

Accelerating Growth Through the Next Normal

As the world of work gets back into gear, most organizations face a growing list of company initiatives that must be addressed for the transition to be successful. However, the most pressing change initiatives right now are maintaining employee safety and adopting tools and practices that will drive continued growth during the return to work. To accomplish both, you'll need to ensure that your people, processes, and technology work in unison amidst this uniquely challenging business climate. This will require a comprehensive communication strategy.

To see your business thrive through periods of change, consider the following key areas when building your communication plan:



Your Audience

The COVID-19 pandemic is impacting everyone differently. This means it's vital that you deliberately message different groups of employees in ways that speak to their unique experiences.

For example, an employee returning after a furlough who will be in physical proximity with customers will have different adjustments to make than staff who continue working remotely and are transitioning to working from the office moving forward. A single message attempting to cover both experiences does not adequately speak to either of these groups individually.

Taking care to craft your communications according to your respective audiences is proven to increase engagement, understanding, and alignment of your workforce.



The Sender

The sender name that employees see attached to each message provides context for the scope, focus, and priority of that communication. Using a general alias to send messages may not yield the highest level of trust and engagement among an employee audience.

Benchmarking research shows that employees prefer to hear messages from two people in the organization:



The sponsor of the change (i.e. the individual directing or managing the change), in regards to business issues and reasons for change.



The employee's immediate supervisors, for the personal impact of the change.



Two-Way Feedback

Consider what feedback you've already received from your workforce during the pandemic. What are some key learnings for the organization going forward? If you do not have actionable feedback, consider ways to solicit some. Employees across the world have been diligently finding solutions to the many unique obstacles they have faced during the pandemic. Their ingenuity and creativity can teach you a lot about how to navigate the next normal moving forward.

Utilize formal and informal two-way feedback channels. Whether you use existing channels or create new ones, this "must-have" could include online mailboxes, suggestion boxes in a field office (formal), or a defined process for front-line leaders and change champions to invite and respond to employee feedback (informal). The organization must actively respond to feedback from all channels and use it to guide communication.



Consistency & Frequency of Messaging

Repetition of consistent messaging is key to driving change and comfort in establishing a new normal. It is important to establish a reliable cadence, and repeat key messages a number of times. The first time you announce a change to employees, they will often wonder how it will impact them and not focus on the details of what you are communicating. Repeating key messages ensures that what you want to get across is heard by employees. Share messages more often than you think you need to.



Planning for Multiple Scenarios

It's not possible to plan for every outcome and obstacle throughout the transition to the next phase of work, but it pays to plan for several. As an executive team or COVID-19 taskforce, map out a few different scenarios that are likely to occur during the return to work, and what type of communication should accompany them.

It may be useful to create a communication plan for the first 90 days of your organization's reopening, and what you'd like to see happen at certain points along the way (Day 10, Day 30, Day 60, etc.).





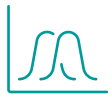
Communications to Support Major Business Objectives

In communicating to employees how your organization plans to return to work, are you also communicating the “why”? Are you considering and conveying the impact of not taking any action to return? Are you addressing the concept of “what’s in it for me” on behalf of employees, and how the changes will affect different individuals? Making sure to answer these questions through your messaging will help keep employees focused on both the end goal and why it matters.



Leveraging Proper Channels for Effective Reach

A holistic communication plan uses numerous channels to reach employees. This could include meetings, one-on-one conversations, newsletters, presentations, brainstorming workshops, lunch-and-learns, intranet Q&A forums, CDs, screen saver messages, and more. Be creative in how you communicate with employees.



Measuring and Evaluating Effectiveness of Messages

The communications team should regularly report on measures such as engagement with tools, participation in key events, feedback received and responded to, and general sentiment gathered from in-person conversations and manager check-ins. This data will allow you to personalize and adjust your communication plan as you go.





Orchestration of Communications

Before launching your communication campaign, make sure to create a shared calendar that includes dates and details for each message. This bird's-eye view will help orchestrate the different pieces of your communication plan, prevent over-saturation, and ensure that core messages are consistently delivered.



Communication Journey

With regular, personalized messaging, and sufficient, actionable feedback, you can create a comprehensive experience, or communication journey, that enables employees to adapt to a new way of working. This will look different for different organizations and their employee base, so take time to brainstorm with your team.



What experiences does your workforce need to make the right changes in behavior or take the right action steps?

Building a communication plan that cuts through the noise and gives your employees the guidance they need is no small task. Each of the above elements should be incorporated into your initial strategy, and referenced throughout the return to work. [GuideSpark Communicate Cloud®](#)—GuideSpark's change communications platform—and associated services automates processes and activities aimed at driving employees to change behavior, ultimately creating billions of dollars in value and accelerated growth in any environment. Consider the ways this platform can fuel your workforce as they accelerate toward the return to work.



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