



Smart guide

# Transform leader communication from flab to fab

Strengthen your core program in 3 months



# Introduction

## Leaders have an essential communication role

To earn employee trust and inspire them to do their best work every day. But too often, leaders find themselves communicating in a way that is dull and outdated, leaving employees feeling disconnected.

### So here's your challenge:

#### Turn your leader into a communication all star in 90 days:

In the same time it takes a fitness guru to transform your body, you can create a comprehensive communication program that will move your leader from another talking head to a confident communication all star.

### We've divided the process into three phases:

- ① Assess
- ② Plan
- ③ Implement

**We've also included maintenance,** so you can continually adjust your plan and avoid falling back into old habits.



# 1 Assessment

Just as you would assess your current fitness level before beginning an exercise routine, you need to understand your leader's situation before developing his/her communication program.

## 4 ways to gather information for a sustainable program

### A. Gather employee intel

To lead effectively, your leader needs to understand who her employees are and what they need. Make informed recommendations to your leader by doing research first. For example:

- Review demographics
- Use existing survey data to understand what's on employees' minds
- Conduct a pulse survey or several focus groups to assess knowledge of key topics

### B. Interview the team

Speak with a few of your leader's direct reports, who can provide insight into his/her style and preferences. Ask questions like:

- What do you think is the biggest challenge the leader faces when communicating with employees?
- How well does the leader's style and approach fit our culture?
- What advice would you give the leader to better connect with employees?



DAYS  
1-14

### Conduct a virtual focus group for fast feedback

When you need employee feedback fast, consider holding one or more virtual focus groups. Using an online meeting tool like Webex or Skype allows you to bring employees together from various locations in one virtual session.

The challenge is to keep employees focused on the discussion while giving them lots of opportunities to participate. So build in techniques like:

- Conduct a word association exercise to test perceptions
- Show a process to determine whether employees understand it
- Use a whiteboard or annotation tools to brainstorm ideas

# 1 Assessment

## C. Consider big changes/initiatives

Find out if there is a key reason to communicate in the near future. If so, consider:

- Aligning the leader's communication efforts with that change or initiative
- Allowing his/her to deliver the kick-off communication
- Sending his/her on a roadshow to talk with employees
- Having his/her announce advocates for the change or initiative

## D. Interview your leader

Now that you've got the inside scoop, sit down with your leader. Prepare a list of questions to make sure you cover everything you want to ask. Here are some questions we recommend:

- From your perspective, what is our top priority this year?
- What do you see as communication's primary role in helping the organization achieve its objectives?
- As a leader, how do you define your role as a communicator?
- What is your biggest challenge as a communicator?
- What is your preferred method of communication?
- In your experience, was there a time when your communication was very successful? What made it successful?



## Tips on effective one-on-one interviews

- Create a written interview guide to help you stay on track and cover all the bases
- Choose a location for the interview where you won't be distracted—ideally, not the leader's office
- Start by stating your objectives, both for the interview and for the overall leader program you're working on
- Allow the leader to go on a tangent, but bring him/her back on track to make sure you get your questions answered



## 2 Plan

Just as a trainer customizes a workout plan based on your abilities and target areas, develop your leader's communication program to build on strengths, improve weaknesses and help achieve his/her objectives.

### Use insights from Phase 1 to create your plan

#### Balance the communication mix

Just as a trainer would include equal attention to all of the muscle groups, make sure to balance your leader's communication program.

#### Develop the cadence

Now that you've chosen the right mix, target how often your leader should work out her communication muscles, including the number of repetitions. You may have to start slowly and then gradually increase intensity for optimal conditioning.



#### For example

A leader whose goal is to improve employee engagement might follow this plan:

Face to face	
Walk around and talk to employees at each location	1 time per year
Address all employees at each location	4 times per year
Host small group coffee chats at each location	8 times per year
Written	
Write an email message (with optional video)	6 times per year
Post a blog	26 times per year



## 2 Plan

### Set expectations about the roles of leaders

It's essential to articulate the role your leader will play, as well as the role of his/her direct reports, and then provide support to fulfill leaders' communication responsibilities.

### Document your plan and set up regular meetings

A great way to get your leader's commitment to the program is to write it down. Include a detailed tactical calendar that you agree to review and adjust regularly.



### Ideas to create balance

#### If your leader likes:

- Speaking at all-employee meetings

#### Then try this too:

- Hold small-group meet-and-greet sessions

#### If your leader likes:

- Giving scripted presentations with PowerPoint®

#### Then try this too:

- Conducting a brainstorm session with flipcharts and markers

#### If your leader likes:

- Writing an intranet blog or email message

#### Then try this too:

- Host informal discussions or Q&A

#### If your leader likes:

- Conducting a large, comprehensive survey

#### Then try this too:

- Walk around to ask employees questions

#### If your leader likes:

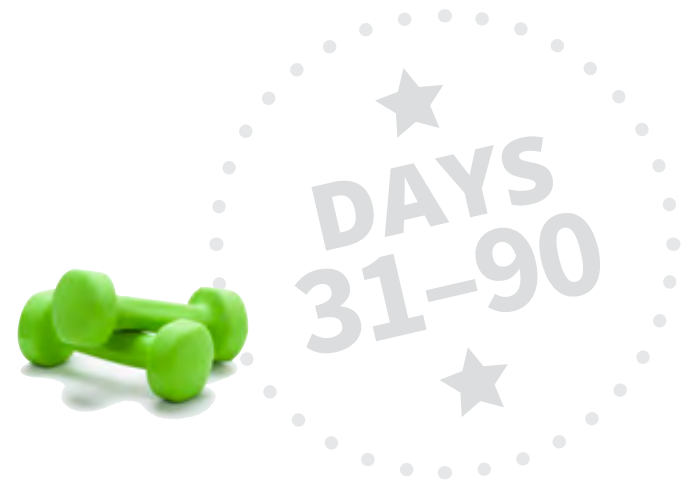
- Sharing insights via pre-recorded video

#### Then try this too:

- Gather insights by going on a listening tour

## 3 Implementation

Now that you've developed the plan, it's time to warm up those communication muscles—and just do it!



### 3 ways to ensure success

#### A. Follow the plan and be prepared

Keep your tactical calendar handy and refer to it often. Be sure you and your leader are prepared for every upcoming opportunity to communicate. Even casual, unscripted interaction requires thorough preparation!

#### B. Provide tools

Give your leader and his/her direct reports talking points, a core presentation deck, fact sheets and FAQs to communicate about priorities, share progress and celebrate accomplishments.

#### C. Encourage and advise

Now that you've set the plan in motion, continue to remind your leader of the importance of employee engagement. Encourage his/her to:

- Empower leaders at the next level to align with key messages and communicate with employees regularly
- Share his/her communication calendar with employees so they see the effort being made



#### Hire a personal trainer

Not necessarily a fitness trainer. But if your leader is uncomfortable with unrehearsed interaction, don't be afraid to suggest a professional communication coach. Leaders often go through training to learn how to handle the media and may benefit from advice on how to handle employee sessions.



# Maintenance

Congratulations! You've completed the 90-day challenge and your leader is a communication pro. But like any workout regimen, it'll be tough to stay on track. With a bit of planning, you can help your leader keep her all-star status.

## Keep the momentum going with these 4 tips

### A. Set realistic goals for improvement

Continue to make incremental improvements to your program, but be realistic. Setting the bar too high will set your leader up for failure.

### B. Mix it up

Evaluate and adjust your mix of channels as needed.

### C. Measure up

To understand progress, compare your current state with the baseline you set during the assessment phase and continue to measure regularly.

### D. Keep it fresh

Avoid the dreaded plateau by changing up just one or two details of your program every so often and make your leader's interactions with employees more memorable.



### Watch for schedule changes

Events that may affect your leader's communication calendar may change. And keep in touch with his/her administrative assistant who is invaluable for inside information about your leader's schedule.



# The leaders in internal communication

**We're Davis & Company**, the employee communication experts. Since 1984, leading organizations have depended on us to reach, engage and motivate their employees. Our strategic mindset, creative spirit and practical know-how can solve your toughest communication challenges. Give us a call. We'd love to help.

To schedule a consultation, contact [Vaishali Benner](#) or call 1-877-399-5100.

## Take leader communication to the next level

We can help you to:

- Develop a communication strategy for leaders
- Articulate roles and expectations
- Brief leaders so they understand content and their role
- Create supporting content such as toolkits and FAQs
- Coach leaders to improve how they communicate

## 5 things to know about us



**Global.** We've created communication programs that reach employees across the world, in nearly every continent (but not, we admit, Antarctica).



**Experienced.** We have decades of experience in communicating change, initiatives, HR programs and policies, and many other topics.



**Collaborative.** Our favorite way of working is to meet with our clients and put our heads together.



**Client-focused.** Our mission is to help you solve your problems. To set you up for success. To make sure you get the recognition you deserve. (We think you get the picture.)



**Acclaimed.** We've won hundreds of awards and routinely earn the praise of clients and colleagues.