WORK SAMPLE · JON RICHARDS

Manager Communication Guide

One of 23 guides I wrote for the Supervising Manager Toolkit at an insurance technology consulting firm of 400 people. Each guide was linked to a gap our engagement survey revealed. Company details removed.

How to Communicate Changes That Affect Employees

This document is intended as a general direction for common day-to-day situations. Avoid copy/pasting into a written communication or saying, "HR told me to say this…", as these are speaking points to help you navigate a potentially difficult topic. Please use sound judgment when applying it to specific circumstances. If you are not confident addressing an issue directly with an employee, please contact Human Resources for additional guidance.

How supervisors communicate change directly impacts trust, engagement, and morale. Clear, early communication helps employees understand the why, reduces uncertainty, and prevents rumors. When managers are transparent, consistent, and open to questions, employees feel supported and better prepared to adapt. This leads to smoother rollouts, less resistance, and stronger team alignment.

1. Communicate Early, Where Applicable and Reasonable. Don't Wait Until Everything Is Final

- Share what you know now, even if details are evolving.
  "We want you to hear this from us first. Some details may shift, but here's what we know so far…"
- Early communication prevents rumors and builds credibility.
- Silence is interpreted as hiding information.

2. Explain the Why (Before the What and How)

Our employees accept change much more readily when the reasoning is clear. Leaders can communicate:

- Why the change is happening (business case, efficiency, compliance, growth, quality, etc.)
- What problem it solves
- How it benefits the employee, customer, or company
- What happens if we don't change (the Threats segment of SWOT)

If leaders skip the "why," employees fill in the blanks with fear.

3. Use a Clear, Simple Message

Use a short, structured message:

1. What's changing
2. Why it's changing
3. When it will happen
4. How it affects employees

5. Where to ask questions

The more complex the change, the more a simpler message often resonates.

4. Share Information in Multiple Formats

Use 2–3 channels to ensure clarity and avoid missed communication:

- Department meeting or huddle
- Follow-up Teams message and email recap
- FAQ or bullet-point summary
- Optional quick video or screen recording

Repetition does not annoy people, ambiguity does.

5. Involve People Before the Change Takes Effect

Employees trust what they help shape. What leaders should do:

- Ask for input early: *"What questions come to mind?"*
- Gather concerns and patterns.
- Bring themes back to leadership for refinement.
- Implement simple fixes before rollout.

Even when the decision itself isn't negotiable, how change is rolled out often is.

6. Be Honest About What Is and Isn't Flexible

Avoid promises leaders can't keep. What leaders should say:

- *"This part is fixed."*
- *"This part is still being shaped."*
- *"This part is open to feedback."*

Employees appreciate boundaries. It reduces false expectations.

7. Communicate Impact with Transparency

Leaders should clearly address:

- Who is impacted
- How much
- What behaviors or tasks will change
- Whether workloads shift
- Whether training or support is coming

Employees handle change better when they understand scope.

8. Give Employees Time to Process

Do not announce a change on Monday morning and implement it Monday afternoon. Best practice:

- Give at least 1–2 weeks for non-urgent changes.
- Provide space for questions and emotions.
- Allow supervisors to hold 1:1 discussions for people who need more clarity.

Time to process means resistance decreases dramatically.

9. Train and Prepare Supervisors First

Never let supervisors hear change news at the same time employees do. Before public rollout:

- Brief all supervising managers and leads
- Provide a talking-points guide
- Allow Q&A to ensure alignment
- Clarify "non-negotiables"
- Role-play tough questions

Supervisors must be equipped to answer: *"What does this mean for me?"*

10. Close the Loop and Follow Through

After communication:

- Provide an FAQ based on employee questions
- Update timelines if anything changes
- Report back: *"Here's what we heard, and here's what we adjusted based on your feedback."*
- Celebrate the implementation wins
- Ask: *"How did the rollout feel to you?"*

Feedback after change means faster trust rebuilding.

11. Protect Psychological Safety During the Rollout

Leaders must:

- Avoid defensiveness
- Validate emotions, even frustration
- Assume positive intent
- Reinforce openness: *"It's okay to have questions or concerns."*

Trust is built in how leaders respond to discomfort.

12. Use "We" Language to Build Unity

When presenting change, leaders should avoid "they said" or "corporate decided." Replace with:

- *"Here's what we are doing…"*

- *“Our team is adapting to…”*
- *“We will navigate this together.”*

Pronouns shape perception.