Smart guide

4 steps for creating awesome FAQs

Help managers answer employees' burning questions

DAVIS & COMPANY

Why do managers love FAQs?

When employees have questions about a workplace topic or issue that impacts them, such as a big change, they first turn to their managers for answers. However, managers often struggle with this important communication role because they aren't knowledgeable about the topic they're supposed to talk about. And managers hate to be put in the position of saying, "I don't know" when an employee asks a question.

What's the best tool to prepare managers to communicate confidently with employees? FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) provide managers with questions employees are most likely to ask, along with the answers managers need. So, when an employee asks, "Got a minute for a quick question?", managers are ready to respond!

This Smart guide will take you through a simple four-step process for creating awesome FAQs. You'll learn how to identify employees' most burning questions, provide clear answers and make it easier for managers to communicate with their teams.

Help managers answer employees' questions

Example

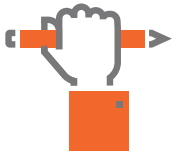
Q: Is training being provided to help employees learn how to use the PMP Tracker?

A: All employees have access to the following training materials on the HR portal:

- Demo videos
- E-learning modules
- Instructional reference cards

4 steps for creating awesome FAQs

1. Gather great questions



2. Find the right answers

3. Fine-tune your content

4. Get approvals and launch

1 Gather great questions

What's the best way to develop questions for your FAQs? Invite key stakeholders to a one-hour (in-person or virtual) brainstorming session to identify questions that managers need to answer.

Who should you invite to your FAQs brainstorm? Any of these people:

- **Leaders –** to share the "big picture" perspective (the business impact)
- **Subject matter experts (SMEs) –** to provide very specific details about the issue/topic
- **Senior communication person –** to provide an outside perspective and to ensure your questions are addressing employees' needs
- **Managers (from different business units or regions) –** to provide insight into what employees in their specific area will want to know

To kick off the brainstorm, ask participants to focus on what employees need to know, believe or do as a result of the topic/issue/change. Then write down as many questions as you can on colored slips of paper; the more specific, the better! Post the questions on a wall and group by similar themes/categories. Also, identify who can answer these questions. (This will come in handy later.)

Following the brainstorming session, document all the questions in a Word document and share with participants. Ask them to let you know if any questions were missed and who can answer them.

Where else can I find great questions?

Employees ask great questions during town halls, staff meetings and training sessions. So, jot them down and use them as a starting point for your FAQs brainstorming session.

Make questions specific

Examples

Q: Do these changes affect current team members who are Medicare-eligible?

Q: What if I'm 65, but my spouse/dependent is not (or vice versa)?

2 Find the right answers

Now that you have a comprehensive list of questions, it's time to start answering them. Here's our suggested approach:

- **Answer as many questions as you can first,** leveraging existing content, such as key messages or talking points.
- **Contact SMEs to help fill in the blanks.** But instead of just emailing SMEs the questions, set up a quick 15-minute, in-person or phone interview to get deeper context and detail.
- **Include examples** to illustrate your meaning and make your answers more relevant to managers and employees. For example, don't just say that the new IT system will save time. Explain that it currently takes employees 20 minutes to complete a task, but using the new system will only take 10 minutes.

How candid should answers be?

As straightforward as you can possibly make them (while still getting approval from Legal and other cautious types). If the document becomes watered-down and spun, FAQs lose their credibility—and their value to managers.

What if I don't have an answer yet to a key question?

If you don't have enough information (or it's too soon) to answer a question that you know employees will ask, don't throw it out! Instead, give managers a clear and transparent response. For example, if the question is "Will there be layoffs?" provide this answer: "At this time, no decision has been made regarding layoffs. Senior leaders will let employees know as soon as possible if a decision is made."

Ask experts to answer your questions

Example

Q: My state has specific requirements around special absences. How do I enter these in the time tracking system?

A: Certain states have specific requirements around special absences, which may require you to input certain codes when you enter your time. Please check HR policy on absences for more information if you are in one of the following states: Arkansas, Colorado or New Jersey.

Make answers candid

Example

Q: Will similar jobs be compensated the same around the world?

A: We have worked carefully to establish a common job level structure with salary ranges based on the local market. This means that jobs with similar knowledge and experience requirements will have the same job level regardless of where they are located. However, they will not have the same salary range because compensation for each level is based on local market.

3 Fine-tune your content

If you want to ensure your FAQs are truly useful for managers, you need to make your questions and answers simple and scannable.

Here are some tips to make your content clear and concise:

- Write at an **eighth-grade reading level** or lower; run a "readability statistics" report using Microsoft Word to determine the level.
- Use a **conversational and friendly** tone.
- Use **short** paragraphs and sentences.

Managers are pressed for time, and are likely to pick through your FAQs for questions they care about most. Here are some tips to make your FAQs scannable:

- Break your questions into **categories** and list them at the top of your document (like a table of contents.) For example, for a change about performance management, create one category for setting goals, another for mid-year reviews and another for year-end evaluations.
- Use **key words in bold font** at the beginning of your questions so they're easy to scan for relevant info.
- Use **bullet points and lists** to make content easier to follow.

What should I avoid when creating my FAQs?

There are three things you should steer clear of when you're editing your FAQs:

- **Corporate jargon.** Employees can see through the meaningless jargon. Be conversational; write the way your audience speaks.
- **Acronyms or terms managers won't easily understand.** Without definitions, these words are merely taking up valuable space.
- **Empty answers.** If your answer dances around the question without directly addressing it, you'll lose credibility.

Keep answers short

Example

Q: What changes will the compensation program bring?

A: Effective January 1, employees will receive a new job grade based on their current responsibilities and the geographic location in which they work. Your manager will schedule a time with you in December to tell you your new job grade.

Put key words at the beginning of questions

Poor example

Where is the link for the new tool's instructions?

Good example

Are instructions located on the home page?

Avoid corporate jargon

Poor example

Synergistic collaboration is imperative for streamlining efficiencies.

Good example

To improve productivity, we must work together.

4 Get approvals and launch

You've compiled a great list of FAQs, and you're eager to share them with your managers. But before you do, you need to have a strategy to get the approvals you need and to successfully introduce your FAQs to managers.

When it comes to the approval process, the more people you involve, the more difficult it will be to get sign off on your FAQs. And you don't have time to waste. So, keep your approval team tight—**five to six people**—including some of the stakeholders you invited to your FAQ brainstorm (see Step 1).

And when you get the go ahead to launch your FAQs, don't just attach them to an email and hit send. Instead, create an intranet **resource hub** for managers that includes your FAQs and other useful tools (such as talking points) that managers may need to talk to their teams. You can also add a social media platform that allows managers to provide feedback, such as ideas for new FAQs.

Remember, creating great FAQs isn't always a "one and done" effort. You may need to add or edit questions over time, and managers can really help you out.

Who do you involve in approvals?

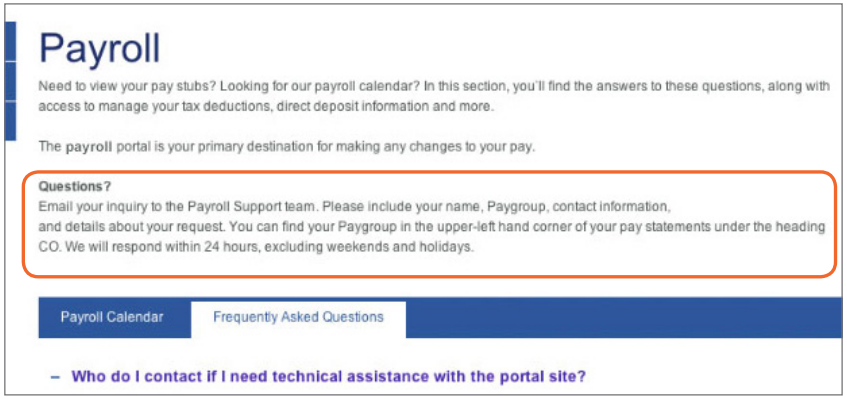
Your approval team should include:

- **Key leader** (whoever is sponsoring the effort/initiative)
- **Subject matter experts** (two to three key players)
- **Senior communication person**
- **Legal and/or HR representative** (if needed)

How do I ensure managers understand the FAQs?

Set up a 30-minute, web-based meeting to give managers a quick tour of your resource hub and to explain how to use the FAQs. This is also a good opportunity to let managers know what is expected of them (their communication role) and answer any questions they might have. By the end of the session, managers will feel prepared to take action.

Add FAQs to your intranet



Tip: Answer user's questions in real time—post links to FAQs on key content pages.

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 manager communication to the next level

We can help you to:

- Define managers' critical communication role
- Build managers' knowledge or skills to communicate effectively
- Create useful communication tools (e.g., talking points and FAQs)
- Prepare managers to embrace and communicate change

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.

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