

Communication toolkits

that work for leaders and managers

**5 ingredients
for compelling, effective
toolkits**



Smart guide



T

ools to encourage communication

Getting your organization's leaders and managers to effectively communicate change initiatives is hard work. Picture the traditional cascade. Just because you email leaders a PowerPoint doesn't mean they'll understand their communication role, or share information with their organizations or teams.

The good news is that you can provide leaders (vice presidents or department/location heads) and managers (those who supervise employees) with **tools that will encourage them to communicate about essential topics**. The key is to make sure toolkits provide information that's relevant and easy to understand, and that tools are designed to meet managers' needs.

DON'T BE THE COMMUNICATOR WHO CRIED WOLF!

Avoid overloading busy leaders and managers with toolkits on "business as usual" topics so that they'll be more likely to take action when you really need it.

Use communication toolkits for major changes or initiatives that require leaders and managers to initiate two-way communication with their teams, such as:

- ▶ New company strategy
- ▶ Mergers or acquisitions
- ▶ Layoffs
- ▶ Business reorganization
- ▶ New IT system or way of working
- ▶ Big shift in employee benefits or pay structure



5 ingredients for compelling, effective toolkits

Don't let your toolkit be seen as just another email or task on an already full to-do list. Here are five key components for creating a successful communication toolkit that inspires busy leaders and managers to take action and provides the results your organization needs.

1 Include a CEO/senior leader message



Want your communication toolkit to “rise to the top” of a leader’s inbox? Include a brief message from your CEO or other senior leader to reinforce the importance of the topic.

Often leaders and managers know what’s changing in their own area, but don’t get the full extent of the organization-wide implications. Use this message as an opportunity to provide the big-picture context.



SET THE STAGE FOR CHANGE

An important step in preparing leaders and managers to communicate a change is to give them a situation analysis—a snapshot of what’s going on at that moment in time. This not only builds a strong foundation for your efforts, it also helps you make a case for your objectives, strategies and tactics.

A situation analysis usually describes the contributing factors behind a change effort, such as:

- ▶ Shifting market or industry trends
- ▶ Recent organizational changes (structural or staffing)
- ▶ Employee survey or focus group results
- ▶ Rollout of new corporate goals/objectives
- ▶ New expectations for employees to work differently

2 Clarify expectations



Your change efforts are more likely to be successful if leaders and managers are actively involved. While your CEO probably understands his or her role, vice presidents and managers further down in the organization may not see themselves as key change communicators.

Clearly explaining the following will ensure that everyone understands what's expected:

Element	Example
Audience	"You are receiving these tools as one of our top 100 global leaders."
Purpose/Role	"You are key to our change efforts. Use this toolkit as a guide to better understand the initiative and help translate what it means to employees in your area of the business."
Timing	"Schedule a team meeting within 30 days to answer questions and discuss next steps for your department."



3 Provide key content



One of the pitfalls of leader cascades is that the message you're trying to get to employees often becomes distorted or lost in the shuffle (like a game of "telephone"). A key message document clearly outlines "the facts" and ensures that everyone in your company—no matter how far they are from headquarters—will get the same story. It also provides leaders and managers with a "script" to get the conversation started with their teams.



YOUR KEY MESSAGE SHOULD INCLUDE:

Elevator speech: a short summary (2-3 sentences) used to quickly and simply explain what the change is, why it's happening and what it means for employees. Here's an example:

Our industry will be faced with significant change over the next five years, and we won't be successful doing business the same way. We need to work differently and be leaner, faster and stronger. And while our competitors try to steal our customers, we'll win by creating and offering better products and services.

Talking points: short, conversational scripts used to explain specific parts of a change in greater detail.



4 Give advice about how to communicate



When leaders and managers understand what's expected of them, they are more likely to go out and talk to their teams about a change. You can set them up for success by explaining their communication role and why it's important. Here's an example of what we mean:

Your role	Why it's important
Emphasize what matters	Employees look to leaders to provide direction and focus
Interpret the big picture to convey "what it means to us"	Abstract high-level information becomes concrete and meaningful
Allow ample time for questions, answer what questions you can, get back to employees with answers	Dialogue is the most important tool in communication: it allows employees to participate and helps them work through issues
Listen to employees' questions, concerns and ideas	Listening demonstrates that you value employees and respect their viewpoint



CREATE A CHECKLIST

To help leaders and managers kick start their communication efforts, give them a checklist that provides concrete steps they can take to ensure employees understand and act on a change. Here are some examples of "action items" you may want to include in your checklist:

- ✓ Ensure every team member signs up for training on the new system.
- ✓ Schedule regular updates on the change initiative during monthly staff meetings.
- ✓ Create regular "open office" hours for team members to discuss questions or concerns.
- ✓ Provide my supervisor with any feedback or concerns from my team about the change.



5 Invest in FAQs



A good list of FAQs is like a crystal ball—not only does it help leaders and managers predict the tough questions employees are likely to ask, it also gives them the information they need to respond knowledgeably and honestly. This sets up leaders and managers to be the first place employees go to for information.

Here are some questions to think about when drafting your FAQs for an upcoming initiative or change:

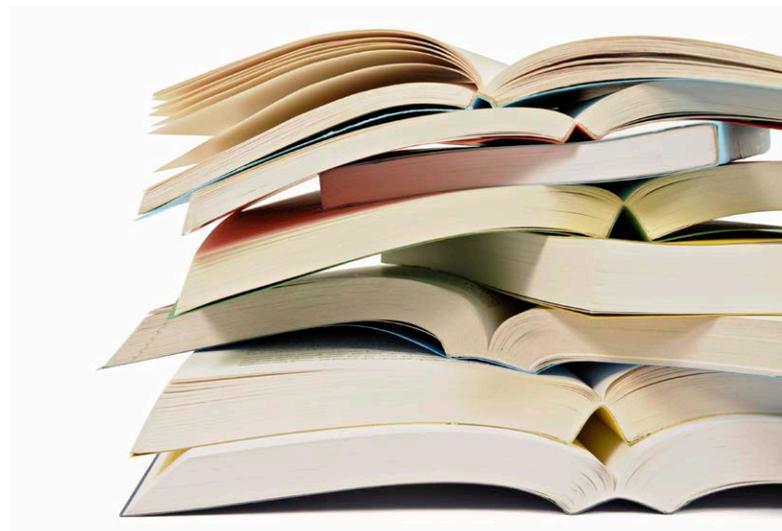
- ▶ What is the change and why is it important?
- ▶ When will it occur?
- ▶ Who will be impacted?
- ▶ What do I need to do differently?
- ▶ Where can I go to ask questions or get more info?

THREE WAYS TO REDUCE “CHANGE ANXIETY”

Leaders and managers are people too, so they feel the same anxiety and uncertainty that employees do about change.

To put leaders and managers at ease, create opportunities for them to talk about change and what it means to their teams. You can:

- ▶ Host a web meeting to review communication materials and answer questions.
- ▶ Schedule face-to-face Q&A sessions, especially for big changes such as layoffs or mergers.
- ▶ Create a discussion board on your leader/manager intranet site to post questions and share success stories.





DAVIS
& COMPANY

11 Harristown Road
Glen Rock, NJ 07452
201.445.5100

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To schedule a consultation,
just call us at 1-877-399-5100
or email Alison Davis at
alison.davis@davisandco.com.