

## FACT SHEET – DEVELOPING AN INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

It is important to develop an internal communications plan that covers what, when and how you and your leadership team are going to communicate with your people. Having a plan ensures that communication is systemised into your culture rather than reactively thinking about how and what you should communicate.

There are seven kinds of employee communication that you should consider incorporating into your repertoire if you want to be a great CEO.

### 1. Employee consultation

Research the communication needs of employees by developing a basic survey that covers the following subjects:

- **People:** Who do they want to receive communication from?
- **Topics:** What do they want to know about?
- **Frequency:** When and how often do they want to receive communication?
- **Medium:** How do they want to receive the communication (e.g. in person, emails, letters)?
- **Purpose:** Why do they want to be communicated with?

Use the results of this survey to develop your internal communication strategy, incorporating the vision and values of your business.

### 2. All employee meetings

The best way to communicate a consistent message to all employees with the look and feel you want to create for your ideal organisational culture is to gather all your people together and talk to them at the same time. This doesn't necessarily mean that they need to be in the same room. If your business is a multi-site operation, use videoconference technology to make this happen. Ideally, everybody should be visible in some way (this is preferable to disembodied voices).

### 3. Video messages

Video messages are being increasingly used by CEOs to communicate with employees across multiple sites and time zones. It doesn't have to be an expensive professional production made by a videographer. It can be something as easy as a video made on your iPhone or other smart device, which can be made available to all employees via a link. This will allow you to deliver real-time messages quickly, consistently and in a personally engaging way. Many of today's top leaders use video messages in this way, so if you're not doing this already, you should seriously consider doing so.

### 4. Site/team visits

Your people want to see you, their CEO, in person – their manager isn't enough. They want to see the 'big boss', to have the opportunity to hear with their own ears what you have to say. Employees are more likely to ask you questions and provide feedback when they meet you in person rather than via email, teleconference or videoconference. Site or team visits are best achieved by incorporating them into your regular schedule. In some cases, this only needs to be once or twice a year; in other cases, a

monthly visit may be more appropriate. It will make a real difference in terms of employee engagement.

One large city council that I worked with had the mayor visit each team annually. It was a fairly informal event over morning tea. The mayor would update department members on council's key strategies, and they had the opportunity to interact with the mayor and ask any questions. Employees greatly respected this gesture and appreciated that he took time out of his busy schedule to meet with employees.

## **5. Written communication**

Written communication still plays an important part in communication strategies of all kinds. This written communication is, of course, almost entirely electronic – hardcopy communications are becoming rarer with each passing year. As well as face-to-face communication, regular company updates can be sent out by email or posted on the intranet or other communication technology platform. These communications don't need to be long-winded or look overly sophisticated. Keep it succinct. Focus on the message you want to deliver.

Be clear on what information needs to be regularly communicated, such as priority operational issues, the welcoming of new employees, and major business wins. Whenever possible, avoid communication overload and inconsistency by consolidating messages from different people or teams into one coherent piece of communication.

## **6. Social media**

Many businesses have a private Facebook group through which they communicate with their people and their people interact with each other and ask questions. Since this requires no technology upgrade, it is a highly convenient and affordable way to ensure that you're communicating regularly with your employees and they're communicating with each other. By no means should this be your only method of communicating with your employees, but it's an excellent addition to complete your internal communication strategy.

## **7. Informal**

Take the opportunity to strike up spontaneous conversations with your employees. Why not eat your lunch with them in the lunch room? Why not join a team meeting you're not expected at? Even the small things, like joining in an afternoon tea birthday celebration for an employee, make a difference. If you have positive feedback to deliver, a personal visit to an employee's desk—perhaps to compliment them for a particularly brilliant piece of work or a noteworthy level of customer service—can really make a difference in that employee's day. Look for opportunities to surprise your employees in a positive way and interact with them informally.

All of us—you, your employees, your customers—are people. Encourage your people to engage with you, your leadership team and each other by regularly communicating (message, listen and respond) with them about the business, its goals and your goals, and their contribution to the success of the business. Importantly, allow them the opportunity to communicate with you, and when they seize that opportunity, listen to them.

**CEO insight**

*“You can never over-communicate with your employees. As a leader, you might feel like you’re talking too much and you may be over-communicating. ‘They don’t want to see that much of me; they don’t want to hear from me too often. Why would they be interested in this piece of information?’ You make decisions to filter yourself as a leader, but the reality is, your employees always want you to communicate. I’ve yet to meet an employee who has said to me: ‘You’re over-communicating, Mat’.” – Mat Baxter, UM Australia*

**EXERCISE – DEVELOP YOUR INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS PLAN**

<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Message</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Medium</b>
<i>Purpose of the communication?</i>	<i>What is the topic/s?</i>	<i>Who is communicating?</i>	<i>When and frequency?</i>	<i>What is the method/medium?</i>

