

## Negotiating the Office Communications Minefield

### Learn a Simple Way to Improve Communications during a Change Process

By Andrée Iffrig

Pat works in a financial institution that's in the middle of a change process. Some days, the whole office feels like a minefield! Leadership expects every employee to become an entrepreneur on the job. Customer service representatives must now be prepared to sell clients on other products and services in order to drive more business. Employee rewards will be tied to individual and team efforts at meeting business objectives.

It has been left to Pat to convince reluctant managers to get on the change bandwagon and to upgrade their management skills. They will be responsible for helping to create the new sales culture and for training employees. Some managers have worked with the organization for years and they're not convinced they need to attend training seminars to become better managers.

What Pat needs is a quick and easy way to motivate these managers to attend the organization's upcoming seminars in management fundamentals. Pat's first communication about the seminars was greeted with indifference, as have most of the announcements about the change process. It's up to Pat to clarify the value of the training so that managers want to attend.

Like most leaders who take an interest in their employees, Pat has an intuitive understanding of each one's communication preferences. Two of the managers prefer a personal phone call to email about the change initiative, and another insists on face-to-face communication.

When questioned about employee motivation, Pat acknowledges that most of the managers are doubtful about "what's in it for me". Understanding their preferences for communication and what motivates them at work will help Pat to craft communications that attract willing learners to the Saturday workshops.

### A simple template for communications planning

In preparation for the seminars we're facilitating, we've shown Pat a planning tool that organizes what Pat knows about communication preferences and motivation into an easily readable chart. It includes six key factors:

- Who's in the target audience
- Specific communication objectives
- Name of a credible messenger for delivering the communication – someone whom the recipient will trust
- Preferred communication vehicle for delivering the message (e.g. phone call, email, face-to-face meeting)
- Timelines associated with the objective
- Special challenges that may come up with specific target audience members

Where Pat is uncertain about someone's motivation or preferences, a brief inquiry ensures that accurate information is entered in the chart. Mostly, however, Pat can rely on a combination of intuition and experience to fill in the planning template. Once it's complete, Pat will design with our help a compelling message encouraging managers to attend the seminars.

What was an office minefield turns out to be easily mapped and negotiated with a simple planning tool like the communications template. Pat can use and reuse the template for a variety of purposes. The end result is effective communications that help create support internally in the organization for business objectives. Incidentally, attendance at the seminars is now confirmed at 100%.

Andrée Iffrig is the author of *Find Your Voice at Work – The Power of Storytelling in the Workplace*.

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