



THINKTHINK!

The danger of undervaluing internal communications



How do you communicate company information with your colleagues? Perhaps you favour the short, sharp approach, something like opening your office door and shouting 'Hey, listen up and spread the word, we've got a new order'. Or possibly such transparency isn't your style, maybe you call a meeting, tell the senior managers and say they are not to breathe a word to anyone. Or do you prefer the 'grapevine method' – dropping a few hints to key colleagues knowing that they will hang around where people congregate and take delight in passing on fresh gossip?

If you are reading this because you are concerned that you are not getting your message across internally then the above may already apply to you. In which case you should know that a study conducted by the Ryder Self Group in 2003 found that when describing their ideal workplace employees consistently rate "effective communication between management and staff" in their top five expectations. (The survey canvassed 10,000 employees across a range of businesses).

↑ In their own words, people feel valued when:

- Their opinions, expertise and experience are recognised through an open two-way channel of communication between management and staff.
- They feel involved and empowered in decision-making processes relating to their jobs.
- Their contributions and efforts are openly recognised.
- Good and bad news is openly communicated, letting them know what is really going on in the organisation.

↓ On the other hand they feel totally undervalued and not trusted when:

- They are kept in the dark about important developments in the organisation.
- They are not asked about their expertise or experience in a particular job or field.
- They are not consulted about important decisions.
- They do not receive any feedback about positive things they have done.

So what? The boss is thinking. Surely it doesn't matter if there are a few disgruntled and misinformed people about, so long as the company is more or less doing well it can't really mean a great deal. **I'm afraid that is simply not the case.** You know, and I know, your colleagues are an asset; they are without doubt potentially the best asset you have, we just need to get this message across to the top brass.

If the employees on the floor are not receiving the company message in a way that makes them feel valued then you can be sure they are not giving of their best. And what's worse they are almost certainly doing some harm. A recent MORI poll found that 30 per cent of UK employees are 'brand neutral', 22 per cent are 'brand saboteurs' and 48 per cent are 'brand champions'. The brand saboteurs have low job satisfaction levels and poor commitment to the company. As a result, they tend to show anti-customer service behaviour, talk down organisational change and have an infectious negative impact on their employee peer group. No that's worrying, to say the very least.

When moral is down or work is tough it is important that the messages circulating within your company are positive. Why? **Because internal messages have a habit of becoming external profiles.**

Picture the scene in the in the pub after work on a Friday night. Someone in accounts has too many Bacardi Breezers and spills the beans on the present state of the company's book debts that he discovered whilst having a snoop, and it's not good. Speculation abounds over a curry later and by Monday morning half of head office is convinced that promised pay rises are in danger, redundancies are inevitable and the company is on a downward slide.

But what the man in accounts didn't know is that your main creditor has just re-structured, is about to pay everything it owes and has a massive order waiting for the company. In the kitchen, by the water-cooler, on MSN and the phone, the grapevine is alive with speculation. (It turns out that there is a notice on the board in reception from the MD telling everyone the good news – but no one has read it; no-one ever reads it.)

In the meantime your valuable colleagues are at best worried, rendering them unproductive, and at worst spending company time looking for another job. Sales people pass on their worries to the customers and before you know it the gossip has become a self-fulfilling prophesy.

I grant you the above is a gloomy example but at Clear Focus they ThinkThink that it is not too far fetched but nor would it take very much effort to turn this scenario around.

If this company had used an experienced communications and marketing agency to devise an effective internal communications strategy then this disastrous turn of events would never have happened. The news of the company's credit problems and subsequent rescue would have been on the desktops of the whole workforce; and with an opportunity to ask questions there would be no need for speculation in the kitchen/pub/restaurant.

Closing music

What the Clear Focus experts are really good at is tailoring communications to suit an individual workforce so that it speaks to them in a language that they will respect and with which they can identify. It's a sort of horses for courses approach. They know that some people will respond well to print – a company hand-out or magazine that they can take home or read over lunch, others prefer the electronic approach and the dynamics of an intranet or company blog where they can have their say or perhaps a downloadable pod-cast from the chairman. There is a massive choice of media that can deliver your message straight to the heart of your colleagues and that's where it counts.

The 52% who are presently either brand neutral or brand saboteurs can be helped towards feeling invested in the company and that way they will become brand champions. And being a brand champion means not only passing positive messages internally but also filtering these out to your customer, creating a buoyancy about the company that will, quite literally pay dividends.

Internal communications is the new marketing strategy. Call Clear Focus on **0845 225 0325** to find out how they can help you to use your most powerful asset.

