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Messenger

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Communication Plans for Change, Part 2

In our last issue, we began looking at the importance of creating a plan to communicate change throughout your organization. We've already discussed how written notices and town hall meetings can be utilized to convey your message about the change plan. This month, we will look at four other options.

Kickoff rallies - Kickoff rallies are an effective means of arousing interest and commitment from the staff to a change initiative. The rally is similar to a town hall meeting in that it gives people time to ask questions. However, the kickoff rally is different in that the entire change team normally shares the platform and multiple presenters address the audience. You may ask each presenter to break the changes down into bite size pieces and to explain, by department, how each employee will be affected. Kickoff rallies are normally very exciting and well attended. They give the entire change team an opportunity to present a unified, positive stand. You will find that kickoff rallies generate a fast buy-in from the staff. For that reason, rallies may serve to jumpstart the change process. In many kickoff meetings, upper management will provide a banquet supper or lunch as a token of good will for the employees.

E-mail - Creating an e-mail is relatively easy. Using this method gives management one more tool to notify employees about concerns, meetings, or new changes and progression. When e-mails are mentioned, many executives rule them out in favor of more traditional forms of communication, especially word of mouth. While word of mouth

can be effective, the potential for messages to unintentionally be distorted, misunderstood, or corrupted is extremely high. To work effectively, the lower managers must be relied upon to provide the frontline employees with vital and often highly detailed information. In the communication chain, omissions and additions can occur that compromise the integrity of the original message. If a manager fails to convey a particular piece of information, this leaves staff out of the loop. They may feel that management did not trust them; and management is frustrated with the misinformation that is circulating throughout the organization. In contrast, e-mails convey information so that it reaches everyone in the same form. You may discover that some of your people will use e-mails to counteract the information they receive on the grapevine.

Newsletters - During massive change, some organizations have successfully used a newsletter to communicate progress. This is normally done on programs that last longer than two or three months. For example, a program that is implemented in several phases. Giving details of the phases and progression of the change helps people stay focused. Using newsletters also allows you to publicly recognize staff members who go above and

Do something. If it doesn't work, do something else. No idea is too crazy.
Jim Hightower

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beyond what is expected in their work. Pictures and graphics can help to tell the story with great clarity.

Training - Training is a vital part of the change effort. Training allows communication to take place while equipping employees with the skills necessary to make the transition process run smoothly. For example, an organization may conduct several programs on creating a positive work environment so they can overcome negativity between departments. This helps employees understand

techniques that work in changing personal and professional negativity, and it also builds morale. Another example is training the entire management team in strategic planning or conventional planning skills. This refreshes the skills of the team and encourages them to function at a higher skill level.

It is important to use multiple methods for communicating the vision and plan for change to all the personnel. Upper management must design a communication plan for dispensing information to the staff in a way that will reduce misinformation and increase trust and respect.

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