

Communicating with Your Global Workforce

By Craig E. Bentley

It doesn't seem like it was that long ago that, for most of us, "work" meant working and interacting with friends and colleagues who all had much in common. We all lived in the same general geographic area and shared many of the same cultural, social, and religious traditions and practices. We tended to work with people of the same nationality, and often of the same race and gender. And for most of us, we didn't even have a lot of contact with people outside of our own time zone, much less another country. So communicating with our colleagues, customers, and suppliers was a pretty straightforward exercise.

Today the rules have changed. The rise of the global economy has imposed tremendous challenges on all of our communication practices; we must now communicate around the world, not just around the corner. We must also be aware of linguistic, cultural, religious, and social differences if we are to build strong communication channels with our colleagues and our most important business contacts. No company can succeed without acknowledging

the changes that have occurred and adopting new approaches and practices for communicating with the global workforce.

As our workforces become more diverse, and our "workplace" takes on more and more of an international flavor, we must be particularly concerned with how effectively we communicate with our own teams of workers spread across the globe. Creating corporate alignment and a consistent focus on corporate strategy, goals, and values is ever more important, and difficult, when we have to make our messages understandable and memorable across cultures, borders, and time zones.

So we must always keep in mind that in establishing sound communication practices, we are now dealing with a "double whammy" effect: our communication strategies require more thought, more consistency, and therefore more effort. A breakdown or failure in executing our communications plan will have an increasingly dramatic and negative impact because of the emerging global scale of our business activities.



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So what can we do?

Here are five tips to help business professionals create a culture of excellent communication between global offices, teams, and individuals:

1.) Repetition, Repetition, Repetition!

To communicate well on the global stage, communicate often. Major business strategies, policies and procedures, and corporate values must be continually reinforced if the message is to reach all corners of your global

workforce. If you are worried that your message is not getting out, you're probably right! When in doubt, repeat, repeat, repeat!

2.) Be Concise!

Remember, every communication will probably be translated into several different languages and may be "massaged" along the way. Keep your message crisp and to the point in order to help preserve its integrity as it travels around the world. The more you can condense your message into one or two phrases that are memorable and easy to repeat and reinforce, the better luck you will have making your message stick" with diverse audiences.

3.) Avoid Jargon and Localized Analogies!

Business jargon may not translate from country to country. Neither may certain commonly used analogies, especially sports analogies (what does "this is a slam dunk" mean to someone who has never seen or played a basketball game?). Use clear, simple language and expressions that "travel well".

4.) Be Aware and Respectful of Cultural and Religious Differences!

Edit your corporate communications to be sure they do not reflect a particular religious bias or tradition at the expense of others. Use humor judiciously – what one cultural finds amusing, another might find offensive. Again, use clear, concise language to communicate your principal messages, and if in doubt about the appropriateness of a word or phrase, leave it out or find a better way to express your thoughts.

5.) Actively Involve your Local Business and HR Teams to "Get the Word Out"!

Make sure you fully brief all your business teams and HR and other key support staff in the field to ensure that they fully understand and can communicate your messages to their local colleagues. They need to be fully conversant with all corporate communication announcements and policies so they can effectively deal with any local issues and concerns and guarantee that the messages reaching your extended network

are consistent with what leaves the head office!

These simple tips will help you meet the challenges of communicating effectively in our expanding global marketplace. Remember, this is the time to communicate more, not less. Keep all of your employees informed, up-to-date, and motivated and you will avoid the pitfalls and reap the benefits of a multi-cultural and multinational workforce.