

Smart guide

Communication toolkits that work for leaders and managers

5 steps to compelling,
effective toolkits





Tools to encourage communication

Getting your organization's leaders and managers to effectively communicate change initiatives is hard work.

Who are we talking about?

Leaders – Vice presidents or department/location heads

Managers – Those who supervise employees

The good news is that you can equip leaders and managers 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.

What's inside

Don't let your toolkit be seen as just another email on an already full to-do list. Here are five steps for creating a successful communication toolkit:

1. Include a CEO/senior leader message3
2. Clarify expectations.....4
3. Provide key content5
4. Give advice about how to communicate.....6
5. Invest in FAQs7

When to create toolkits

Avoid overloading busy leaders and managers with toolkits about “business as usual” topics so they're more likely to take action when you really need it.

Instead, use toolkits for major changes that require two-way communication, including:

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

Step 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 but helps you make a case for your objectives, strategies and tactics.



Why	How
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A message from the boss creates a sense of urgency/importance• The CEO/senior leader should start to set expectations• This message will help cut through the clutter	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make it brief and to the point• Don’t burden messages with how-tos; it’s not the role of the CEO to instruct• Emphasize why leaders need to communicate

Step 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:

- **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/action:** "Schedule a team meeting within 30 days to answer questions and discuss next steps for your department."



Why	How
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unless you've articulated communication roles, leaders don't understand what's expected of them • In fact, they often think communicating change "is not my job" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasize actions required • Clarify timing ("What's the deadline?") • Be as specific as possible ("Hold a meeting with your team")

Step 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 with a "script" to get the conversation started with their teams.

Your key message should include:

- **Elevator speech:** a short summary used to quickly and simply explain what the change is, why it's happening and what it means for employees
- **Talking points:** short, conversational scripts used to explain specific parts of a change in greater detail



Why	How
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't assume leaders "know all about it" (even if they've been briefed) • PowerPoint provides only sketchy details—not effective at creating learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make content digestible—leaders need to absorb it quickly: chunk it out so recipients can skim • Connect the dots and provide context • Include an "elevator speech" that sums up the topic in 50 words or fewer • Define all terms, explain everything

Step 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. Set them up for success by explaining their communication role and why it's important.

Your role:

- Emphasize what matters
- Interpret the big picture to convey “what it means to us”
- Allow ample time for questions, answer what questions you can, then get back to employees with answers
- Listen to employees' questions, concerns and ideas

Why it's important:

- Employees look to leaders to provide direction and focus
- Abstract high-level information becomes concrete and meaningful
- Dialogue is the most important tool in communication: it allows employees to participate and helps them work through issues
- Listening demonstrates that you value employees and respect their viewpoint



Why	How
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills in most organizations follow a bell curve: 20% effective, 60% middling, 20% ineffective • Leaders are most likely to pay attention to skills development when they have an urgent need to communicate • There's an opportunity to subtly improve skills in the context of communicating “this thing” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link tips on “how to” with expectations about what actions leaders/managers need to take • Include a checklist • If the topic is emotional, provide information about how leaders can respond to objections, anxiety, even bad behavior

Step 5

Invest in FAQs

A good list of FAQs helps leaders and managers predict the tough questions employees are likely to ask and also gives them the information they need to respond intelligently and honestly.

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/we need to do differently?
- Where can I go to ask questions or get more info?

Use FAQs to reduce change anxiety

The less anxious leaders and managers are about change, the more willing they'll be to answer tough questions. Here are three ways to get leaders talking:

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



Why

- For both leaders and managers, FAQs are easily digestible and comfortable to use

How

- Include the toughest Qs you can to enhance value of FAQs (and help leaders be credible and successful)
- Keep answers as short as possible
- If many questions must be included, group them by category for easy navigation

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 communication toolkits to the next level.

We can help you:

- Write the perfect CEO message
- Clearly explain communication roles
- Provide matching elevator speech
- Convey what it means to the audience
- Craft stellar FAQs

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.