

MOST READ



OF 2018

THE
GROSSMAN
GROUP

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MOST READ



OF 2018

As we head into the new year, we wanted to take a moment to look back and see what resonated most with you – our readers – in 2018. As we looked at what your favorite content was, we couldn't pick just a few posts to highlight. So included here are our most read leadership and communication articles of 2018.

There's a wide variety of topics, including posts from what 7 traits are critical to build trust in companies to how to communicate in a crisis situation. There's also guidance on how to create an internal communication plan in 7 steps, driving business results with communication planning, taking a message forward when you disagree, expectations about communication that every employee must know, and more.

Let us know what you think, what topics are on your mind and where we can add value for you. Here's to continuing to elevate our skills in the year ahead!

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Taking Your Communications to the Next Level

Drive Business Results with Communication Planning

While important initiatives always have a game plan behind them, daily communications between leaders and employees are often unplanned or buried beneath other pressing business priorities. However, planning communications is often the key to employees having the information and context they need to help an organization or team achieve its vision and goals.

By planning your intended communications, you can build stronger relationships with employees, and motivate them to contribute to your organization's success.

Follow these four steps – Plan, Say, Do and Check – to drive the right behaviors and enhance business performance through your communications with this simple communication planning model.

Step 1: Plan

Think about the problem/solution or behavior you're trying to address; set communication objectives with your intended business results and your audience needs in mind.

Questions to cover in your planning:

- What is the goal of this communication?
- Who will I communicate with?
- After this communication, what do I want my audience to Think, Feel, and Do?
- How will I know my communication is successful (e.g. improved survey scores or productivity, behavior changes)?
- How often will I measure my communications (weekly, bimonthly, quarterly, etc.)?



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Drive Business Results with Communication Planning

Step 2: Say

Customize your key messages for impact to respond to employees' needs and help them know the context and why it's relevant.

Think about these questions as you customize your messages:

- Why is this topic important for my audience?
- What do I want my audience to do with this information?
- What behaviors do I expect of my audience?
- What can my audience expect of me?

Step 3: Do

Deliver your messages to effectively reach your audience and encourage dialogue.

Your messages should:

- Identify the problem and the outcome/result you want
- Identify your audience(s) and their perspective on the topic
- Be structured to answer what you want employees to Think, Feel and Do
- Be delivered in a way that works for employees
- Include follow up to determine if employees have questions or ideas



Drive Business Results with Communication Planning

Answer these questions before delivering your messages:

- When will I communicate?
- What is the best place or way for me to communicate this (face-to-face, email, etc.)?
- How will I collect feedback or ensure my audience understands the communication?

Step 4: Check

Evaluate communication effectiveness so you know what's working and how to continuously improve. Check back in 30 days, then 90 and beyond, to review the progress your goal is making.



What opportunities do you see to better plan your communications?

How To Communicate Better with The 5 Ws and an H

Ask any journalist and they can tell you about the 5 Ws and an H. Any solid news story covers those six basic ingredients. The same is true for communicating inside an organization, especially as it relates to sharing a compelling vision or guiding decisions about the future.

Want to ensure you don't forget a critical detail in your **communications**? Think 5 Ws and an H to ensure you're capturing important perspective, sharing the all-important context, and making it relevant for your audience.



What

- What's the decision?
- What does it mean?
- What should I know?
- What's in it for me?



Why

- Why is it the right decision?
- Why now?
- Why is it important?



Who

- Who made the decision?
- Who's in charge?
- Who does it impact?

How To Communicate Better with The 5 Ws and an H

Where

- Where is this decision coming from?
- Where/what locations will it affect?
- Where can I get more information?

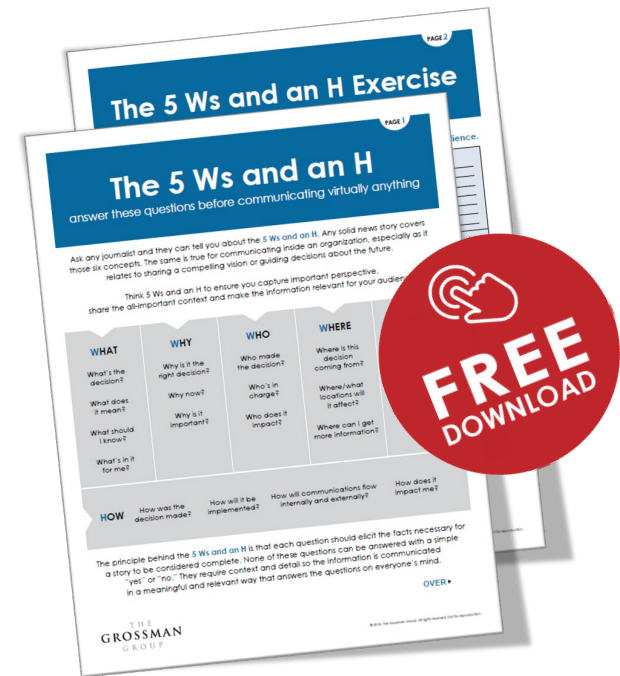
When

- When is this happening?

How

- How was the decision made?
- How will it be implemented?
- How will communications flow internally and externally?
- How does it impact me?

When communicating [your message](#), the order is important. Adult learners want to know the “**what**” first and then the “**why**.” The rest can follow logically.



Which W or H do you most often forget to include when you communicate? Download this free two-page tool—[The 5 Ws and an H](#)—to help guide you.

6 Steps for Effectively Connecting with Your Audience(s)

You've probably heard the philosophical question "If a tree falls in a forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" That same concept applies to communication. If you share a message with an audience and it doesn't make sense to them or they aren't able to connect with it, did they really hear what you had to say?

Where Effective Communication Begins

All effective communication begins with knowing your audience and speaking their language – both literally and figuratively. That doesn't mean changing your core messages, but rather adjusting the way you present them or the context you offer to help explain those messages in a way that resonates most directly with the people to whom you are speaking. Sometimes that is much harder than it sounds because audiences can vary greatly, whether across a team or an entire organization. So where should you begin?

STEP 1: Determine who your audience is.

You might start by making a list of the various groups that form your audience for an upcoming presentation or a memo that you're writing. Don't limit this list. Make sure you consider all aspects of your audience, including peers and those to whom you report, if that applies.

Think about the different segments of your audience and specifically:

- what they have in common, and
- where they differ.

STEP 2: Consider what is on their minds.

Put yourself in their shoes and think about how they view your topic and what they care about. Looking at the world through their eyes will help you develop an effective message and deliver it in ways that will make your audience more likely to listen, engage and act.

6 Steps for Effectively Connecting with Your Audience(s)

STEP 3: Think about what you need them to know.

While it is absolutely critical that you adjust your messages and means of communication to your audience, that doesn't mean you should lose sight of what you need them to know. Remember your core messages and make sure you are clearly and effectively incorporating them into your communication, while simultaneously packaging them in a way that will best meet your audience where *they* are.

STEP 4: Think about what you need them to think, feel or do based on what you tell them.

More than just passing along information, effective [communication should inform](#), engage, and inspire listeners or readers. Keep that in mind when you are crafting your next speech or memo. Ask yourself what you want the audience to remember as a result of what you have said. Are you calling them to take action of any kind? Is that “ask” clearly conveyed and repeated for emphasis? The most effective communication moves people to action, and many times we need to ask for what we want!

STEP 5: Decide the best means of communicating this information.

As a child, we're often reminded “there's a time and a place” for that (whatever the activity may be). That adage holds true for effective communication as well.

When considering setting and format, if you are sharing news about a major change, perhaps that is best done in a town hall or team meeting to allow for [face-to-face dialogue](#). If you're passing on regular updates that people need to know, but likely won't elicit concern, then consider a memo or regular e-newsletter, depending on the channels you have available. The more complex the message, the more you need a face-to-face-like setting.

6 Steps for Effectively Connecting with Your Audience(s)

STEP 6: Ask yourself how you can best relate to your audience and motivate them to take action.

Now we're getting down to the heart of knowing your audience. Look back at your audience list and their mindset. Think about **a story that you could tell** that they might relate to, or a way you could relate back how their actions will have a broader impact on the company as a whole. This is your chance to add relevancy to what you're saying and leave them with a memorable call to action.

Ultimately, the key is knowing your audiences and presenting the information they want to hear along with the information they need to hear in a way that works best for them. When you think about message delivery in those terms, you're setting up yourself and your audiences for a positive communications experience – no matter the topic you are conveying.



Which of these steps provide you the greatest opportunity to be more audience-focused?

The Art of Active Listening

Perhaps you've heard the quote "There's a difference between listening and waiting for your turn to speak." The concept might seem simple, but **active listening** – that is, fully concentrating on what's being said – takes work and practice. And the results can make a significant difference in the quality of relationships, followership and overall results.

Five Steps for Sharpening Your Listening Ears

While there may not be an actual formula for active listening, there are steps you can take to become a better listener. Even if you already feel like you're a good listener, it never hurts to brush up on these skills as listening is an irreplaceable tool in your communications toolkit.

1. Focus.

Make **eye contact** with the person who is talking with you and give them your full attention. This means putting your phone away and not letting anything distract you.

2. Confirm with the source and ask clarifying questions.

The best way to reinforce that you are listening while also making sure you are accurately understanding what someone is saying is to restate what you have heard to check your understanding. Use phrases like:

- "What I'm hearing you say is..."
- "What I'm understanding from you is..."
- "Is it fair to say that what you are most concerned about is..."
- "Did you say that [x] is your top priority?"

The Art of Active Listening

3. Listen with all your senses.

Do you hear that the person is talking loud? That could be an indication of frustration or anger. Do you see that he or she is avoiding eye contact with you? Perhaps there is an issue of shyness or feeling intimidated. Are their arms crossed? They might be feeling defensive.

4. Remain neutral.

You must be aware of your own feelings, biases and opinions, so they don't affect what you're hearing.

- Avoid getting defensive. If someone has a criticism, remain open minded by saying something like: "Thanks. I'm glad to know that. Let's talk about what we can do to fix that."
- Don't let an area of friction derail the entire conversation. If the speaker seems hung-up on one particular issue, try moving the conversation along by saying something such as: "Thanks. I'm glad to know that. What else is on your mind?"
- Agree to disagree to avoid getting emotional. Calmly state something like. "I understand your point. We just disagree on this one."

5. Genuinely listen.

Let the speaker finish his or her thoughts before you begin evaluating what they are saying. That may require taking a thoughtful pause before you respond. And don't get distracted by thinking about what you're going to say next instead of listening to what they're saying.

The Art of Active Listening

Don't Forget This Critical Action

Even when you apply each of these steps, there is one critical action that you must remember to apply after the conversation: follow up. If you've committed or agreed to do something, such as sharing information via email later, make sure you do it. The best listening may seem to fall on deaf ears if the receiver doesn't take action as spurred by the conversation.

Listening Quiz

Ask one of your direct reports, your boss, or anyone with whom you communicate to honestly respond yes or no to these 10 questions. Be open to the feedback you get.

	YES	NO
1. During the past few weeks, can you recall a time where you thought I wasn't listening to you?		
2. When you are talking to me, does my interaction with you make you feel stressed?		
3. When you talk to me, do I tend to lose eye contact with you?		
4. Do I ever get defensive when you tell me things I disagree with?		
5. When talking to me, does the conversation often end without me asking questions to clarify what you've said?		
6. In a conversation, do I sometimes overreact to information?		
7. Do I ever jump in to finish what you're saying?		
8. Is it common that I don't change my opinion after taking something over with you?		
9. When you are trying to communicate something to me, do I often talk too much?		
10. When you talk to me, do I ever seem detached?		

Reflect on your "yes" answers and think about which one or two, if implemented well, would have the greatest positive impact to help you listen even better!

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FREE DOWNLOAD

How well do you truly listen? Take this [Listening Quiz](#)...the results may just surprise you.



Tips and Strategies for Effective Leadership

7 Critical Traits for Building Trust in Companies

Trust everywhere is eroding. The lack of trust inside business today is especially troubling, as reported by numerous studies over the past several years.

In 2017, [Edelman's Trust Barometer](#) underscored the scope of the problem, revealing the largest-ever drop in trust across government, business, media and non-governmental organizations. As just one measure of the trust problem in business, CEO credibility dropped 12 points globally to an all-time low of 37 percent, falling in every country studied.

On the other hand, there is clear evidence that focusing on trust pays off for organizations, which means it's well worth the effort to make trust a priority in today's business climate.

Trustworthiness Has a Financial Benefit

For instance, the corporate advocacy organization [Trust Across America](#) recently reported that trustworthiness has a significant financial pay off. The organization has studied corporate integrity in America's largest 2,000 public companies since 2010, identifying companies whose leadership goes well beyond legal requirements to get at what's truly right for all stakeholders. The organization reports that during the three-year period from February 2013 to February 2016, America's most trustworthy public companies outperformed the S&P 500 by 1.8 times.

"An organization's chances at long-term success are predicated on the level of trust it builds with all its stakeholders," said Barbara Brooks Kimmel, CEO and co-founder of Trust Across America, in a [recent blog post](#).

How, then, can companies and leaders become more trustworthy?

After decades advising corporate leaders, I've come to recognize some common traits of trustworthy companies. All the traits lead to greater performance, including better collaboration, communication, innovation, stronger relationships and a greater esprit de corps.

7 Critical Traits for Building Trust in Companies

...continued

I've seen this in my own work with corporate clients – companies focused on trust are winning the war for talent and customers. Employees want to work for companies that trust their people and are trusted in the marketplace.

In pursuing genuine trust, leaders need to strive for a consistency of words and actions that stand the test of time, and lead to a real relationship. That relationship needs to be motivated by meeting mutually beneficial needs, not selfish needs that only benefit one party. (I shared some of what I've seen work for leaders looking to build trust in a recent article for *Fast Company*, "[The Five Things that Trustworthy Bosses Have Mastered](#)."

Traits That Help Build Trust in Organizations

Building trust doesn't have to be a daunting task. To begin a greater commitment to trust in your organization, here's some important traits worth adopting:

Trait 1: Company purpose, values and culture are defined, employees know how to practice them and bring the strategy to life, and there are systems in place to support what's important and valued.

In companies with this type of DNA, company policies, procedures and systems, including rewards and recognition systems, reinforce what's important. There are also consequences for behaviors that are not in sync with the company values.

Trait 2: Leaders act in respectfully authentic ways that are consistent with the purpose and values of the company.

It makes sense that employees work best for leaders who are purposefully building and managing trust. The first step for leaders is giving employees their own trust. Once that's established, employees return the favor by beginning to trust their leaders as well.

Continued on next page...

7 Critical Traits for Building Trust in Companies

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Respectfully authentic leaders also know that leadership is about focusing on others, being humble, operating with grace under pressure, and having quiet courage to bring more humanity to the workplace. These types of leaders care deeply about respect but also honesty – getting to the heart of the matter, yet in kind ways. These leaders also look to every interaction as an opportunity to connect with others.

Trait 3: The company establishes a culture of transparency and places a strong value on telling the truth, even when it hurts.

Organizational communications are a priority in trustworthy organizations, and the communication is timely, relevant and focused on what employees need to know and why. Leaders are fully transparent in what they say, especially during times of change, sharing with employees what they know, when they know it.

Leaders are also transparent about what's working and what's not with their teams and other people. They create a feedback-rich environment focused on getting even better. Failures and learnings are celebrated, as are the big wins.

Trait 4: The organization makes communicating with their own employees a priority, and tries to ensure that leaders communicate first with their employees, before any other stakeholders.

In trustworthy organizations, there's a strong focus on **internal communications** and helping to ensure every employee is connected to their job and the organization's strategy. Employees feel motivated and inspired to contribute their best.

7 Critical Traits for Building Trust in Companies

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Trait 5: Trustworthy organizations focus on belonging, which goes well beyond simply valuing diversity and inclusion.

Savvy organizations know that seeking diverse perspectives leads to important outcomes. As such, diverse perspectives and people are valued and alternative points of view are welcomed.

From this strong culture, employees begin to feel a sense of belonging, which increases productivity and engagement. (On the opposite spectrum, employees who don't feel like they belong often feel disengaged, detached and not invested in the company's success).

Trait 6: There's an emphasis on relationships versus transactions, both internally and externally.

This is about recognizing that trust is ultimately about building strong relationships, ones with intimacy and vulnerability.

Employees in these organizations receive a fair, relevant and motivating employee value proposition, or “deal” outlining what they can expect from the company. That deal reflects both what the employees want and what the company expects in return.

At the same time, leaders are focused on helping the best people grow and develop, and want to see their employees make a positive contribution to the company.

Externally, customers can trust employees to deliver on their brand promise, which reflects the reality of the Brand and is delivered consistently. There's no empty aspirational brand promise that's not realistic or achievable.

7 Critical Traits for Building Trust in Companies

Trait 7: The CEO serves as the Chief Communications Officer.

CEOs in trustworthy companies translate their vision and strategy in meaningful ways so employees know it, get it, believe it, and act on it. These CEOs are not distant leaders; they want to communicate regularly with employees and genuinely connect with them.

CEOs in these companies are also focused on helping all leaders know that their own communication matters – and that effective communication with their teams is clearly worthwhile and ultimately drives company performance.

Which traits do you see as most important in building trustworthy companies? What successes or failures have you seen in your own company's work to build trust with employees?



Did you know building more trust in your organization leads to better business outcomes? Click to download the [7 Critical Traits for Building Trust Inside Companies eBook](#) to get practical, strategic answers on how leaders and companies can become more trustworthy.



Becoming an Effective leadercommunicator: 7 Steps to Success

One might be considered a strong communicator, but lack the other skills necessary to be a successful leader. However, the reverse does not hold true. Strong communication skills are paramount to successful leadership.

To understand what it takes to be a successful leadercommunicator, it's important to understand what we mean when we say communication. This can range from an informal hallway chat with a colleague to a company-wide presentation to facilitating a staff meeting or huddle, to delivering the news of a major change impacting the entire organization.

Research from consulting firm Willis Towers Watson shows that employees believe that the ability to inspire and motivate is the most important driver of leader effectiveness. Also key, employees say, is the ability of leaders to clearly communicate plans and demonstrate an understanding of key success factors. So successful leader communication is truly critical. But how do you achieve success in this area? Consider these seven steps...

7 Steps to Become an Effective leadercommunicator

1. Be Personally Effective

- Be approachable
- Adapt your personal style to connect in the best way with your audience(s)
- Deliver messages in a clear, interesting and engaging way
- Watch and respond to non-verbal cues to improve comfort level and buy-in
- Be responsive
- Follow up
- Demonstrate expertise
- Meet commitments and do things on time

Becoming an Effective leadercommunicator: 7 Steps to Success

2. Share Information Regularly and Appropriately

- Be committed to [sharing information](#) with employees
- Treat confidential information appropriately

3. Create Line of Sight

- Explain the company's vision, mission and goals in ways that are relevant to employees' jobs
- Be a translator

4. Communicate Change

- Inform employees [about changes](#) taking place in the organization
- Explain the reasons behind decisions
- Be okay to not have all the answers (and help find them)

5. Create Dialogue

- Ask questions
- Ask [open-ended questions](#) to gather more information and create dialogue
- Seek diverse perspectives

6. Give, Get and Use Feedback

- Be open to [feedback from employees](#)
- Take actions based on the feedback of employees

7. Advocate for the Team and Organization

- Put the interests of the group/organization before your own

Thinking about the steps to becoming an effective leadercommunicator, which ones do you already apply on a regular basis? Which ones do you think may take some concentrated effort to incorporate into your everyday processes?

Consider making a list of simple actions you might take to address the ones that don't come as naturally to you and work to apply at least one item from the list every day.

Expectations About Communication That Every Employee Must Know

Communication is a contact sport. You need to play to win. For communication to flow effectively, it needs to be a two-way street, and requires active participation. Said another way, communication is something you do *with* people not *to* people.

Setting Expectations Is Important

Everyone in your organization should understand what's expected of them when it comes to communication. No matter what position you hold, and whether it's your first day or you're celebrating your 20th year, here are the expectations you want employees to rise to:

- Play an active role in communicating with others
- Stay current with company information
- Ask questions
- Listen for understanding and take action
- Be respectful in your communication with others
- Participate effectively in work conversations
- Avoid information overload by sharing communication with too broad an audience
- Use communications to improve results

People managers and senior leaders should have additional expectations as well based on their role, and must be measured on how well they meet the expectations.

Have you set your expectations with your team, or do you need to do that at your next all-hands meeting?

Recognition That Motivates: 3 Must-Have Components

When thinking about employee communications, one of the first things that often comes to mind is channels for conveying messages and [mechanisms for gathering feedback](#). That said, how might employee recognition help you drive further engagement on your team?

Whether a formal award or a simple pat on the back, recognition can be a powerful tool in your communication arsenal. By showing appreciation and communicating a job well done in specific ways, you can enhance team performance and motivate employees to take their work to the next level.

Four Questions to Consider

Recognition can take many forms, so start by asking yourself:

- 1. What's a critical behavior you want to see more of? Is there a strategic priority for the company that could be reinforced? Or a company value that needs highlighting to strengthen its role in the organizational culture?**

At the heart of recognition, we want to make employees feel appreciated, but that doesn't mean we can't also tie-in the bigger organizational picture. Think about your goals and the company strategic framework to decide if there's a concept from which you could build your recognition around and simultaneously reinforce a [core message](#). It's often said that what gets measured is what gets done – that's true for recognition, too: what gets rewarded is what you'll most likely see more of.

- 2. Is there a specific time of year that team members are called upon to meet heightened demand and could benefit from extra acknowledgement of that hard work?**

This would be in addition to a steady drumbeat of recognition throughout the year. No matter what you decide is the best cadence for formal recognition, remember that informal recognition can happen year-round in the form of a personal word of thanks and appreciation during a team huddle. The key is to do it frequently, sincerely, and in as specific a way as possible.

Recognition That Motivates: 3 Must-Have Components

3. What type of recognition would best resonate with your unique workforce or the individual you are honoring? Is it public acknowledgment? A celebration event? Or something tangible?

In recognition, one size does not fit all. One individual might value a public display of gratitude during a meeting, while others might prefer a simple, private word of appreciation. Be aware of how members prefer to be recognized or what's culturally appropriate.

4. How can you best structure recognition so members of the team are inspired to participate and feel engaged in the process?

Crowdsourcing can certainly be applied to award programs as well. Who better to recognize an unsung hero than those who work side-by-side with him or her on a daily basis? Consider building excitement and involvement by taking nominations by email or secret ballot, or there are even apps available that allow teams to formally give one another kudos.

Three Must-Haves for Recognition

Once you've thought through the answers to these questions, you can begin to formulate the structure of your recognition. In doing so, remember these key guidelines:

- **Make it personal**
- **Make it meaningful**
- **Make it specific**

When you do that, the recognition not only resonates with the recipients, but it helps others to understand expectations and commit to demonstrating similar behaviors.

Think about a time when you were acknowledged for your hard work. What about the recognition stands out in your mind and why?

5 Tips to Define Your Business Strategy – Literally

When it comes to strategy there are two rules:

Rule #1: Have a strategy.

Rule #2: Make sure everyone is literally on the same page in understanding the components of the strategy and how to implement it.

All too often, strategies contain words or concepts that take on as many meanings and interpretations as the number of people who read them.

An Example

Take the word “growth”, for example. It’s a common term used in just about every strategy (for good reason). But what does growth really mean in your strategy? Is it incremental growth, organic growth, growing the pipeline, growing the global footprint, growing the number of employees, growing through acquisition, or something else?

Your answer will make a difference in how people think about growth, and the actions they take as a result. You want to ensure you’re driving the actions you want, which in turn lead to the business outcome you want.

Define Each Concept in Your Strategy

Take a cue from the trusted dictionary and literally define what each of the concepts means in your strategy. Share the definitions with your leaders and employees. Take the time for real dialogue with your teams (that way, you’ll know if they’re on the same page as you or if they need more clarification). Get them to internalize the strategy so they know how it connects to their job.

5 Tips to Define Your Business Strategy – Literally

Define your strategy—literally:

- **Be global:** Ensure the core terms you use will work globally; strip away jargon or buzz words.
- **Be all-encompassing:** Define all the important terms even if they seem obvious to you.
- **Be precise:** Use clear and specific language in defining your terms.
- **Be real:** Describe how you're thinking about the business today and where you want it to go as if you were talking directly to a front-line employee.
- **Be visual:** A picture's worth a thousand words.

I'll never forget a meeting with the top 10 executives of a company. We were there to talk about communicating their new strategy to employees. Part way through the meeting, the CEO realized his own leadership team was defining core elements of the strategy in different ways, including as it applied to the business model, franchising model, and current approach to create loyal customers.

We took a step back and got everyone aligned on the key terms and how to define and talk about their business. It became a defining moment for the leadership team because even the best communication plan can't engage employees if leadership is sending different messages.

How might you benefit if you took a step back from your strategy to ensure alignment?



Internal Communication Best Practices

5 Steps to Meaningful Internal Communication

Effective employee communication can improve an organization and drive business success by turning strategy into action. Yet too often, executives measure communication through emails sent or town halls hosted rather than by the one metric that truly matters—how well key leaders and their employees understand and have acted on what's communicated.

Clearly, there's a real opportunity to make good internal communication great, and organizations would be wise to seize it.

While good internal communication gets the message out, great internal communication helps employees connect the dots between overarching business strategy and their role. When the communication is good, it informs. When it's great, it engages employees and moves them to action. Quite simply, internal communication that's executed well helps people and organizations be even better. The reality is that despite all the new and timely communication channels—flurries of emails, meetings, memos, intranets, video, internal social media, and more—research shows that the majority of companies aren't getting through to employees to help them connect the dots. In [an article for the Harvard Business Review](#), researchers Donald Sull, Rebecca Homkes and Charles Sull highlighted poor communication as one of the key reasons that strategies fail. As one researcher put it:

“In other words, when leaders charged with explaining strategy to the troops are given five chances to list their company's strategic objectives, nearly half fail to get even one right.”

An Example of Poor Communication

The researchers go on to say the issue isn't with a lack of communication. Instead, it's a problem with the communication not being great. The HBR report highlighted one example of poor communication that is all too common in companies today. The executives at a tech company went to great lengths to communicate the company strategy at the annual executive off-site, but they ended up bombarding employees with so much information that they completely turned off the group.

5 Steps to Meaningful Internal Communication

“They introduced 11 corporate priorities (which were different from the strategic objectives), a list of core competencies (including one with nine templates), a set of corporate values, and a dictionary of 21 new strategic terms to be mastered. Not surprisingly, the assembled managers were baffled about what mattered most.”

5 Steps to Meaningful Internal Communication

Step 1: Articulate goals, vision and mission

At this initial stage, you are thinking about your desired outcome in the context of the organization’s goals, vision and mission. This ensures that from the beginning you are thinking big picture: What are the outcomes that you want to achieve, how do they tie to what’s most important at this organization, and how do you need to shape your messaging to demonstrate the connection to achieve those goals?

Step 2: Message development that resonates with key audiences

Develop key messages that communicate with and speak to the right audiences. Messages need to be **clear, credible and resonate** with your audience. A critical part of the message development process is understanding where your audience is coming from so you can make your messages powerfully meaningful to them. That’s where research comes in. What data do you need to best understand your audience?

Step 3: Communications planning

Building on the core messaging you have identified and developed, your next step is to create a plan that articulates the approach for achieving the goals identified in Step 1 through communication.

5 Steps to Meaningful Internal Communication

As part of this plan, you must:

- Identify key audiences you need to reach
- Decide on best vehicles for communicating the message (e.g., in-person meeting, newsletter article, intranet, email, video, podcast, letter from the president, etc.)
- Select appropriate timing

Step 4: Implement

By now, you've reached the implementation phase of your **communication plan**. It's now up to you to put the ball into play and to begin communicating with employees. Using your established plan as a guide, you should use the various communications tools available to reach your employees with your powerful message where it will have the most meaning to them. This will ultimately drive the outcomes you seek.

Step 5: Evaluate against goals created in the context of the current environment

You should start working on Step 5 as you are also undertaking Step 4. This is the evaluation phase. This last step is critical in ensuring that you drive the desired behaviors or actions in employees. If you learn that this is not the case, step back and re-evaluate your plan. It's important to be able to correct your course along the way if you learn that something isn't working as you had anticipated or intended.

At its core, Step 5 is about assessing whether or not your communication has helped you achieve the desired outcomes you identified in Step 1.

So What's the Payoff?

- **Employees understand the big picture and how they fit in:** They feel valued, listened to, and like an important part of the team and the organization.

5 Steps to Meaningful Internal Communication

- **Employees are more productive and there is meaning to their work:** As a result, they contribute more and feel better about their contribution and the organization so they stay on the job and help move the business forward.
- **Better leaders:** Communication isn't just tactical anymore; it's about strategy. In this context, leaders are better able to understand employee needs and how to meet those needs to motivate, inspire and engage them.
- **Vigilant managers who have an ear to the ground:** For managers and organizations to attract, create and retain an engaged workforce, they must be committed for the long haul. **Building the trust** and credibility to keep employees engaged requires effort, but it's worth it. It takes only seconds to lose employee connection and interest.
- **A culture of communication:** The employee engagement journey is a continuous one. Communication is not an "event." It is a continuing process. You must work every day to ask the right questions, answer others appropriately, and communicate openly and honestly with employees. When they see you making that extra effort, they'll do the same. By moving away from lip service and toward positive action, you drive positive business results.

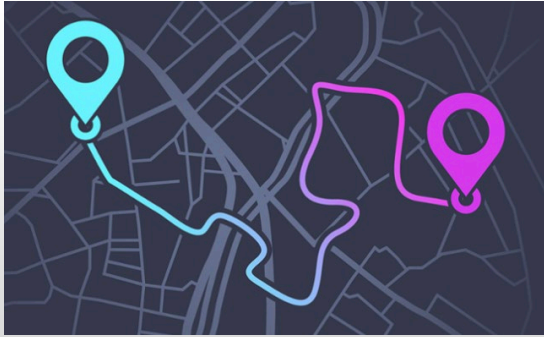
Organizations that understand, prioritize and constantly strive to achieve better internal communication are a breed apart. They achieve trust and credibility. They enable employees to do their jobs better. They create a constructive workplace that encourages growth and a common sense of purpose. From all this, there can only be one result: Higher levels of performance and better business results.

How are you doing at thinking strategically and effectively about your communications?

Click to download this eBook—[Use the Right Channels to Communicate with Impact](#)—and see how being more purposeful when choosing communication channels leads to less clutter and more effective communications with employees.



How to Create an Internal Communications Plan in 7 Steps



What is a Strategic Internal Communication Plan?

A best practice for internal communications teams is to have a plan. That may sound basic but all too often we find that internal communications departments don't have plans in place – and it shows in how the team works, how well employees are communicated with, and, in many cases, the kind of impact the function has on the business. An internal communications plan articulates what the function is uniquely qualified to do to help drive business outcomes for the organization.

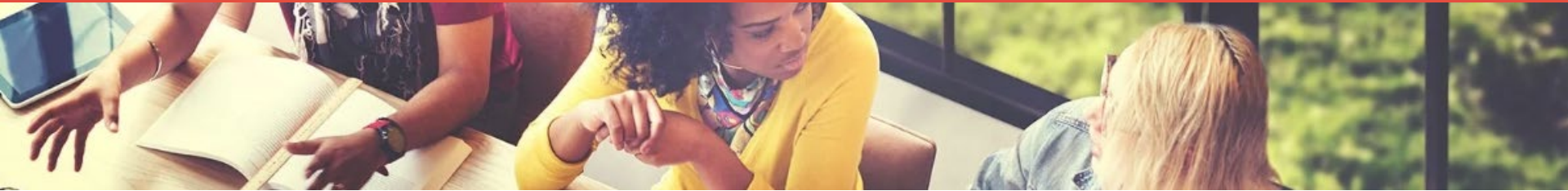
Why an Internal Communications Plan Is Beneficial

An internal communications plan is necessary for many reasons. It:

- Provides a clear roadmap for consistently communicating with employees, so they feel informed about goals for your organization, or a specific initiative, so they can take action and help achieve those goals;
- Defines what internal communications strategies are important to focus on, how and when they'll be implemented and how they'll be measured to demonstrate value and impact to the business;
- Keeps the internal communications team focused and guides their efforts so they're spending their time on the right things that are most important to the business in a most efficient and effective way; and
- Enables important conversations and engagement with business leaders and partners about internal communication strategies that can best deliver on key business needs and opportunities.

Think of it like your roadmap for how to take your communications forward so you can move employees to action.

How to Create an Internal Communications Plan in 7 Steps



What's in an Internal Communications Plan?

There are many ways to do an internal communication plan. Our best advice is to pick a format that works for you and always have a plan in place! That said, here is a model for an internal communication plan that works and is easy to use. A traditional internal communication plan has these key components:

- A current situation of your business
- What you want to accomplish (your business goals and communication goals)
- Who you need to talk with (your audience)
- What you want to say (your core messages)
- How you will communicate (your internal communication strategies, tactics and channels)
- When you will communicate (your calendar), and
- How you will measure your progress

Your communications plan doesn't need to be long – a few pages is fine or even one-pager works.

What an Internal Communication Plan Is Not

An internal communication plan is not just a list of tactics. The tactics are instead, part of the overall plan and should reflect what you're going to do to achieve your business objectives.

How to Create an Internal Communications Plan in 7 Steps

How to Create an Internal Communication Plan in 7 Steps

Communication plans are needed for any of a number of topics – developing a plan to turn strategy into action, help employees with a change, address important industry issues, sensitive employee topics, create an internal campaign to reduce safety incidents, and more. Any time you have a lot to say, think about having a communication plan to orchestrate how best to say it with your audience and outcomes in mind.

Whatever your communication need, these seven steps can serve as a framework as you develop your plan.

Step 1: Summarize the Situation

Provide a situation overview and what's prompting the need for communications. Mapping the current situation, considering business needs and talking to key stakeholders can help with this process.

For example, is there a shift in organizational priorities because of the marketplace or industry? Low employee engagement scores? New products or services? Are you starting a new employee initiative and you need to keep them informed and engaged in the process?

This section includes research and analysis and addresses what's currently being done to address the issue. It's situations like this that signal when a communication plan is necessary.

Step 2: Determine Your Desired Outcome ...

Click to access the rest of the [Ultimate Internal Communications Plan Guide](#) — including 4 free templates and tools.





Communicating in a Crisis and Addressing Tough Topics

4 Steps to Communicate in a Crisis Situation

Every company, no matter the industry, deals with difficult problems and issues each day. Starbucks' issue of racial profiling in one of their stores; Southwest's emergency landing resulting in the death of a passenger; countless produce companies having issues with E. coli and Chili's data breach, to name a few. No industry or organization is free from the risk of a crisis. So what should corporate leaders do when something goes wrong?

4 Steps to Effectively Communicate in a Crisis

One important caveat up front — sound communications cannot make up for poor decision-making on the part of leadership. However, when leaders do become aware of issues, they should follow these actions:

1. Gather the Facts

Understand the situation, its components, results and future implications as much as possible. Figure out what you know; **what you don't know**; what you need to find out; and what are myths and rumors that abound.

2. Tell the Truth

There is no substitute for this. While you should work with your communications team on what information you will be sharing, whatever you share needs to be the unadulterated truth.

3. Plan Your Communications

With the exception of FCC and/or regulatory requirements, all communication should be executed from the “inside out.” Employees should be communicated to first and foremost, followed by outside audiences.

4. Build Communication Skill

No matter how successful the leader, there is one common truth — communication is a learned skill. When...

4 Steps to Communicate in a Crisis Situation

...crisis situations arise, those leaders who have taken the time to build that skill beforehand are far more successful than those learning “on the fly.” To drive **effective communications**, leaders must:

- Have a platform that outlines their core messages and actions.
- Be visible, open, honest, trustworthy and candid.
- Be consistent.
- Communicate frequently.
- Understand that everything they say and do communicates.
- Answer questions employees have.
- Be engaged in developing and planning their communications.
- Engage their communications team as a business partner.
- Ask employees for their input and use it.

The Value of Being a leadercommunicator

These are the qualities of what I call a “**leadercommunicator**,” an individual who realizes that most problems in business today lie in the absence of real communication. They apply in a crisis and every day. When done well, these courageous leaders are able to mitigate crisis, create shared meaning and move people to action.

Which one step — when implemented effectively — will be most useful to help you become a leadercommunicator?

Taking a Message Forward When You Disagree

When we plan and are purposeful, it can be relatively easy to communicate topics we support and care about. But how do you deliver messages that you don't support or agree with?

Communicate a Tough Topic in a Supportive Way

The first person you need to lead is yourself, and then you can be in a better position to communicate with others. It's not unlike what airlines say in the unlikely event of an emergency – put on your oxygen mask first before you help others.

Hopefully, you've had a chance to share your thoughts and engage on the tough topic before you need to communicate it. When that happens, as long as you feel that your opinion was heard, it's easier to set aside your own perspective and communicate in a supportive way.

If the decision is still bothering you, think about what you do agree with first and focus on that. Then, reflect on the parts of the decision that you struggle with. Do you agree with the outcome and disagree with how something's being handled? Disagree with the timing? Disagree with how it's being communicated overall?

Use that reflection time as a way of learning something about yourself, and owning what you disagree with. You then have a greater chance of not having these thoughts control you as you move forward and communicate.

Know that you're not going to agree with everything your company is doing, and that's okay. You still can lead in a professional, helpful and inspirational way by putting your personal opinions aside for the larger good.

If there's nothing you agree with, you might need to reflect on your fit with that team and organization.

Taking a Message Forward When You Disagree

Planning Your Communications Increases Your Chances of Success

Once you've taken care of yourself, you're now ready to plan your communications to increase your likelihood of success. As you do, remember what your goal is, especially with difficult issues – your goal is not to get people to *like* what you communicate (and you might be in that camp, too). Your goal is to get them to *understand* what you're communicating.



Your goal is not to get people to *like* what you communicate; your goal is to get them to *understand* what you're communicating.

Remember – we make the weather. And sometimes we – as leaders – might be rained on ourselves, or might feel like we're getting poured on without an umbrella.

In that case, it's our job to dry off, reflect on what happened, and make great weather for our team.

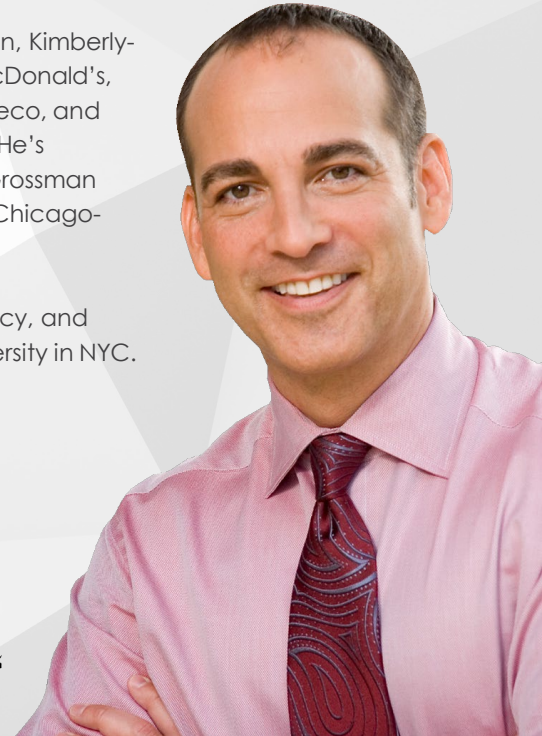
In what ways are you making great weather for your team?

David Grossman, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA, CSP

David helps leaders drive productivity and get the results they want through authentic and courageous leadership and communication. He's a sought-after speaker and advisor to Fortune 500 leaders, and three-time author. His latest book, "No Cape Needed: The Simplest, Smartest, Fastest Steps to Improve How You Communicate By Leaps and Bounds," recently won the Pinnacle Book Award for the "Best in Business" category and the Beverly Hills International Book Award's President's award.

His other books include, "You Can't NOT Communicate: Proven Communication Solutions That Power the Fortune 100," now in its second edition, and its follow up, "You Can't NOT Communicate 2". His leader**communicator** blog is also ranked the #1 blog on communication by Feedspot two years in a row. David counsels leaders at top organizations to unleash the power of strategic internal communication and drive performance. Clients include Allstate, CVS Health,

Hill-Rom, Johnson & Johnson, Kimberly-Clark, Lockheed Martin, McDonald's, NYU Langone Health, Tenneco, and Wyndham, among others. He's Founder and CEO of The Grossman Group, an award-winning Chicago-based strategic leadership development and internal communications consultancy, and teaches at Columbia University in NYC.



David has been featured in:

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.  NIGHTLY NEWS  TODAY Chicago Tribune FASTCOMPANY Los Angeles Times



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