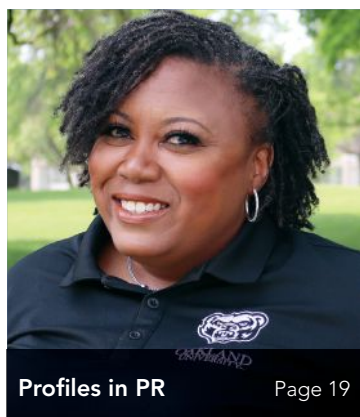
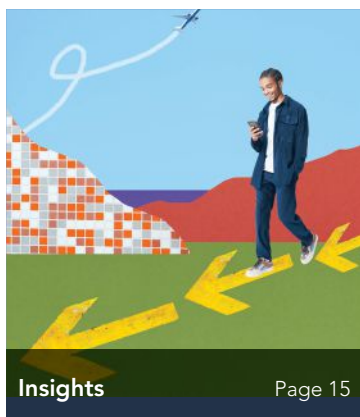
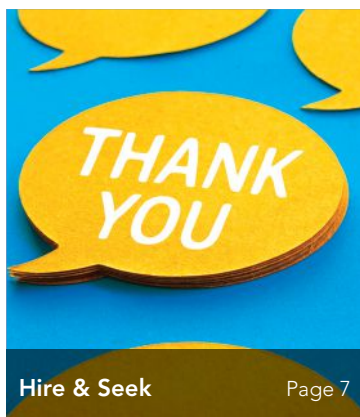


PRSA

STRATEGIES & TACTICS

Fostering an Engaged Work Culture





Set aside time in your calendar for opportunities to expand your skill sets and network at the following 2024 Section conferences:

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MAY 15–17 **Employee Communications** • Atlanta

JUNE 2–5 **Travel & Tourism** • Greenville, S.C.

JUNE 12–14 **Public Affairs & Government** • Seattle

AUG. 1–2 **Association/Nonprofit** • Washington, D.C.

SEPT. 25 **Independent Practitioners Alliance** • Virtual

OCT. 13–15 **Health Academy** • Anaheim, Calif.
(Co-located with ICON 2024)



For more information and to register, visit prsa.org/conferences

#Editor's Corner

In this issue, we continue to explore the impact of generative AI on the PR profession. Members of PRSA's Employee Communications Section discuss current topics of importance, with AI heading the list.

The Section's Connect24 Conference will have an artificial intelligence theme this May 15-17, "Connect AI: Navigating the Future of IC in an AI World."

Turn to Page 8 to see what they say about AI and other challenging issues. The online version has the full Q&A.

And check out my editor's note online for a short video interview with Connect24 chair Erica Goodwin.

An internal communications perspective from Delta Airlines

This past October, I had the chance to interview several thought leaders at ICON 2023 in Nashville, Tenn., including Gina Laughlin, vice president of global employee communications for Delta Air Lines.

In a Q&A published at PRsay, we discussed Delta's employee-first approach to internal communications and the challenges of reaching deskless employees.

Given this issue's theme, I wanted to share some of Gina's insights here:

On trends in employee communications:

We are always trying to pay attention to what is happening from a technology perspective. Where can we leverage technology to help tell our stories and get our messages across a little bit easier? What are trends in stories that employees may be connecting to or reading more often or less often?

We're trying to think about what is happening inside the organization [and what employees] may be hearing from outside the organization that could influence how we craft messages or how we tell those stories. Technology is probably the biggest one, and then watching what's happening in the world, what's happening in society, to make sure we're staying attuned to messages, trends or topics that may be more relevant or less relevant on any given day.

On AI's impact on employee communications:

As internal communicators, we support Delta employees, many of whom are directly involved in supporting our customers. Being able to provide fast and accurate, automated access to information that our customers need is going to be one of the biggest benefits [of AI]. Our ability to have that communications machine — whether it's information that employees need to do their jobs, or that employees need to pass along to customers — could be a big benefit.

I'll also be watching how employees — and how all of us — trust information differently. Do we trust information that comes from a machine differently than we trust information sourced from a human?

Do policy- and procedure-related, technical communications feel more accurate coming from an AI-driven apparatus? Do communications on behalf of an individual or brand feel less authentic when driven by machine learning? Those are things we're going to be looking at in the years ahead.

On how internal communications professionals can help build trust for an organization:

Internal comms is so important to building trust and credibility and connecting employees — not only to the mission and the purpose of the organization but also to the leaders of the organization and to each other.

Every day, there's something we get to do to make an employee feel more connected. It's that transparent communication, that connected experience that builds trust and credibility over time.

Scan the QR code to read the full interview with Gina. ❖



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Strategies & Tactics (ISSN 2576-2028) is published 10 times per year by the Public Relations Society of America, 120 Wall Street, Floor 21, New York, NY 10005. March 2024. Volume 7, Number 3.

Nonmember domestic subscription rate: \$125 a year. One-year rate for Canada \$175. Subscriptions must be paid in U.S. funds with the check drawn on a U.S. bank. Single copies \$15 each. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to PRSA, *Strategies & Tactics*®, 120 Wall Street, Floor 21, New York, NY 10005. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing office. Copyright 2024 by Public Relations Society of America.

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PRSA Appoints Senior Counsel to 2024 Board of Directors

PRSA named Heide Harrell, M.A., APR, and Scott Thornburg, APR, Senior Counsel to the 2024 Board of Directors.

Harrell is director of communications for Central Arkansas Water, a metropolitan water system serving almost 500,000 Arkansans in eight counties. Thornburg is senior director, global marketing and communications for Sojern, a \$100-million-plus travel technology firm.

"Heide and Scott are experienced servant leaders who have served across all levels of the association," said 2024 Chair Joseph Abreu, APR. "They have worked diligently with PRSA volunteers and staff for their entire careers to improve our member experience and elevate the public relations profession. Their continued work with the Board will undoubtedly help advance our



mission."

Harrell has more than 20 years of communications and marketing experience, and her many PRSA roles include serving as a member of the Board from 2020-2022 and as secretary in 2023. She has contributed to committees

and task forces that support PRSA students and PRSA's annual conference. Harrell has also been chair and director of the Southwest District and president of the Arkansas Chapter.

Thornburg's PRSA experience includes previously serving as senior counsel and director at large on the Board of Directors. He has also been the chair of the Technology Committee and a member of the Strategic Planning Committee.

He has been a strategic communications adviser for top global brands, including Oracle, ExxonMobil, Google and Nasdaq.

Board Nomination Coming Soon

PRSA is preparing to announce the application process for the 2025 Board of Directors.

Board members meet and closely collaborate with colleagues on the local, regional and national levels, supporting efforts to champion PRSA and amplifying our value with members. Their duties and responsibilities include fiscal oversight, helping to guide and oversee PRSA's strategic vision and goals, enhancing membership growth, and serving as the face of the organization, among many other projects and programs.

Visit the PRSA website or social media platforms for updates on the Board nomination announcement.

PRSA Certificate Program Will Help Journalists, Students Enter PR

Public relations continues to be an inviting profession for journalists. To help these professionals interested in new careers in communica-

tions, PRSA is offering a certificate program, "Transitioning from Journalism to PR & Comms," beginning on March 12.

The five-week course of live, online modules will connect "the needs of PR and communications entities with the skill sets of journalists and other professionals eyeing a transition," the program description reads.

Two longtime PRSA members will present the course: Jeanne Salvatore, president of JMS Communications and a PR lecturer at Seton Hall University, and Sherry Goldman, president of Goldman Communications Group and an adjunct professor in public relations at the City College of New York. The program will feature numerous guest speakers, including several former journalists.

In an interview with PRsay, Salvatore and Goldman said communications professionals and journalists share similar skills. Strong writers with media prowess and the ability to speak clearly and concisely, journalists are well suited to work in public relations. Former journalists also understand news and how to create a story hook.

Besides helping prepare former journalists to enter public relations, the certificate program will also benefit digital marketers, content creators, advertising pros and social media experts, Salvatore and Goldman said.

The course will cover the fundamentals of media relations, so those starting in public relations, including students and new professionals, can also learn from the program.

Visit the PRSA website for registration information.



What's Trending

What people were talking about on social media this past month...



@PRSA_NOLA APR Chair @cherynrobles & her team secured the \$25 million grant & are leading the @resilientNOLA 15-acre Lincoln Beach restoration efforts alongside local community beacons, charging us to save an important part of local #BlackHistory.

@PRSAHouston The Year of the Dragon is here, and with it a powerful wave of energy for change and success. Let's take inspiration from this promising year to lead our lives with boldness & bravery. Here's to a year of making the impossible possible.

@CloeyCallahan A PR person just pitched me, but started with why they don't care for a recent article I wrote... uh, what?

@PRSAOrlando We were stunned by today's turnout! We had 58 students from @UCF & @valenciacollege register for our #PRSAOrlando lunch & panel discussion. Thank you to panelists who shared insights into their careers in PR & modern media relations strategies.



6 likes

beeyoungcomms 🍷 Such a fun time visiting, learning and laughing with my Indie friends at IRL in #Orlando on Friday! 🍷 Always so good putting a voice to a face! So glad we could all spend some fun time together. Thanks @wendykurtz for all your hard work in putting it all together!



What are your frustrations with work meetings? What may make them more effective?

"Work meetings often lack a focused agenda on the purpose of the meeting & what needs to be accomplished. This leads to meetings devolving into general conversation or complaining, lasting longer than necessary." — *Kaden Jacobs, APR*

"Define the roles of participants: Are we discussing, deciding or relaying information? This applies to staff & stakeholder meetings. Be authentic in asking for engagement. If the decision has already been made, don't ask what should be done. Ask how we are going to roll it out or what we think the reaction will be." — *Andrea Watson, MPA, APR*

"Always have a purpose for the meeting. Always have an agenda & distribute it in advance. Always specify when the meeting will end." — *Tom Unger, APR, Fellow PRSA*

In Brief

Ethics Ratings Fall for Most Professions in Gallup Poll

Americans consider many professions less ethical and honest today than in recent years, a new Gallup poll finds. Members of Congress, senators, car salespeople and advertising practitioners are considered the least ethical, with single-digit ratings.

Ethics ratings for five professions hit new lows this year, including members of Congress (6%), senators (8%), journalists (19%), clergy (32%) and pharmacists (55%). Ratings for business executives (12%), bankers (19%) and college teachers (42%) tie previous lows. The last time ratings for bankers and business executives were this low was in 2009, after the Great Recession. College teachers haven't been considered this unethical since 1977.

Almost all of the 23 professions measured are viewed less positively today than a year ago or four years ago. Nurses, at 78%, top the list for honesty and ethics, compared to 85% in 2019. Veterinarians are second, at 65%. Four other occupations have majority positive ratings, even as they've fallen: engineers (60%), dentists (59%), medical doctors (56%) and pharmacists (55%).



vectorfusionart

Social Media Use Widespread Among U.S. Adults, Survey Finds

American adults use a variety of social media sites and apps, especially YouTube and Facebook, Pew Research Center finds.

Among social media platforms asked about in a September 2023 survey, YouTube was the most widely used, with 83% of respondents saying they've ever used the video-based site.

A majority of American adults surveyed (68%) say they've used Facebook, while just under half (47%) use Instagram. Among U.S. adults, 27%–35% say they use Pinterest, LinkedIn, WhatsApp and Snapchat. A third (33%) use TikTok, up from 21% in a 2021 survey. About 20% of respondents use X, formerly known as Twitter.

Adults under 30 are far more likely to use Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok, the research finds. YouTube and Facebook are the only two social media sites that majorities of all age groups use. Americans ages 30–49 report using LinkedIn, WhatsApp and Facebook at higher rates. Some 74% of adults under 30 use at least five of the social media sites studied.



viktor

1 in 2 working Americans consider chatty co-workers their main distraction in the office. — *Workamajig*

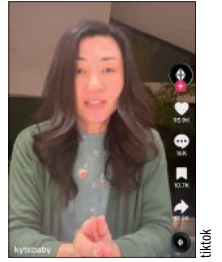
For Baby-Clothing Company, Maternity Leave Decision Raises TikTok Storm

The CEO of a small baby-clothing company issued two public apologies in January for denying a mother's request to work from home while her adopted baby was in neonatal intensive care. As Axios reported, the business disaster for woman-owned Kyte Baby spread on TikTok, becoming 2024's first communications-related crisis to go viral for a company.

The employee, Marissa Hughes, had worked in marketing at Texas-based Kyte Baby for less than a year when she adopted the prematurely born baby boy. The company said it offered her two weeks' maternity leave if she would commit to working at least another six months upon her return. Given her son's situation, Hughes said she couldn't commit to working in-person after the maternity leave ended. She proposed a remote option but was denied.

In her first video apology on TikTok, Kyte Baby CEO Ying Liu said refusing Hughes' request had been "a terrible decision" and "insensitive, selfish." After TikTok users ridiculed the first video, Liu posted a second apology, saying the first message "wasn't sincere."

"I am forever amazed at the tendency of corporate America to want to strip the humanity out of their communications, whether it be an apology or any other public statement," crisis counselor James Haggerty told CNN.



tiktok

Most U.S. Adults Can Spot Fake Political Headlines, Research Suggests

About 75% of U.S. adults can tell real political news headlines from fake ones, a new study finds. As Nieman-Lab reports, researchers at MIT and Columbia University quizzed nearly 8,000 participants from June 2019 to March 2022.

Younger, less-educated participants were less likely to pick true headlines, compared to older participants with bachelor's degrees or higher.

One quiz offered three real headlines and three fabricated headlines that journalists had written for the study. In another, participants were shown three real headlines and three fake headlines that had circulated online, provided by the fact-checking site Snopes.

According to study co-author Charles Angelucci, an assistant professor of applied economics at MIT, people who use social media tend to be less informed than the general population. Those who are politically engaged and likely to vote are more likely to choose the real headline, the research found. — *Greg Beaubien*



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- Change your address and update your contact information: prsa.org/MyPRSA/Profile
- Read the latest posts on our PRSA blog: prsay.prsa.org
- Become a PRSA member: prsa.org/JoinUs
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The Explainer

How to Boost Employee Engagement and Strengthen Relationships

Is your team highly involved in, and enthusiastic about, their work and workplace? Are they psychologically unattached to their work and company? Or are they resentful that their needs aren't being met and acting out their unhappiness?

These are the questions Gallup asked to define employee engagement in a recent study, which found that 33% of U.S. employees are engaged, while 16% are actively disengaged, according to a recent *Inc.* article.

For employees who are feeling detached from their work, Gallup reports that one meaningful conversation per week with their manager — as short as 15 minutes — can help strengthen relationships and make them feel valued.

To help make your employees feel needed, wanted and motivated, first follow the rule of recognition. "Make it a point to note what a person is doing well, what you appreciate or what you can thank them for. Your praise doesn't always have to be elaborate, but it should be sincere and specific," the article says.

Offer to collaborate and work together with others. When co-workers felt strong relationships or some sense of connection with one another, they were more likely to stay at the company longer and recommend it to others.

It's also important to clarify expectations and priorities with employees. Weekly check-ins can be beneficial and help keep everyone on track, productive and on the same page. The conversations and check-ins can be brief, as long as they are frequent and consistent. Continuous feedback can have a greater impact than a long one-off conversation.

In addition, try to get to know your teammates and employees. Ask them about themselves, what they enjoy doing, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. The answers may be helpful for workflow and help you leverage their strengths on various projects — you may get to know them better as well. "And doing so may not only increase the quality of the job, but also help motivate the person because they're being seen and heard," says *Inc.*

Here are some tips for putting these meaningful conversations into practice and boosting employee morale. — Amy Jacques

- 1 Recognize and appreciate recent work.
- 2 Offer collaboration and develop relationships.
- 3 Clarify current goals and priorities.
- 4 Keep sessions regular and brief.
- 5 Emphasize employee strengths.



By the Numbers



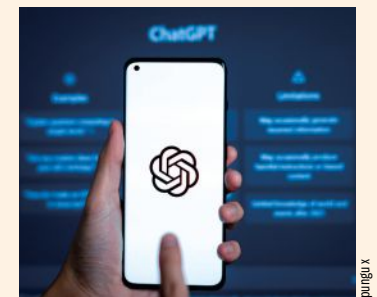
75% of study participants said they would conceal their illnesses in order to work or attend events, University of Michigan research reveals.

Most U.S. adults today say they use the internet (95%), have a smartphone (90%) or subscribe to high-speed internet at home (80%), according to a Pew Research Center survey.



Workers with managers more than 12 years older than themselves were nearly 1.5 times more likely to report low productivity, per a report from the London School of Economics and Political Science.

The percentage of professionals who use ChatGPT or similar AI tools in the workplace has more than doubled in a year, from 43% in January 2023 up to 62% 12 months later, Glassdoor data shows.



82% of corporate managers say new Gen Z hires often lack the soft skills to be successful, a Harris Poll finds.



Dispatch From Idaho

POSTCARD

"The surge in Idaho's population and job growth have been a catalyst for its public relations industry. Over the past year, several new PR firms have opened to help brands tell their story and build trust with the public. PRSA Idaho is well-positioned to capitalize on this growth and foster the professional development of competent, ethical PR practitioners."

—Malcolm Hong
Public Relations Officer, Zions Bank, Boise, Idaho
President, PRSA Idaho Chapter



Issues Trends

These were the most popular topics from our daily *Issues & Trends* e-newsletter in the past month.

- ▶▶ Concern over AI deepfakes ahead of election 2024
- ▶▶ The secrets of social media copywriting
- ▶▶ Why some hiring managers steer clear of Gen Z
- ▶▶ The weekly habit that boosts employee engagement
- ▶▶ The Taylor Swift effect on Super Bowl ads
- ▶▶ Stanley responds to concern its viral cups contain lead
- ▶▶ Exploring return-to-work policies
- ▶▶ Writing effective Chat-GPT prompts

5 Tips for Handling Group Presentations

By Rob Biesenbach



When it comes to group presentations, there are two types of people: those who are excited about the opportunity to collaborate, and confident that the final product will be better than what they could accomplish on their own; and those who dread it, fearing that the process will be difficult and chaotic and the quality will suffer.

Wherever you stand, there's no question that a group presentation is more complicated than going solo. So here are my tips for a more seamless, effective experience, whether you're part of a team delivering a new business pitch, a client update or a project proposal.

1. Speak with one voice.

While it's important to define clear and distinct roles for each team member (perhaps one does an overview, another covers strategy, another presents tactics, etc.), those components must add up to a cohesive whole.

Everyone should agree on an overarching set of messages, and the slides, structure, style and tone should be consistent from one person to the next.

2. Demonstrate chemistry.

In a new business pitch especially, the audience isn't just focused on the content; they're also evaluating whether the team acts as a team.

After all, if the group can't get it together for a presentation, how are they going to collaborate on a complex campaign or project? So, it's important to demonstrate some level of natural chemistry. And if it's not there, then it needs to be conjured!

That means plenty of give and take, where members of the team chime in, add additional perspective, complete each other's thoughts and generally show they're in tune with each other.

3. Be likable.

We're naturally attracted to people we "click" with.

So, in a new business pitch, when credentials and experience among competing agencies are roughly equal, it often comes down to that X factor. Who can the client picture spending hours, weeks and months with in the trenches?

And in any type of group presentation, creating affinity is key to connecting. So be warm, be open and be funny (where appropriate). Show some personality. Exude passion for the idea and the opportunity.

Pro tip: Being likable starts with

liking each other!

4. Tune in.

How often have you seen this in a group presentation? When one person is presenting, the others are buried in their notes, preparing for their moment in the spotlight.

That's not a good look! Even when others are doing the talking, everyone needs to be "on" and engaged. That means looking at the speaker, paying attention to what they're saying, and offering verbal and nonverbal reinforcement.

It's also important to monitor the audience. Gauge the temperature of the room. Take note of their expression and body language. Do they look confused? Skeptical? Bored?

That might be a time to break in and ask if they have a question or need clarification.

Remember: The best presentations are a dialogue, not a monologue. Involve the audience. Make it a conversation.

5. Practice together.

I've been part of group presentations where we spent so much time discussing and developing the material that there was almost no time left to rehearse.

So be sure to do several run-throughs. Don't speed through them or skip around — you have to know whether it fits the allotted time.

Work on the transitions. The handoffs should be as smooth as possible (which again demonstrates teamwork). Tee up the

next presenter, as in: "That's our recommended strategy. Now Stuart is going to walk us through the deliverables and milestones."

And refer to other presenters: "Here's a look at the customer care team that Kevin referenced" or, "As Stacey will outline later..."

Finally, of course, in a group setting, all the usual rules about presenting apply. You have to understand your audience, structure the content clearly, tell stories, create sharp visuals, bring energy to your delivery and all the rest.

If you do it right and make it a true team effort, then the result should amount to more than the sum of its parts. ❖

Rob Biesenbach helps leaders break free from death by PowerPoint, tell their story and communicate like humans should. He's an in-demand speaker, workshop leader and coach, an award-winning communicator and a bestselling author. He's worked with great organizations including AARP, Allstate, Caterpillar, Coca-Cola and Lockheed Martin.



Prioritize Employee Comms and Relationships

By Melissa Vela-Williamson, M.A., APR



When my firm develops a strategic communications plan, we include a target publics section that lists employees. In marketing terms, "publics" equals "audience." In PR terms, we should consider employees as key stakeholders.

Clients often seem surprised that employees are included as a targeted audience. Communication should always be distributed from the inside, out. No organizational brand or initiative comes to life without employees. For example, if store employees aren't aware of a new product launch, their customers aren't served, and the purchase may not happen.

Recently, my family was looking for a Monster Jam event coupon that commercials stated would be available at our nearest Great Clips. Four locations later, we still had not found one. On each store visit, the Great Clips employees said they weren't familiar with the promotion. They looked frustrated or even embarrassed during our visits.

Employees who don't know what's happening feel left out, disconnected or worse — disenfranchised. This lack of communication was a missed opportunity for both internal and external relationship building.

I talked with Amanda Todd, director of internal communication at the cybersecurity company Expel, to learn more about employee communication, culture, and engagement. This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

How do we best foster employee engagement in today's environment?

Building engagement is more challenging than ever, especially with employee engagement rates on a steady decline since 2021, per Gallup research. Investing in employee communications is a key strategy to foster engagement. In today's environment, the intentionality and frequency of our communication matter. Too much, and employees tune out; too little, and concerns about a lack of information arise.

To reignite engagement, focus on writing meaningful words, keep it concise, maintain authenticity and ensure clarity. Train others who communicate with employees to adopt this approach.

How are employees adjusting to post-pandemic changes?

It depends on the industry and the jobs. Many frontline workers didn't have

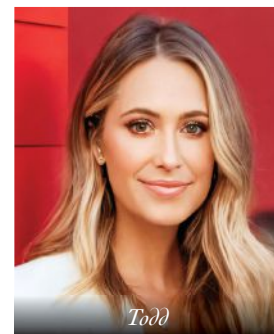
the luxury of working from home during an incredibly tenuous few years, and that's created a burnout unlike anything we've ever seen. This is prevalent in teachers and nurses.

The sentiment and behaviors matter, because the effects of 2020 on workers in such industries have yet to be realized. It's our job to recognize and plan for care and compassion for those who kept our world turning when many of us were able to stay home.

The sentiment from a comms perspective should be to keep paying attention and driving leaders to consider what's best for workforces. Once those decisions and plans are decided, communicate them clearly and with compassion.

There can be five generations of employees in the workforce. How should we approach that as communicators?

Our success hinges on two key strategies: Identify the universal thread that connects us all on a human level, irrespective of age. Recognize the importance of leveraging various communication channels.



While common threads unite us, it's crucial to acknowledge that different generations often gravitate toward distinct storytelling platforms. By strategically uncovering shared experiences and utilizing a blend of channels, we can effectively reach our audiences with precision and intent.

What seems to matter most to employees regarding company culture?

One of my favorite business authors, Ashley Goodall, wrote a book with Marcus Buckingham called "Nine Lies About Work." The first "lie" they outline in their book is, "People care about the companies they work for." Research suggests that's categorically false.

People don't care about the company they work for. People care about which team they're on, because that's where work, and culture, happens.

Employees don't cite leaving companies because the culture is bad. They cite that their manager or team doesn't embody the culture, and that matters most. The day-to-day experiences employees have are where culture takes root.

As communicators, we must ensure leaders understand what behaviors we expect and drive greater accountability to demonstrate that, because it matters. ❖

Melissa Vela-Williamson, M.A., APR, specializes in integrating public relations with DEI principles. She is an author, podcast host and boutique firm owner. Connect with her at MWW Communications.



A Renewed Look at Company Culture

By Mark Mohammadpour, APR, Fellow PRSA

You are in a powerful position to play a significant role in influencing and defining company culture.

Whether we're working from home 100% of the time, in a hybrid situation where you may or may not meet your team in person, or some other agreement with your company, how we work today and in the future will constantly evolve.

The data shows there's a disconnect with remote employees. Gallup states, "28% of exclusively remote employees strongly agree that they feel connected to their organization's mission and purpose."

But what does this mean for you and your team?

As PR leaders whose job is to build relationships, this is our opportunity to shine. No other profession has the skills and experience to help companies redefine their culture.

Companies with a strong and understood culture will retain their employees and see an increase in productivity, trust and rapport, reducing turnover and improving business results.

A new look at company culture should be addressed in three areas:

1. Your relationship with your manager
2. Your relationship with your immediate team
3. Your expanded circle of engagement and influence

Let's break this down.

First, and this is no surprise, your relationship with your manager will significantly impact your opinion on the company culture. They are the ones who, ideally, think about the role you play in the business and you as a person. They understand you're a human, not a robot, and will have peaks and valleys.

As an employee, you will realize the same about your manager. This relationship has a direct impact on your relationship with the company.

To do

At least once per quarter, have a focused 1:1 conversation with your manager about your experiences at the company. The discussion should relate to broader themes of your relationship with the business.



These can be positive experiences to share with others in the company or constructive feedback to share with stakeholders and, if necessary, human resources.

Second is the relationship with your immediate team. This team is likely those you spend at least 50% of your time with daily. Along with your manager, this group will influence how you feel at the company.

To do

Every six months, host a conversation with your team to best determine the relationship between the work stream and the overall business. How does your team feel about its standing with the larger business? The conversation will illuminate adjustments to be made or examples of what's working very well.

The third is your expanded circle of engagement and influence. These could be clients, executives, board members or other publics you spend time with regularly. This group could be the most exhausting! This is why ensuring you have strong relationships with your manager and your immediate team is critical, as they will be essential to helping round out your employee experience.

To do

When appropriate, have casual conversations with select members of this group to solicit how they define great culture within the company. Often, people will respond, "I love the people here."

While this is a great, positive response, I often look to garner specific examples. Put on your story mining hat and solicit more details to help shape the responses.

Finally, harness the information you receive to help prospective employees you're hiring better understand what life is like at your company.

Company culture is multifaceted and primed for the PR profession to play a leadership role. I cannot wait to see how this profession continues to lead the way. ❖

Mark Mohammadpour, APR, Fellow PRSA, is a senior communications executive and employee well-being consultant. His company, Chasing the Sun, empowers PR professionals to prioritize their well-being so they can shine in the family room and the boardroom. Before launching Chasing the Sun, Mark was an executive at Weber Shandwick and Edelman, leading award-winning campaigns for Adobe, Microsoft, Samsung and the U.S. Army. Mark served as president of the PRSA Oregon Chapter in 2016.

Following Up After the Interview

By Christina Stokes



Have you ever walked out of an interview feeling like you nailed it in every way? There is nothing quite like that glow of confidence. You displayed your skills with enthusiasm, answered every unexpected question with certainty, and maybe you even cracked a well-received joke or two. Sure, take a bow and text your mom — you've earned it!

The show doesn't end there because it's now time for the encore. What, pray tell, would that entail? Well, it's not dancing across a stage to the latest hit song. Everything you do from this moment onward is still being closely assessed by hiring managers.

Your interview follow-up is what seals the deal in a subtle and strategic way that can turn a good interview into a job offer. If you're worried about seeming annoying or even desperate, then fear not. There is a delicate way of approaching post-interview communication. The key is to blend appreciation, professionalism and just the right amount of eagerness.

Write a thank-you note.

First, within 24 hours of your interview, be prompt and send a thank-you email to your interviewer. In the email, express your gratitude for being given the opportunity to have a conversation about their hiring need.

Reiterate your continued interest in the position. Also, mention something specific from the discussion that highlights your qualifications.

In your follow-up email, and in any communications afterward, be professional and concise. Try to focus on key points and avoid unnecessary details. You also want to politely inquire about any next steps, as well as the timeline for the decision-making process. Express your eagerness to move forward in the hiring process and put a bow on that package — you're done!

There are a few things you definitely should avoid in your thank-you note, such as any assumptions about starting work, making negative remarks about a former employer, or being overly familiar. Another thing to avoid is being too general, so be mindful to tailor every thank you email that you send.

Connect on LinkedIn.

If you haven't already, then this would be a great time to connect with the interviewer on LinkedIn. When you send the connection request, include a brief, personalized message. Just a sentence is

fine, because the preview text will usually get cut off from view unless the reader clicks to expand it, anyway.

Confirm your interest.

Now, let's say the expected time period has passed. If you don't receive a response — feedback, a decision, or (hopefully) next steps — then this is a great moment to send a polite, composed follow-up. In this note, reiterate your interest in the role and the company. Ask if there is any additional information that you can provide and let them know that you'd be happy to engage in another round if needed. Remember to always express your thanks for being considered.



Remain professional.

I've said it before, but I do want to stress that remaining professional is critical. The PR profession is closely interconnected, so work to maintain a gracious and mature tone in all your communications with interviewers. Whether you receive a positive or negative response, aim to take their feedback in stride. Every interview is a learning experience. You want this person to remember you positively, and you want them to think of you for future opportunities.

Be authentic.

Allow your authenticity to shine in your interview conversations, thank-you notes and follow-up emails. These moments are strategic moves in the job hunt, and every interaction is an opportunity to leave a positive impression. You may not get an offer, but at the very least, you have successfully expanded your network.

Best of luck after the interview and may your next follow-up email be the prelude to a new chapter in your professional journey! ❖

Christina Stokes is the senior vice president and director of talent acquisition at Rubenstein. She is passionate about refining and enhancing employee engagement, company culture, and diversity and inclusion efforts. Twitter: @NewYorkRoses.



Internal Innovation

By John Elsasser

Charting the Path Forward for Employee Comms in the AI Age

To learn more about the current and future state of employee communications, Editor-in-Chief John Elsasser caught up with three members of the executive committee for PRSA's Employee Communications Section.

On May 15-17 in Atlanta, they will hold their annual Connect24 Conference, themed "Connect AI: Navigating the Future of IC in an AI World."

What challenges or opportunities has the rise of AI presented for employee communications?

Erica Goodwin: The challenges we're seeing with AI are similar to those we see with other new technology adoptions. They involve trust, ethics, security, change and their effects on humans and relationships.

AI is evolving at hyper-speed, which can make it hard to comprehend and hard to trust. For example, we must be vigilant about catching and correcting bias when we see it.

Strategically integrating AI into processes and systems can create efficiencies. AI can help personalize communications and interpret data to provide insights that we can act on in the future. The possibilities seem limitless.

Jennifer Hirsch: Two challenges for all AI users are data privacy and misinformation. AI platforms employ varying policies regarding how data is collected, stored and used, which raises privacy and security issues.

It's critical that AI-generated content is not treated as an off-the-shelf offering.

However, AI is helping employee communicators work faster and be more efficient in producing content. I advise all communication professionals to advance their knowledge of prompt engineering — AI is only as good as the prompts you enter. Think about how you would train a new intern and use that mindset as you use AI.

Laura Wentz: It's unknown how artificial intelligence will shape our roles, transform how we work and possibly change how we communicate with employees.

We need to learn about the experiences of other communicators who are ethically using AI daily to find efficiencies, improve productivity, create content



Erica Goodwin
Lead Consultant
Radiant
Communications, LLC

Jennifer Hirsch
Vice President
The Grossman Group

Laura Wentz
Manager, People
Communications
Gulfstream Aerospace

and more.

This year's Connect conference will be an opportunity to gather those best practices and explore how we can make AI work for us as communicators.

How can AI enhance internal comms without the messages losing their authenticity?

Goodwin: We maintain authenticity by taking information created by artificial intelligence, assessing it, adapting it and then finally articulating it. The last three steps must be done by a human.

Like writing, we start with a first draft. We review it for errors and then add our tone of voice. We read the text again with others in mind, before sharing it with our audience.

Hirsch: I love to bounce ideas off AI platforms when developing content or working through data analysis. But I view the content that AI generates as a starting point for insights and inspiration, never as the final product.

I recently connected with a former colleague who advises on the intersection of technology and communication. He posed a challenge: Whatever AI generates, add something to it, or introduce alternatives. I consider my organization's culture and values to ensure the content remains authentic.

By treating AI as a starting point that requires additional critical thinking, communicators can ensure that the technology remains a supportive tool rather than a replacement for our own work.

Wentz: Employee communications is all about connecting with the people who shape your company's culture. It's an important component of the employee value proposition. For many internal

work arrangements.

No amount of internal communication can substitute for demonstrating empathy, humanity and authenticity.

Wentz: Remote and hybrid work have become the norm for many, but we're doing what we've always done as communicators — finding the best ways to engage with the different audiences we serve.

Communicators can help counter digital burnout by auditing our communications and listening to feedback from employees.

What do you hope employee comms will look like in five years?

Goodwin: In 2029, I hope employee communications will feel and look as genuine as they do today. I hope AI will have become more of a partner in our work to create content, personalize messages and synthesize data.

Maybe we'll use augmented and virtual reality to meet and communicate by then. I hope employee communications will have a more complex understanding of employees, so we can proactively keep them engaged.

Hirsch: In five years, my hope is that companies will prioritize employees as their most important stakeholders — and as a result, have robust, well-resourced internal communications in place, complemented by AI.

Employee communications needs to be an integral part of any company's business strategy, not an afterthought. As the adage goes, when you take care of employees, they'll take care of business.

Wentz: I'm certain we'll still be talking about the pros and cons of AI in 2029, but I want to ensure that our most important audience is always at the forefront of that conversation — the employees. I hope we will harness the power of tech tools in an authentic, ethical way, so people-first company cultures become the norm.

I hope that even the smallest internal-communications teams will use technology to deliver personalized content to help employees and managers connect to one another and their company. ■■

Navigating Mergers and Acquisitions

Considerations for Communications Success

By Maya Frutiger

Whenever the ownership of a business will be transferred or consolidated, a strategy to communicate the deal is essential.

In the dozen-plus mergers and acquisitions that I've navigated — including Sumitomo Pharma's recent combination of seven subsidiaries — a few important communications considerations have contributed to their success.

In my experience, these communications strategies can benefit a variety of teams beyond the standard M&A playbook.

First, it's essential to understand the type of deal and the related nuances of acquisitions, consolidations and mergers (i.e., direct mergers, parent-subsidiary mergers and multi-entity mergers). While the terms "mergers" and "acquisitions" are often used interchangeably, they are not the same thing. Each type of deal requires its own communication strategy. Teams should avoid one-size-fits-all M&A guidance and recognize on face value that deals are dynamic and the exact communications approach will depend on the nuances and structure of the transaction.

While playbooks can serve as a good starting point or reference, it's important to cross-examine against your deal realities to ensure strategies are aligned and not miscalculated or outdated for the situation at hand.

Know your deal, know your message.

Understanding the deal is the first step in the planning journey. Familiarizing yourself with the deal and its nuances will help you develop what disclosures must be made and informs the go-forward strategy and messaging. While not all-encompassing, common deal and messaging marriages include:

Acquisitions

When the deal is an acquisition, it's best to communicate the value prop-

osition. Explain how acquiring the other business will strengthen the company, its vision and culture. Address the anxieties that employees and customers are feeling about potential integration efforts with clear messaging and plans for transitions.

From an investor and media perspective, the strategic rationale and equity story is of essence — particularly for public companies that require carefully crafted investor-centric narratives.

Consolidations

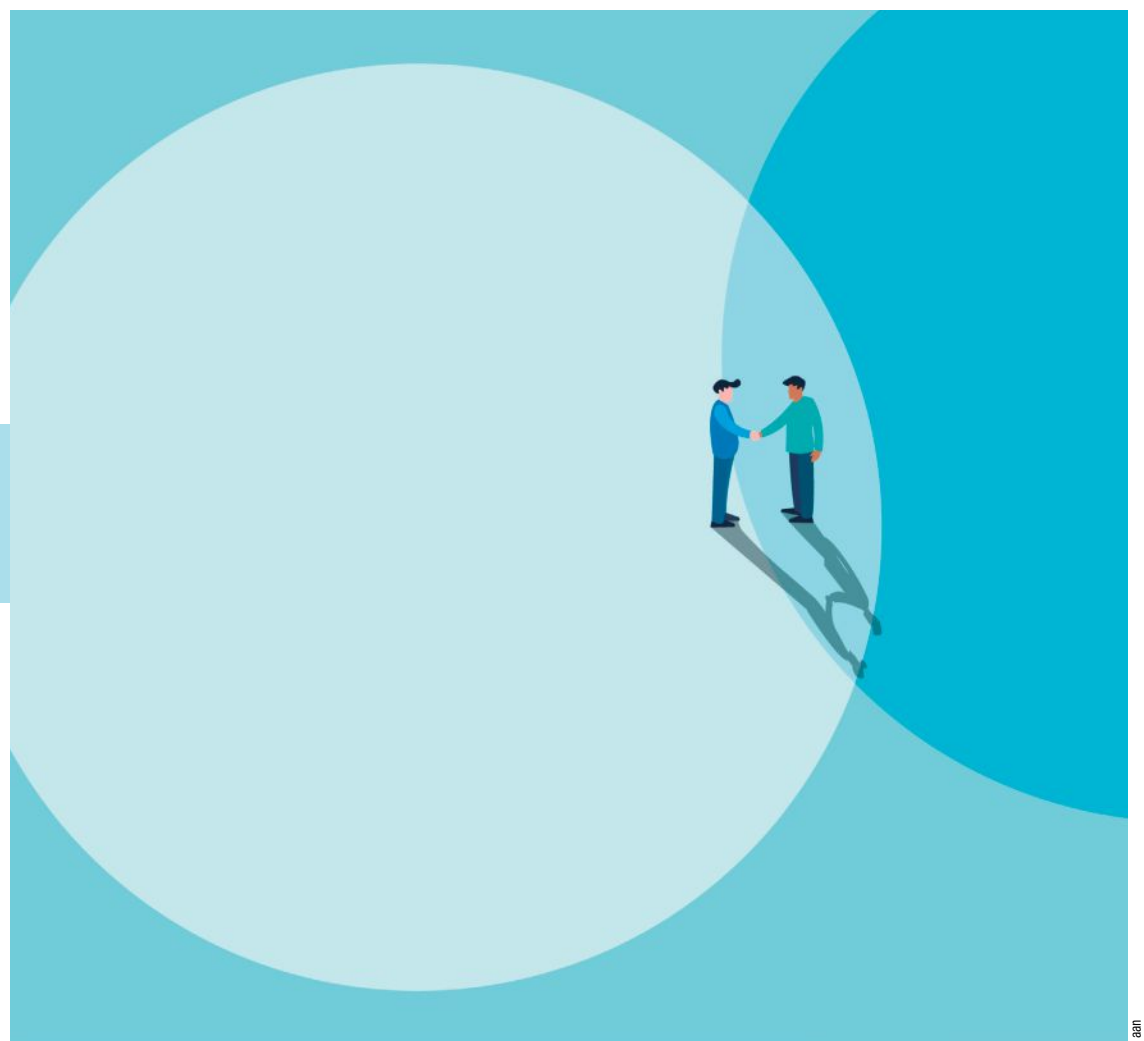
When streamlining operations, transparency reigns supreme. Messages should explain the rationale behind consolidating smaller organizations and the potential benefits the consolidation will provide for stakeholders. Proactively address potential job losses with empathy.

“While the terms ‘mergers’ and ‘acquisitions’ are often used interchangeably, they are not the same thing. Each type of deal requires its own communication strategy.”

Mergers

The merger type matters and will dictate the communications approach. Most often, messages should highlight the synergies achieved through the merger, along with shared goals, leadership, vision and business continuity.

In complex mergers of two or more entities, communications should explain the structure of the new organization. Such mergers will likely demand a multi-pronged communications strategy, in which messages are tailored to each entity's specific concerns and those of stakeholders.



Regardless of the type of deal, communicators should take a geographically sensitive approach. Messages should reflect regional cultural nuances, regulatory differences and the communications preferences of various stakeholders. Additionally, whether the company is public or private will also influence the degree of messaging needs. Unlike most private companies, publicly listed companies in different markets have varying disclosure rules and demand thoughtful, investor-centric narratives.

The organization's size will also affect the message. A megacorporation's communications strategy will require far more tactical consideration than that of a small, private company, for example. Larger companies typically have internal messaging platforms and external digital channels to cascade information in addition to more structured companywide town halls allowing leadership to share updates with employees. Smaller companies, on the other hand, often call for more intimate discussions, including face-to-face interactions and personalized communications from leaders.

Industry nuances also influence communications for corporate mergers, acquisitions and consolidations. To tell a story that's legally appropriate and resonates with primary stakeholders, communicators first need to understand the industry and its regulatory framework. For example, due to regulatory requirements, a pharmaceutical or biotechnology company will announce its products or capabilities differently than a consumer brand.

Beyond the deal announcement

Do not overlook the vital pre-an-

nouncement phase, where leaks can wreak havoc. Have scenario plans in place addressing potential issues as well as reactive/proactive measures if necessary. For public companies, scenario planning is particularly crucial. Premature events can damage an organization's reputation, influence its stock price or kill the deal altogether.

Communication isn't a one-off event. It's a continuous journey, demanding agility and empathy well after the potential transaction announcement has commenced. Post-close announcements are often neglected.

Issues tend to appear in the latter half of a company integration. Navigating that turbulence requires proactive crisis management, continuous dialogue and frequent progress updates.

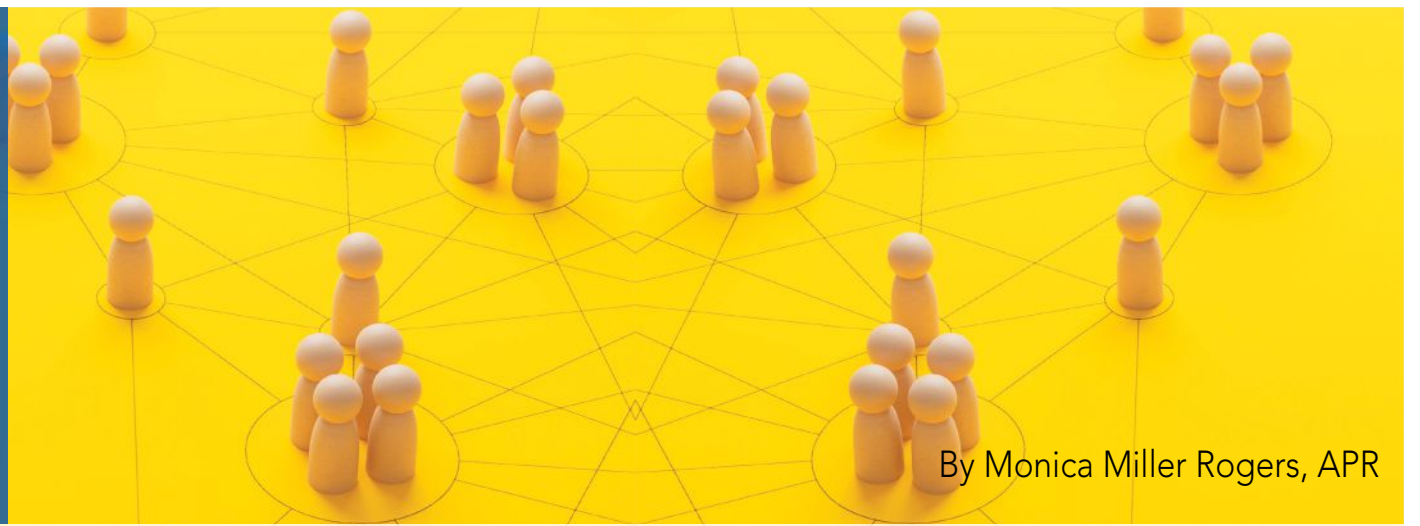
Corporate mergers, acquisitions and consolidations are living beasts. While there are many other key nuances and learnings to reflect on, teams, in general, should be prepared to adapt to changing circumstances and tailor their messages accordingly.

Communications is not just messaging and tactics; it's the company strategy that enables value-add business outcomes, generates buy-in, manages reputation and guides stakeholders through changes. ■■



Maya Frutiger is head of communications at Sumitomo Pharma America, where she leads the company's global market strategy, brand and external affairs. In her various leadership roles, Frutiger successfully led business strategy and growth for numerous company and portfolio initiatives across a range of M&A transactions as well as new product and company launches, among other notable strategic projects.

Team Effort



By Monica Miller Rogers, APR

How Internal and External Comms Can Work Better Together

“Whatever is said internally may go external, and what ever is said externally will surely be discussed internally.”

I shared this statement a little more than three years ago with the Aflac corporate communications director during an interview for my current position leading employee communications for the Fortune 500 supplemental insurance company with the famous duck brand. While an interview process for an internal communications role may not always include interacting with the public relations lead, it should as the insight and relationship between these two disciplines continues to grow closer.

Internal communications traditionally focuses on ensuring employees and other stakeholders within an organization are informed and engaged. Channels serve leadership in relaying messages that connect the internal audience with the organization’s mission, values and objectives. The end goal is to cultivate a culture of belonging and alignment to the business goals.

External communications conventionally shapes the company’s identity with customers, investors (if a publicly traded company), media and other public stakeholders. Through outward-facing efforts, an organization builds and strengthens its reputation. The objective is to ever increase a company’s market position for the most success.

When the internal and external communications functions work together, we

see the benefits of consistent messaging, objective alignment and brand advocacy. When they don’t, we witness breakdowns in employee engagement, reputation protection and audience trust.

There is also the issue of crossover — intended or not. In the age of instant communication, how long does it take to turn an internal message into an external challenge? The “send” button isn’t too hard to find on a keyboard. Similarly, how easy is it for an employee to learn about an important business matter via a press release he or she reads on Google? Making employees the last to know certainly is not the best way to impress upon them that they are important company ambassadors.

So, how can these two powerful forces create a unified front? Here are a few tips.

Nurture the relationship.

In many corporate communications functions, internal and external communications have the same reporting structure. At Aflac, these two areas report to the chief communications officer. This helps break down barriers and prevent silos. Regardless of where the functions sit in the organization, however, the relationship between the leaders of these two areas determines how successful the integration is.

Get to know your counterpart, what’s

important to them and their audience, and offer to be a resource to help them further their reach.

Share the information.

Our employee communications and public relations team members at Aflac meet regularly to hear what each team is working on, discuss how employees can help further external efforts, and share employee stories that help consumers understand Aflac’s purpose and culture. We also regularly share when Aflac is in the news on our intranet so employees are in the know and can share within their own networks.

“When the internal and external communications functions work together, we see the benefits of consistent messaging, objective alignment and brand advocacy.”

Work closely with your communications colleagues and collaborate on projects that inform and engage both external and internal stakeholders.

Walk the talk.

Each year, Aflac releases its Work-Forces Report, an external survey that tracks the state of the American workplace, highlighting the internal benefits that U.S. employees desire. Used as a

communications tool, the survey is aligned with the many employee benefits that Aflac offers its own workforce, such as mental health care and flexible working arrangements. While garnering media attention for the company, the report also helped keep benefits top of mind for our employees and became part of an ongoing awareness campaign leading up to open enrollment.

Align and repurpose your content and ensure that it supports efforts inside and outside of the organization.

When internal and external communications streams work together, they fortify each other, and amplify the organization’s strategy, culture and reputation — and this leads to successful business outcomes. Developing and maintaining close relationships between the function leaders, cross-collaborating on projects, and creating content to be used both internally and externally blurs the line for these communications areas to work better together. Don’t fight it; embrace it. A rising tide lifts all boats. ■■



Monica Miller Rodgers, APR, is the senior manager of employee communications at Aflac, a Fortune 500 supplemental insurance company. She leads award-winning communications strategies that connect employees and other internal stakeholders to organizational objectives and the company mission and vision.



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A Continuous Journey

Tips for Prioritizing Team Well-Being and Motivation

By Kristelle Siarza Moon, APR

This meeting is starting to feel like Groundhog Day.” I was shocked when I heard this, realizing my mistake with one of my favorite activities — the fundamental agency “Monday meeting” — was now recognized by staff as unnecessary, boring and uninspiring.

When I founded Siarza, my PR and digital agency, 10 years ago, I knew I had to have that kickoff meeting every week. Originally intended as a delightful gathering for the family, the meeting could have inadvertently turned into a TikTok trend that could have easily been featured on “agencyprobs.”

I realized it was time to start working and began seeking feedback and advice from my colleagues on my employee engagement activity. I contemplated how we could refine our employee engagement philosophies. This is part of what I learned:

Let’s blow stuff up!

In this instance, I gave my team a unique and exciting opportunity to rethink and rework our approach. With a little help from my friends within the Counselors Academy, I solicited best practices and opened the team meeting with an opportunity to change the “Monday Meeting” structure. It’s a good example of how you can blow stuff up.

By allowing them the freedom to

explore new ideas and experiment with different processes and procedures, we allowed them the opportunity to try something new and potentially fail. If it didn’t implode, then who benefits from this? The company does.

“As leaders, creating spaces where our team members feel valued, heard and motivated is a shared responsibility.”

Mind your language.

When referring to the individuals on your payroll, it is crucial to choose your words wisely to imply the right culture. That’s why at Siarza, we’ve learned to use the words “team members.” I had to ask an individual to kindly stop calling me “boss.” I hated how I felt when I heard it. She meant incredibly well and was always respectful, but I always felt I was continually trying to earn the title.

How you describe them can carry different connotations. Are they employees, subordinates, team members

or part of your staff? Each term carries its nuances and implications, and this is one of the many ways in which culture (like in DEI advocacy work) is essential to understand. It sets the tone for their engagement, motivation and overall organizational satisfaction.

Be transparent during the onboarding.

Having an onboarding presentation that goes over the rich history and journey of the company is undeniably beneficial. However, I firmly believe in setting clear expectations right from the beginning, much like a first date.

Like deciding whether to pick up the tab, continue going on subsequent dates, or simply focus on the benefits (ha), I have discovered that conducting onboarding processes transparently without hidden agendas keeps people engaged and significantly improves our turnover rate.

Never ignore the Slack banter.

Amid our daily endeavors, finding solace in shared laughter, relatable memes and adorable furry animal photos creates a sense of belonging and normalcy.

Whether we’re engaging in crazy antics together or from a distance, these lighthearted moments provide respite from the demands of our work. From mastering the latest dance craze to deciphering the cryptic language of Gen Z, banter adds a touch of joy to our billable hours. Why not encourage your team to unwind and enjoy a well-deserved break with their favorite Pedro Pascal reel?

So, fostering an engaging and exciting work environment is not a one-time calendar invite; it’s a continuous journey of compassion, creativity and a good cackle with the team.

As leaders, creating spaces where our team members feel valued, heard and motivated is a shared responsibility. It’s not just about billable hour targets and profit margins; it’s about building a resilient community that thrives on shared successes and collective growth. After all, a team that laughs, learns and evolves together succeeds together. ■■



In Brief



Is AI Monitoring Your Work Messages?

Depending on where you work, artificial intelligence might be analyzing your messages on Slack, Microsoft Teams, Zoom and other popular apps.

As CNBC reports, large U.S. employers such as Walmart, Delta Air Lines,

T-Mobile, Chevron and Starbucks are using AI from a company called Aware to monitor their employees’ chatter.

Jeff Schumann, CEO of the Columbus, Ohio-based Aware, says its AI models help companies “understand the risk within

their communications. It’s always tracking real-time employee sentiment, and it’s always tracking real-time toxicity.”

Using the AI software, employers can see how workers are responding to a new corporate policy or marketing campaign, Schumann says. Aware’s AI models, built to read text and process images, can also identify bullying, harassment, discrimination, noncompliance, pornography, nudity and other behaviors, he said. One of its AI models can flag individual employee names.

Amba Kak, executive director of the AI Now Institute at New York University, says AI monitoring “results in a chilling effect on what people are saying in the workplace.”

— Greg Beaubien



Kristelle Siarza Moon, APR, is the owner and CEO of Siarza, a public relations and digital agency headquartered in Albuquerque, N.M. She serves as a Counselors Academy executive committee member and volunteers on the DEI committee for PRSA as co-vice

chair. She also serves as treasurer for PRSA’s New Mexico PRSA Chapter.



A Commitment to Success

2 Key Workforce Demographics to Embrace

By Trish Nicolas and Carmen Marsans

In the communications profession, we talk a lot about demographics. Knowing our target audience is as essential as peanut butter is to jelly and Barbie is to Ken.

Understanding our audiences helps us know how to reach them, and — more important — how to resonate and engage with them. And with our internal audiences, that's more vital than ever. With 77% of the global workforce currently disengaged, according to Gallup's 2023 State of the Global Workplace, we see a global economic impact to the tune of \$8.8 trillion annually.

In light of these employee disengagement insights, elevated worker burnout rates, and the financial impact that both of these trends can have on corporate performance, two key workforce demographics that all communications professionals should prioritize are deskless employees and the Hispanic workforce.

Deskless workers

Deskless workers make up a whopping 80% of the global workforce, yet we generally over-index on white-collar, desktop-centric, digital communication.

➔ Adobe's 2015 Paper Jam: Why Documents are Dragging Us Down study tells us the reality is that the vast majority of deskless workers — 83% — still rely on paper files for their workflows.

➔ In Deskless Not Voiceless: The 2021 Frontline Barometer study by Workplace, 52% of frontline workers said access to tools was the reason they would move to a new job, and 44% of frontline workers believe desk-based colleagues have better tech.

➔ Turnover in the deskless workforce is high: According to the Quinyx's State of the Deskless Workforce 2020 report, 61% of deskless workers have considered quitting their jobs because they are unhappy with their work environment.

Questions to consider when planning communications for deskless workers:

➔ How does this insight impact how you communicate with and engage your deskless workforce?

➔ Have you considered using tent cards, posters and stand-up meetings for communications vehicles?

➔ Are you engaging and equipping people managers to be strong communicators through toolkits and training?

“Evaluate if your company is intentionally creating and nurturing an environment that demonstrates a commitment to all employees' success and growth through both actions and infrastructure.

➔ Are you leveraging leader visits to listen to employees and to share vital company news?

➔ How are you tapping technology to leverage digital screens in high visibility gathering areas for slideshows and videos?

➔ Have you considered a mobile app for your deskless workforce to get information in the palm of their hands in a timely manner?

Prioritizing communications for the 2.7 billion deskless workers around the world — especially across your employee base — will go a long way in enhancing engagement and worker loyalty, which can have a positive impact on corporate performance. The Gallup 2020 Q12 meta-analysis revealed that “businesses with a critical mass of engaged employees outperformed their competition” with “higher earnings per share.”

Hispanic workers

Hispanic workers comprise 20% of the U.S. workforce and they wield significant buying power, representing a massive 39% of the country's gross domestic product growth.

➔ Labor force growth is being driven by the Hispanic demographic. In the third quarter of 2023, the labor force participation rate of Hispanics was higher (67.2%) than the national average (62.9%)

➔ Hispanics are projected to account for 78% of net new workers between 2020 and 2030.

➔ While Hispanics remain overrepresented in service occupations, they now make up 10.7% of workers in management jobs, up from 5.2% in 2000.

➔ According to a 2012 study by the Pew Research Center, Latinos over-indexed in digital devices, with 87% of U.S. Hispanic internet users owning a smartphone compared with 84% of non-Hispanic white internet users.

As the Hispanic workforce continues to grow, companies must acknowledge and embrace this reality by emphasizing inclusive communication that goes beyond translation. That means creating and prioritizing content that is culturally relevant, reflecting an understanding of diverse cultural, social and political nuances.

Evaluate if your company is intentionally creating and nurturing an environment that demonstrates a commitment to all employees' success and growth through both actions and infrastructure.

Questions to consider when planning communications for Hispanic workers:

➔ Are you providing translated materials to your workforce?

➔ Do you offer communications, events and feedback loops that are easily accessible, native language-based and culturally sensitive for all your employees?

➔ Has your company established ERGs that offer a safe place to voice opinions, express concerns and address misunderstandings to help create a feeling of connection to their co-workers they may identify with?

➔ Are you offering cultural awareness training for employees and managers to foster mutual understanding, respect and empathy?

➔ Have you provided equal opportunity mentoring programs that enable employees to get guidance to help them attain their goals and conquer feelings of isolation and nonacceptance because of cultural misunderstanding or discrimination?

➔ Does your organization reflect the demographics of the audience you serve?

Many of the same tactics apply to both deskless workers and Hispanic employees in the United States. It starts with asking ourselves if we really know our (often evolving) audiences, and if we are being active stewards of their communications and engagement experience. Being aware of the trends and taking action will help to put true resonance within reach. ■■



Trish Nicolas is EVP/head of Americas for rf.engage — Ruder Finn's Global Center of Excellence for Strategic Internal Communications. She leads a team of world-class communications experts to deliver strategic solutions, inspired innovation and exceptional execution. Named a 2024 “Top Woman in Communications” by Ragan, Nicolas has served more than 200 companies over the course of her 35-year career, earning national awards.



As SVP at RF Comunicad, **Carmen Marsans** has extensive experience creating culturally sensitive strategies that deliver strong market positioning for clients. She leads corporate programs and special projects with international organizations, specializing in forging community relationships through public outreach to foster long-term growth. An inductee in PRSA National Capital Chapter's Public Relations Hall of Fame, her work has earned national recognition.

Making Connections

Understanding the Link between DEI and Employee Engagement

By Thomas Bennett

As PR and communication professionals — whether you work in-house, at an agency, or as an academic or a consultant — we can all relate to what it means to be connected and engaged at our respective companies or organizations.

However, the nexus between diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and employee engagement may be less apparent. I'll share more about employee engagement and DEI, the intersection between the two, and how to increase employee engagement at a diverse company or organization.

What is employee engagement?

Employee engagement is holistically about the emotional connection employees have with their company, colleagues, team and department, and their day-to-day work responsibilities. Simply put, it's about how invested employees are emotionally in their respective work and the company's mission and goals.

When employees are engaged at all levels, they're not just working toward a paycheck or a promotion; they have a genuine interest and commitment to their day-to-day work and job responsibilities and want to support and add value to the company's success.

Employee engagement is a significant driver of company success. Investing in employee engagement leads to overall

increased productivity and better quality of work, and helps companies retain top talent.

What is diversity, equity and inclusion?

For some, DEI is just an acronym. But it also equates to fairness, what people stand for and how we treat each other. According to a McKinsey article, DEI "are three closely linked values held by many organizations that are working to be supportive of different groups of individuals, including people of different races, ethnicities, religions, abilities, genders and sexual orientations."

“Diversity encourages belonging and inclusivity, and that translates to increased levels of employee engagement.”

A lot has been happening recently in the world of DEI. In 2023, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott signed a bill banning DEI offices and initiatives across higher education institutions in the state.

On a national level, third-party groups are targeting corporate DEI initiatives of many U.S.-based and global companies and organizations.

Despite these efforts, DEI has been,



and remains, not only an important part of workplace culture but also a central key to employee engagement.

And in a positive sign, according to recent research by The Conference Board, none of the chief HR officers surveyed expressed intentions to reduce their commitment to DEI initiatives in 2024.

How do employee engagement and DEI work together?

Data shows that there's a positive intersection between DEI and employee engagement. From this data, we can glean that the more diverse, equitable and inclusive a company is, the more engaged its employees are. Diversity encourages belonging and inclusivity, and that translates to increased levels of employee engagement.

Studies have shown that having a diverse workplace has so many benefits spanning innovation, diversity of creativity, thought and opinion, in addition to problem-solving abilities.

Imagine being in a team or department meeting where most of the employees come from diverse backgrounds — different cultures, races, genders, disability statuses, neurodivergence — all bringing their unique approaches and perspectives. This level of diversity will stimulate unique ideas and result in numerous insights.

How can employee engagement be increased in a diverse company?

Employee engagement can be increased across a diverse company in many ways, such as communication, training and employee recognition.

As PR professionals, we know how essential communication is overall. From an employee engagement perspective, it develops human connection among peers, colleagues and staff while equally encouraging positive dialogue and feedback, and the company's vision and goals that all the employees are working toward. A Grammarly Harris poll indicated "that ineffective communication processes cost U.S. businesses up to \$1.2 trillion every year."

Ongoing training and professional development are critical for employees at all levels. It allows them to obtain skills to meet the expectations of their job role and responsibilities, preparing them to take on new roles and opportunities.

According to Deloitte, "recognition is highly correlated with improving employee engagement, which, in turn, improves job performance. In fact, employee engagement, productivity and performance are 14% higher in organizations with recognition programs than those without."

Employee recognition can be anything from simple and easy words of thank you to recognition awards to bonuses and promotions, to name a few.

A high level of successful employee engagement can make a company thrive. When employees are engaged, it yields innovative and creative thinking, increased levels of productivity and a space where they feel safe. The answer to creating an overall engaged employee environment is DEI. ■■

In Brief



As Backlash Grows, Many Executives Remain Committed to DEI

Even as backlash and legal challenges intensify against diversity-related initiatives, many employers have deepened their commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion programs, a report from the employment-law firm Littler finds.

In a survey of 320 U.S. C-suite executives, a majority (57%) said their organizations have expanded their DEI commitments and activities over the past year. Nearly the same proportion (59%) said backlash against corporate diversity programs has increased since the U.S. Supreme Court's June 2023 ruling that raced-based college admissions are unlawful.

According to the Littler report, more than a third (36%) of the executives surveyed said they have maintained their organizations' DEI efforts, while just 1% reported significant

decreases. Further, 91% of C-suite leaders surveyed said the Supreme Court ruling has not made DEI programs less of a priority for their organizations. More than two-thirds (69%) said the court's decision has not changed their approach to DEI initiatives.

Among C-suite executives surveyed, 58% said their organizations continue to provide training and professional development opportunities to diverse employees. More than half (55%) said they are promoting diverse employees into leadership positions.

As political polarization widens, nearly three-quarters of C-suite leaders surveyed (73%) said they face challenges trying to handle divisive social and political beliefs among employees and/or respond to pressure to take stances on contentious social issues. In the survey, leadership teams reported that divisive issues can have high-stakes consequences for their businesses and reputations. — Greg Beaubien



Thomas Bennett is a senior vice president at FleishmanHillard, a global PR and communications agency. He advises clients on all aspects of diversity, equity and inclusion and leads the health equity business for the agency. Bennett is a PRSA Board Member and was recently recognized

as a PRWeek Top 30 Healthcare Influencer.

Building the Case

A Blueprint for Engagement During Times of Change

By Leah Gladu

paradee

Often when an organization is going through change, employee engagement is put on the backburner. I've seen it time and time again — leaders tend to fixate on big changes impacting the company while overlooking the day-to-day engagement of their workforce.

But the simple truth is a lot of companies won't survive big changes with this single-minded focus because change can't succeed without employee adoption.

Engaging your employees before, during *and* after change is the secret sauce to successfully implementing change without sacrificing workforce engagement and culture. In my experience, I've seen these five employee engagement tactics lead to successful change efforts, and they can be applied to your company's change strategies regardless of industry, size or location:

1. Remember that top-down communications help employees understand what's going on in a personalized and transparent way.

Build a strong, clear case for change so employees understand what the change is, why it's happening and how it will affect them. And doing so transparently and authentically will help maintain employee trust and commitment.

2. Communicate often to retain your workforce's attention — even when it feels repetitive.

Help your messages break through the clutter of other communications by communicating differently based on your audience preferences. You can do this by leveraging various channels (thinking about digital, print and in-person) and formats (using videos and graphics). By keeping accessibility in mind, your messages will reach all employees and meet them where they are.

“Build a strong, clear case for change so employees understand what the change is, why it's happening and how it will affect them.”

3. Ground your change communications in foundational messages.

Leaders and change communicators have more access into the company ecosystem and therefore know much more than the average employee. Remove the assumption that your audience knows what *you* know and craft messages that help employees understand what the benefits are and how this change will

impact them (the WIIFM — or “what's in it for me”).

4. Build in feedback mechanisms.

Give your employees a way to share their thoughts and opinions, whether through a digital portal or leader-to-peer listening sessions, and offer the option for feedback to be anonymous.

A word of caution — if you're going to solicit employees' opinions, then make sure you are prepared to acknowledge their feedback. This may not mean always *acting* on the feedback, but it's important to address it even if that means explaining why you can't do something employees asked for. If your people feel they aren't being heard, then you risk them disengaging or even actively resisting change.

5. Lean into your middle managers who are in a unique position to build more personal connections and foster engagement directly with their teams.

People leaders can serve as a key communications channel to help “own the message” to their teams on a more intimate scale. They can also bring their teams together for team-building activities and meetings. When possible, host your gatherings in person to help teams build camaraderie and stronger relation-

ships face-to-face.

When applied to real-world change scenarios, this blueprint can help your organization successfully usher employees through change. In one company's case, I saw this approach lead to the standardization of an organizational readiness approach that built change resilience among approximately 1,200 employees, during a two-year cycle of continuous change. Their thoughtful investment in employee programs resulted in a 10-point engagement score lead across its technology divisions and six points ahead of the company's average.

Whether you're preparing for an upcoming change or proactively fostering workforce culture and engagement, consider leveraging these best practices to set your organization and employees up for success. ■■



Leah Gladu is a dynamic communications executive with more than 20 years of experience in a constantly evolving industry. She has led communications for global companies, mentored some of today's most promising young leaders and served first as president and now CEO of KWI, a communications and management consulting agency based in Atlanta, where she's overseen exponential growth of the agency and its clients. To continue the conversation, connect with her on LinkedIn.

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Fewer People Quitting Their Jobs, Labor Department Finds

Americans quit 6.1 million fewer jobs in 2023 than in 2022, a decline of 12%, the Labor Department said in January.

As *The Wall Street Journal* reported, fewer resignations could mean workers are less confident in their ability to find new jobs, or that they've become more content in their current roles.

The total number of job resignations declined to 44.5 million in 2023, from 50.6 million in 2022, which was the highest on record. Fewer people leaving their jobs is a turnaround from the pandemic years, when resignations surged and companies faced labor shortages.

In recent months, potential job seekers have seen news of high-profile layoffs (in technology and media, for example), smaller pay raises and sharp declines in hiring in certain industries. Despite pockets of weakness, unemployment

reached a historically low rate of 3.7% at the end of 2023.

Still, it's taking longer for Americans to find new jobs. According to a recent LinkedIn survey, most workers are thinking about changing jobs this year, but many are not finding opportunities. At the same time, fewer people quitting their jobs will limit how fast wages grow, as companies face less pressure to attract and retain workers, said Brett Ryan, senior U.S. economist at Deutsche Bank.

The rate at which employers have hired new workers has fallen below pre-pandemic levels. Companies appear to be keeping their current employees but not hiring new ones, economists said. Despite some notable job cuts, layoffs have

also fallen compared to before the pandemic began.

— Greg Beaubien

The total number of people quitting their jobs in:

2023:

44.5 million

2022:

50.6 million

Catherine Hernandez-Blades on Leading Through Values

By Ken Jacobs

For more than 25 years, Catherine Hernandez-Blades has been a leader in communications, marketing, public affairs, and crisis and change management.

Among her many roles, she has been chief communications officer and/or chief marketing officer for three Fortune 500 companies, including Aflac and Flextronics. In her most recent position, she was senior vice president, marketing and communications, for SAIC, a technology company in Reston, Va.

Hernandez-Blades earned her bachelor's degree in mass communications from the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. Since then, she has received numerous awards and accolades, including receiving two Silver Cannes Lions awards in 2019 and being named among Forbes' Top-50 Most Influential Global CMOs the same year. All opinions expressed are her own.

In hindsight, 2023 was not a stellar year for the communications industry. What leadership skills did you most tap to get you, your team and your organization to manage this?

You're right — 2023 was filled with challenges, on the heels of a multiyear, global pandemic. We've all learned a lot through both experiences. We learned about leading through ambiguity and adversity.

Hopefully, we also learned to lead with greater empathy and use our creativity to remove not only the traditional workplace barriers with which we are all familiar but also the nontraditional obstacles that those on our teams are facing.

Early during the pandemic, one young mom on my team explained how much her life had changed, noting that she had gone from working mom to working Mom with so many other duties while balancing a host of other responsibilities.



Taking the Lead

That drove home to me the point that, as leaders, we need to take care of our people in new, different, and highly nontraditional ways. Creative problem-solving is essential, but never more so than when circumstances are at their most difficult.

It all starts with listening. Identify the real issues and then tackle them one by one. In the earlier example, I repurposed a "use it or lose it" travel budget to send a meal to everyone on my team once a week. It may be a small thing, but it allowed me to take one thing off their proverbial plates.

For example, I had heard that people were interested in feeling a greater sense of connection. So I moved all-hands meetings from once a quarter to twice a month, inviting other CCOs and CMOs to Zoom into the meetings and hold information sessions.

Hearing those outside voices was probably one of the best things we did as a team during that time. I hope it was a great experience for our guests, as well.

What was the most difficult moment in your leadership career, and how did you get through it?

There have been many, but the ones that adversely impacted people and their families were the most difficult. All are challenging but in different ways. The one constant that has helped me is the importance of connecting to values.

Transparency and treating people with dignity and respect are important values to me. When circumstances go beyond an employee's control, like the illegal actions of one individual, or when a business underperforms, it's important to be upfront and honest, while leaning into your personal value system and acknowledging the accurate facts that led up to the actions to the extent possible.

Reorganizations resulting in downsizing due to poor business performance

are also extremely difficult. When faced with this situation, I've done what I can to provide networking opportunities and exceptional references to those impacted and to offer the maximum packages the company would allow to help those in this situation to have softer landings.

Most important, it's key that everyone understands that reorganizations are not performance related and acknowledges the outstanding contributions of the individual to the organization.

The bottom line is that by leading with values and doing the right thing where people are concerned, not only do individuals benefit, but the business does, as well.

A few years ago, you contributed to the book "Business Acumen for Strategic Communicators." How can today's PR managers increase their business skills and become leaders?

My section [of the book] was about understanding how money is made in the business. I spent half of my career embedded in business units before moving to corporate C-suites. My experiences in the businesses have informed my business acumen as much as my corporate roles, and in some cases, even more. As communicators, we benefit from both.

If you have a chance to assume responsibility for a P&L, you should do it. Today, more and more of those in our field are expanding into these types of roles. From Joan Wainwright to Stacey Tank, and even me, more and more of us are achieving great success running revenue-generating operations. Being responsible for a P&L provides an entirely different perspective and, while out of one's comfort zone, an opportunity to learn and grow.

My advice is to attend all the meetings — operations, financial and functional — and learn everything you can about all aspects of the business, including business development and strategy. Leverage your organization's matrix to grow your skills. Ask for coaches, both senior to you and your peers, from every aspect of the business. Practice connecting the dots.

Communications pros are uniquely



"The one constant that has helped me is the importance of connecting to values. Transparency and treating people with dignity and respect are important values to me."

positioned to do this because we touch every aspect of our organizations.

If you could go back, knowing what you know now, what leadership advice would you give yourself as a recent college graduate?

Based upon all these experiences, I would tell myself that it's important to celebrate the successes and appreciate them in the moment, rather than constantly looking ahead to the next success. Otherwise, you risk losing out on so many experiences. It's also important to make sure you learn lessons when things don't go according to plan.

I would also tell myself that everything is about choices. There will be many times when the demands of the work you have chosen feel more urgent than those at home — and more often than not, work will win. These are not jobs; they are lifestyles. Prepare for the guilt that comes with it.

I'm so grateful to have a husband who is understanding and supportive. Bryan and I just celebrated our 29th wedding anniversary in December. In terms of choices, on this one fortunately, I chose wisely. ❖

Ken Jacobs is the principal of Jacobs Consulting & Executive Coaching, which empowers PR and communications leaders and executives to breakthrough results via executive coaching, and helps communications agencies achieve their business development, profitability and client service goals, via consulting and training. Please find him at www.jacobscomm.com ken@jacobscomm.com @KensViews, or on LinkedIn.

Learn More

For more insights from communications executives, search the "Taking the Lead" archives at the PRSA website. Recent interviews include:



Soon Mee Kim, chief diversity, equity and inclusion officer, Omnicom Public Relations Group



Damon Jones, CCO, P&G



Ben Finzel, president, RENEWPR

When It Comes Time for Leaders to Speak Out

By David Grossman, APR, Fellow PRSA

We often hear from CEOs and top-level leaders that they don't want to speak on an issue out of concern that it will offend employees or cause backlash among key stakeholders — that, by addressing the issue, they are inherently taking a side on a sensitive or polarizing matter.



Our recent research, conducted in partnership with The Harris Poll in the wake of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, shows that a lack of response couldn't be further from what employees need from their leaders today.

The research revealed that, while 51% of employees indicated they were affected in some way by the events in the Middle East (significantly more than might be expected based on population numbers and even those who had friends, colleagues or other direct ties to the region), only 21% of employees report receiving any internal statement on the matter. Even fewer (16%) reported outreach from their manager.

While a boundary may have once existed between our professional and personal lives in the past, that divide has all but disappeared. Issues outside the workplace are clearly impacting employees' well-being, and that impact intensifies when leadership is silent.

At its core, the research underscores a principle that we've long known to be true: Leadership is not a sideline sport. Today's leaders must actively lead with heart and address issues head-on — not by taking a side of an issue, but by communicating to employees in a way that brings empathy and humanity into the workplace and helps employees know that people care about them.

So, what does this mean for internal communications today? Read on for additional key findings from the research, and the implications for leaders and communicators:

Saying nothing says everything.

The only "side" to take is that of your employees — especially given its impact on their well-being. Employees who said their company did not make a statement



reported just 10% confidence in company leadership. If we're going to advocate for something, then let's advocate for concern and humanity toward employees.

Missed communications are a missed opportunity.

In comparison to the 10% figure above, effective internal communication on the matter led to a 4 to 6 times increase in critical business drivers: confidence in leadership, alignment around culture and employee engagement.

Don't assume employee silence means employees are OK.

Know what your employees think about and the issues, topics and concerns that impact them. A greater percentage of employees' well-being may be affected significantly by issues than senior leaders might expect — as shown by the 51% of employees who indicated they were affected by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (25% of which had no ties to the region).

Craft your communications with what matters most to employees.

As an addendum to The Harris Poll survey of employees, we also polled 118 internal and senior communication professionals to understand the essential elements of internal communications when issues arise.

This group identified 12 critical components, and they are led by what we call ACE: authenticity, concern and empathy.

Be intentional about how you address and reflect these

because, even when you think you're using the right words, employees don't often see it the same way.

Remember, it's not 'one and done.'

Communicating an internal statement isn't enough to impact employee well-being alone. The true impact comes when these statements are coupled with manager outreach.

The research found that managers generally did well when they communicated directly. When employees reported meeting with their manager, 43% felt strongly that the conversation made them feel more engaged, and 42% felt strongly that their manager was empathetic.

“Issues outside the workplace are clearly impacting employees' well-being, and that impact intensifies when leadership is silent.”

Managers hold the key, and we must support them and hold them accountable.

The lack of manager conversations (only 16 percent) reflects the need for greater accountability, development and the tools to help them. Managers don't need to carry a message forward, solve an issue or have all the answers.

Instead, we need to help prepare them to listen, empathize and demonstrate support. In many organizations we work with, we hear from leadership that there's a breakdown in communications at the

manager level.

If you invest in just a single internal communications improvement this year, then focus on upskilling and equipping managers to listen, empathize and support their employees, not just make organizational messages relevant for their people.

Update the playbook.

If you have a playbook on communicating about social issues or guidelines, then take time to rethink how you approach communications through the lens of what matters to employees. Revisit the playbook with key decision-makers across the business and update it where necessary.

If you take away one thing, then remember: The time is *now* to show you care. We're in a permacrisis, or feeling of tremendous permanent uncertainty, as Adam Grant, author and professor at the Wharton School, recently called it. Issues will continue to increase in a compounding fashion.

We must help leaders to lead with their heart in their head. By combining heart and head in leadership, leaders can create a more holistic and balanced approach that is focused on both the well-being of individuals and the success of the organization.

As the adage goes, when you take care of employees, they'll take care of the business. Companies cannot win in the marketplace without first winning in the workplace. In the moments that matter most, make employee concern a top consideration when thinking about communicating effectively. ❖

David Grossman, APR, Fellow PRSA, is founder & CEO of The Grossman Group, which has celebrated 20-plus years of engaging employees and helping leaders lead with heart.

Scan the QR code to read David Grossman's article on PRSA titled, "New Research Shows Poor CEO Communication on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict."



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COMMUNICATION STRATEGY, INTEGRATED MARKETING COMMUNICATIONS ▶▶▶

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Sherry Goldman, president, Goldman Communications Group, and adjunct professor in public relations, City College of New York; Jeanne Salvatore, president, JMS Communications, and lecturer of public relations, Seton Hall University

TECHNIQUES & TACTICS ▶▶▶

Live Webinar, March 14; 3–4 p.m. ET

Why PR Firms Should Get Their Clients Doing Marketing Podcasts

Evan Makovsky, owner, STARCAST MEDIA

EMERGING TRENDS, ETHICS, TECHNIQUES & TACTICS ▶▶▶

Workshop, March 25, 27 and April 1; 3–5 p.m. ET

AI-Generated PR: Balancing Authenticity and Ethics

Lisa Du Bois Low, MBA, APR, associate professor of practice, PR and strategic communication management, Texas Tech University College of Media & Communication

ACCREDITATION PREPARATION & MAINTENANCE ▶▶▶

Workshop, April 3, 12–1:00 p.m. ET

APR Nuts and Bolts: APR Process and Overview

Claire Hill, APR, assistant editor, Tennessee Farmers Cooperative

WRITING

Live Webinar, April 11; 3–4 p.m. ET

7 Steps to Stellar Writing

Ann Wylie, president, Wylie Communications Inc.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

In-person Workshop, April 11–12; 9 a.m.–6 p.m. CDT

Master Class in Strategic Communication

Helio Fred Garcia, president, Logos Consulting Group; Katie Garcia, advisor, Logos Consulting Group

MEDIA RELATIONS, WRITING ▶▶▶

Live Webinar, April 17; 3–4 p.m. ET

Boost Your News Writing Skills

Tom Unger, APR, Fellow PRSA, owner, News Writing Pro, LLC



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APR Boot Camp

Amy Adamy, APR, PR and marketing manager, Lansing Board of Water & Light; Andrew D. Corner, APR, Fellow PRSA, interim chair and professor of practice, Michigan State University; Sean Connolly, APR, owner, Connolly Communications, LLC; Jason Kirsch, APR, principal and senior counselor, PRworks

ETHICS ▶▶▶

Live Webinar — PRSA Storytellers Series, May 9; 3–4 p.m. ET

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Marlene Neill, Ph.D., APR, Fellow PRSA, associate professor and graduate program director, Baylor University

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TaQuinda Johnson on the Role of Asking 'Why' in Your Career

TaQuinda Johnson is an integrated communications and marketing practitioner who specializes in nonprofit, educational, faith-based and lifestyle sectors.

She currently serves as assistant director of communications for Oakland University, where her wide-ranging role includes coordinating and analyzing enrollment marketing and communication campaigns, and creating messaging for the Rochester, Mich.-based school.

Johnson previously worked as a social media specialist at her alma mater, Eastern Michigan University, where she continues as a guest lecturer.

An active PRSA member, Johnson is this year's Detroit Chapter president.

Here, she talks with Editor-in-Chief John Elsasser about her start in the profession, the importance of DEI, and the role of asking 'Why' in your career.

Q You graduated from Eastern Michigan University with a degree in public relations. Did you arrive on campus with that in mind as a career?

A Actually, it wasn't [something I was thinking about pursuing at first]. I went to Eastern Michigan originally as a secondary vocal music teacher and then switched to secondary English. It was during this time that I started providing public relations voluntarily for a Christian entertainment production company.

I enjoyed it so much and knew it was my calling. I immediately changed my major.

Q What initially inspired you to serve as a volunteer leader within PRSA?

A I always say that I am a product of PRSA. I was a member of PRSSA at Eastern Michigan University. Through PRSSA, I received an inside look into the many benefits and what it's truly like to get involved with PRSA.

Q You are the first Black woman to serve as the Detroit Chapter's president. What does this distinction mean for you?

A According to statistics, 7% of PR and communications professionals are Black. Representation matters, and I am honored to stand in this position to lead the charge.

I stand on the shoulders of many before me who have sacrificed and endured so much for the betterment of not just our profession but also our culture.

Being in this role is not about me, but it's about being the catalyst for change we desire to see within our profession. It's about showing others who look just like me that they, too, can achieve their goals and be the change they desire to see.

I often say to the team here in Detroit that we may not control what's happening outside Detroit, but change begins in our own backyard.

Q Who have been some of your leadership role models within PRSA?

A My two role models within PRSA would be [longtime professors at Eastern Michigan University] Lolita Cummings, APR, and the late Melissa Motschall. They served as my mentors and advisors at EMU. They introduced me to PRSA as a student and continued to be pillars in my journey as a professional.

Q What are some of the broader communications-related topics that you're discussing at the Detroit Chapter in these early months of 2024?

A This year, some of the topics that are at the forefront for the Detroit Chapter have been the use of AI within our profession, the effect on the profession, and the change we want to see when it comes to DEI and mental health within the profession, to name a few.

Q You are the assistant director of communications at Oakland University in Oakland County, Mich. What are some of your responsibilities in that role? Is there a typical day for you?

A I am responsible for the communications and marketing efforts to prospective and transfer students. Each line of communication — from publications to the development and execution of the social media efforts for the Department of Admissions — rests in my care.

I always say that no day is the same at OU!

Q How do you collaborate with other departments within the university to ensure cohesive communication efforts?

A From an admissions standpoint, we have monthly meetings with the various departments regarding their recruitment efforts and how we can assist.

Out of these meetings, we conduct academic visit days and send out various communications to prospective students on their behalf. This ensures that the messaging is cohesive.



Q You have a master's in integrated marketing and communications from Eastern Michigan University. Why did you decide to pursue an advanced degree?

A I always had a desire to go after an advanced degree. I was drawn to the integrated marketing and communications program at EMU because the program catered to the working professional. I always desired to elevate my skills in public relations and this program was the perfect fit for me.

Q Working in a higher-education environment, what advice do you have to share with communications students and the next generation of PR professionals?

A For those who are interested in going into higher education, I would recommend that you have a passion for it and truly realize the bigger picture. Our profession can be selfless; it's so important for us as professionals to remember our "Why."

When obstacles come your way and work gets hard, always remember your "Why." Why did you go into the profession? Who is relying on you to answer the call to this profession? Someone's passion or calling is connected to your answer and to your "Why."

Q What advice would you go back and tell yourself as a student?

A Give yourself a little grace. Enjoy the ride and always keep your "Why" in the forefront. ❖



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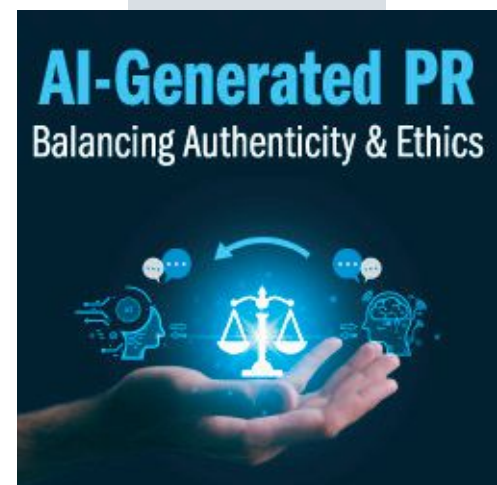
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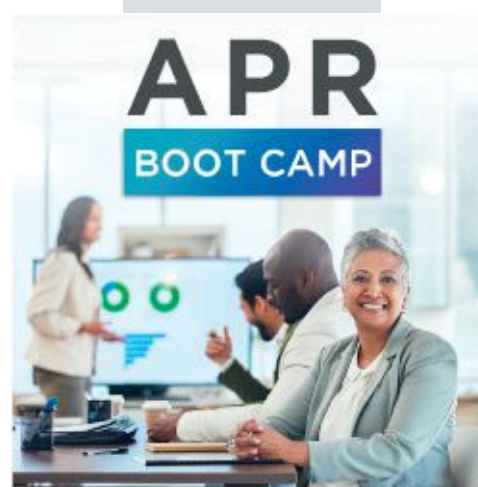
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