

MCSO Internal Communication Plan Rationale and Guidelines

Goals:

Build staff support and confidence in district.

Generate confidence in the district's focus / plan among the staff

Management behavior: Commit to honesty and transparency within the limits of the law and good judgment.

- Say as much as you can and know to be true as soon as you can – without inflaming the situation, exposing someone, hindering an investigation, etc.
- Choose your words carefully and provide clear talking points as well as guidance in terms of tone and sensibility:
- **Get out in front of the rumor train.** “Let’s give ‘em something (good) to talk about!”
- Have a specified ‘chain of communications’ that defines who gets information first, from whom, and how.
- Avoid talking down to staff, emotional ‘gushing,’ etc. Apologize when necessary. Immediately clear up any miscommunications or incorrect information that has been shared. It happens.
- Use inclusive language in your messages whenever possible. Not everyone is a teacher.

Plan for remediation

Since the ICP process is comprehensive, we may end up asking people in the organization to behave and communicate differently. That may mean we will need to help people develop the skills needed to fulfill these new expectations. For example, a manager might need to learn how to rephrase memos, or conduct cooperative performance appraisals so they are consistent with the desired culture.

Implement

Continuously Monitor and Revise

Over time, new communication tools may become more obvious, or we may find that some tools are ineffective. So consistent with a continuous improvement approach we need to assess the effects of what we are doing, and "re-steer" as needed. Some organizations use annual surveys to assess whether progress is being made, and solicit additional ideas

Projects that may be controversial and district wide events need a written communication plan.

Many, if not most, successful communication plans have information passing in both directions – from administration to staff and from staff to administration.

Identify the available communication tools

Since we consider internal communication in a broad sense, we need to identify the means by which we can affect corporate culture in the direction we want to go. Below are some examples of communication tools.

Grassroots:

Engage staff as ambassadors for Middletown City Schools

Participate in community events and committees

- Customer service training for staff
- Annual Principal for a Day program
- Participate in community events and committees
- Encourage positive and healthy informal communication

Staff to Management Forums:

Getting information FROM staff also sends messages!

- Surveys
- Staff meetings
- Individual meetings
- Blogs
- Brown bag lunches with principal
- Coffee w/ director

Paper-based:

Memos (internal correspondence),

Newsletter,

Brochures,

Performance appraisal documents,

Slogans,

Pay packet enclosures, etc.

Executive/Manager Oral:

Administrators meetings

Building staff meetings

One-on-one (face to face) administrator to staff communication

Informal communication

Electronic:

E-mail

Web sites

Intranets

Social networking

Blogs

E-news

The top 10 essential elements of a successful internal communications strategy:

1. Effective employee-directed communications must be led from the top

Effective communications require the active commitment and endorsement of senior managers. It is not enough simply to develop a 'vision statement' or formulate in general terms the values by which the company lives. Behavior is what counts. Managers must be seen to behave in a manner that is consistent with the ethos they are promoting.

2. The essence of good communications is consistency

At all costs, avoid following fashion and tinkering. If you try to improve communications and then fail--because your messages are inconsistent or are 'good news only'--things will not quietly settle back into the way they used to be. You will inevitably have created expectations, and may have to live with the consequences of having disappointed those expectations.

3. Charismatic yet natural and planned communications are more effective.

Successful employee communications owe as much to consistency, careful planning and attention to detail as they do to charisma or natural gifts.

We might not all be another Zig Ziglar, Tony Robbins or Bill Clinton. But even such communication 'giants' slip up if they fail to plan, fail to pay attention to detail and fail to project a consistent message.

4. Communication via the principal is most effective

Principal to building staff communication is an opportunity for people to ask questions and check that they have understood the issues correctly. However, be aware that business urgency and reality may dictate the need, on many occasions, to inform staff directly rather than relying entirely on the cascade process. (Though managers will still need to answer people's questions and listen to their views.)

5. There must be integration / coordination between internal and external communications

There must be a fit between what you are telling your people and what you are telling your customers, shareholders and public. (By the same token, there must be a fit between what you are telling your people, and what the external media are telling them.)

6. Timing is critical

However clearly expressed and well-presented your message may be, if it arrives at the wrong time you might as well not have bothered. Old news is often worse than no news. Consequently, it is important to ensure that the channels you use can really deliver at the time you need them to. Use the district protocol for internal communication

7. Tone is important

Expressing overly-gushing enthusiasm about a technical change of little real significance to your staff or public at large is scarcely calculated to make people take your message to heart. If they don't take that message to heart, why would they take the rest of what you say to their bosoms?

8. Never lose sight of the 'what's in it for me?' factor

We are self-interested creatures. I may have invented the most amazing gadget ever, but unless I get you emotionally involved you are never likely to listen to my message about it. But if I can show you how my gadget will revolutionize your life, add dollars to your wallet, free up your time, fix your smelly feet, wash your car for you, stop your kids arguing with you, bring peace with your spouse, bring world peace...

9. Communication is a two-way process

Employee communications are NOT a one-way information dump. Capturing feedback is of critical importance. Informal and formal methods of feedback are valid: (environmental scanning, written survey, etc.) If you are not seen to be listening and acting on what you are told, why should people bother telling you?

10. Set your standards and stick to them

Determine which channels should be mandatory and which should be optional; establish quality standards for all channels and review these at least annually.