and nap pods. Leave space for this kind of things. Promote water cooler talk.

- Occasional leisure outings DURING a work day! - It does not equate a waste in productivity just because you halt your usual duties to go on a fun outing once in a while. In fact, events like that can feel like a short vacation from work (without the full week absence) and refreshing to your staff.

- Efficient all-staff meetings - When your whole team comes together, focus on getting and keeping everyone on the same page. Organize the flow of information as clearly as possible. Here's a recommended resource for organizing meeting agendas. Use the meeting also as an opportunity to honor individual achievements. If there are problems to address, be sure the "wins" are equally highlighted, if not greater.

CHAPTER 4 - ARRANGE THE OFFICE TO PROMOTE TEAM WORK AND PRODUCTIVITY

ISOLATED, PRODUCTIVE WORK SPACE

An employee's work space should be private enough to hone in on his or her own work without hearing everyone else's conversations. Also, there should be some level of privacy that encourages co-workers to request to meet with each other through email or instant message rather than thinking they can shout out to that co-worker across the room, constantly interrupting their focus.

This will make the business interactions more organized, and hopefully more efficient, than when a chaotic, "machine-gun" approach is used. If employees are constantly getting spoken to using a "machine-gun" approach, whether it's peer to peer or with management, it can feel very frustrating. It can affect one's focus, and it's a nightmare for time management.

COLLABORATIVE WORKSPACE

For many businesses, collaborating on work is equally important. If co-workers never have the time and space to work together, it can cause delay in getting things done. It can improve the quality of a project when different people can give input according to their expertise.

BREAK SPACE

Having the space for casual conversations during lunch or breaks is also very healthy. Be sure this is far enough away from regular workspace so that those conversations don't distract others. It's also nice for the seating in break rooms, etc. to be inviting so that people feel comfortable staying for a while to enjoy themselves. Can you imagine the type of people we'd be if we never did anything entertaining? Relaxation and fun are just as much a part of thinking up solutions and good ideas than an actual brainstorming session. Same goes for productivity.

These are the type of spaces we recommend for every office:

- Functional and aesthetically appealing leisure areas
- Personal workstations far enough from other commons areas. Make sure they are arranged so that a person is able to feel like that can get into their own bubble whenever they need to. This can be accomplished through cubicles, large shelving, separate clusters of 2-4 desks, private offices with doors, etc.
- Large tables for collaborating among 3 to 10+ people
- Brainstorming rooms that inspire ideas and keep clutter at bay. This kind of room might involve couches, boards for note-taking, and more. It should limit distracting noises from outside spaces.

CHAPTER 5 - STREAMLINE COMMUNICATION CHANNELS AND UTILIZE THE BEST TECHNOLOGY

Are you a larger company? Have you ever thought about an internal newsletter just for updates on each department? You can use this as a way to praise the accomplishments of different employees or can include entertaining content. All this can improve morale and team unity.

What about an instant messaging tool you use just for answering immediate questions among co-workers? You can use this for casual conversations as well, which can improve morale.

STREAMLINE THE CHANNELS

If you choose methods for specific communication outcomes, make them as streamlined as possible so there's no confusion. If every employee is getting hit up on 15 different channels in one day about all kinds of topics, the feeling can be summed up in one word – overwhelming!

Different kinds of communication need specified channels:

- Requesting a meeting
- Asking a quick question
- Back and forth correspondence over a project
- Approaching upper management
- Requesting time off
- Casual conversations
- Reviewing official policies

MAKE INTERNAL INFORMATION READILY AVAILABLE

Processes and procedures need to be clear to everyone at all times in a business. Make this information easily accessible. Make known to your employees where to find other official documents, too, even if the answer is to make a request with your HR Rep. Make the steps clear. You can do this through a thorough on-boarding process for a new hire. However, it's nice to do quarterly house-cleaning, where training or simple reminders are given for all policies and procedures.

TECHNOLOGY

Since the types of communication we mentioned above will most likely take place on any given day, here are some technology solutions we recommend.

- Requesting and scheduling a meeting
  - Google Calendar invites
- Asking a quick question
  - Slack
  - Instant Messenger
- Back and forth correspondence over a project
  - Many people are choosing social intranet software and collaboration tools over regular emails for this type of interaction.
  - Teamwork - software usually used for project management. The interface shows when changes are made to documents. You can revert to every version of that document. You can even leave comments within a document or send a separate message to any member.
- Approaching upper management
  - Email
  - A request form within an intranet channel
- Requesting time off
  - Check out our Time and Assistance program systems here.
- Logging Work Time
  - Check out our time and assistance systems here.
- Casual conversation
  - Slack
  - Instant Messenger
- Accessing Official Documents
  - Google Drive Folders
  - Dropbox
  - 1Source HR Enterprise Platform

ACCOMMODATE YOUR PEOPLE

Modern society is hectic enough. The demands never stop. If you can provide tools that accommodate your employees in their work and communication, do it.

Here are some other ways technology can help make communication easier for your employees:
- Video conferencing for remote options
  - Zoom
  - GoToMeeting
  - Slack Calls
- Allow them opt-in options for certain content

CHAPTER 6 - REGULAR ASSESSMENT OF BUSINESS HEALTH

Make it your goal to constantly improve your business' internal communication and culture. Constantly trying out the next new idea results in never having the same methods. The best practice is actually a commitment to regularly –and honestly – assessing all aspects of communication practices; not ignoring the problem areas or procrastinating a decision.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR REVIEWS

Since internal communication affects your employees directly, allow them the opportunity to give their reviews of management, methods, and the business culture. Anonymity is key. They should be able to be open and honest without fear of reciprocity. Your business will not receive an accurate temperature reading if that fear is present, which would make the assessment pointless.

Use third-party tools or bring in an unbiased workplace counselor or consultant who can do a health check-up on your business practices which includes hearing from employees. Once you've done an assessment, be humble. Face the problem areas head on.

Stay in tune with new systems proven to work by sources you trust. With constant advancements in technology, a good system change, if not done too often or too hastily, is a good idea.

HELP EMPLOYEES UNDERSTAND THEMSELVES

When a person understands their communication style or how their personality handles conflict, it can be life-changing for them as a person. That awareness can also help them improve their quality of communication with others.

Give your employees resources to help them dive into that discovery. We use the Predictive Index at our company and we recommend it! Another great idea would be to use the information gleaned from the resources in your next retreat or team-building meeting. Listen to everyone's results and mull over as a team how you can apply the knowledge in your daily interactions.

CHAPTER 7 - COACH AND CARE

Be an organization that's always building each other up and building toward a better future. Here are some examples of coaching and caring for your team.

- Provide coaching opportunities for team members. Turn them into leaders!
- Most definitely, one's personal struggles affect the way they interact with others in the workplace. Care for your employees holistically so that they are healthier individuals. This can be done through promoting extra health opportunities or using a counseling professional.
- Attend conferences and other learning opportunities together to help everyone stay current in the industry, sharing the same language and mindset.
- Train WHENEVER training is needed. Employees start working at different phases of a business. They were probably on-boarded by different people. They may have experienced a change of hands in management or they've moved into several different positions throughout their time as an employee. Regular training ensures everyone is on the same page about how the job is done and the operation of the office.

CHAPTER 8 - CREATE A CULTURE

Similar to the culture of a geographical location, people's values and dialects are derived from the culture. Create your own work culture intentionally. When you do, connection and communication should occur naturally.

Spend time sharing about the values of your culture. Mindset affects communication.

For your work culture, make your mission clear. This is where your brand will come into play, but you must also consider the personalities and strengths of your team members when you think about the culture you have. A mantra might sound cheesy but it gives the actual words to drive the work. We are talking all about the power of communication, right? When a tough situation arises at work, people can look to a mantra for mental fortitude. It literally puts the right words in their mouth.

You can also create your own lingo or buzz words. This makes people feel like a part of something. It can add greater meaning to a discussion than using more common phrases. Inside jokes are also powerful for internal connection. If some of your slang is abbreviated, it could make communication quicker. If nothing else, it makes things more interesting!

CHAPTER 9 - BE EMPLOYEE-CENTRIC

The purpose of all internal communication is to help every individual feel connected to the business mission and each other, which makes an individual more satisfied in their work experience and, in turn, more productive for the business.

We want to say it again: The right mindset and the right values affect the quality of communication. Many businesses have a customer-first motto. But that motto has its limits. Other businesses believe if you protect and promote your employees as a top priority then those employees will be able to focus on your customers and do great work for them!

Prioritize your internal communication and it will spill over into the client experience. Maintaining long-standing engagement from your employees is a wonderful achievement for a business. Be sure you are clearly communicating this desire and you will achieve it!