

Tip # 5

DEVELOPING A SURVEY COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Studies have found that survey response rates markedly improve when pre-survey communications are delivered to potential respondents prior to survey administration¹.

A successful survey program requires the willing participation of key groups and individuals in the organization. People participate because they feel ownership in the process, understand the benefits of a survey effort, and trust that their input will be considered. Communication before, during, and after the survey administration is an integral part of maintaining employee commitment to the process and reinforcing management's credibility.

A comprehensive communication plan should ensure a broad base of understanding and support for the survey objectives and how they will impact the organization. It must also present accurate and timely communication about the survey process, the survey outcomes, and what management intends to do with the results to drive positive change in the organization.

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1. Successful Communication Strategy Guidelines:

- Empower one person within the organization and then hold him/her accountable for coordinating the dissemination of information. This person can be your primary survey

coordinator, someone in HR or a member of your communication department. Having multiple people responsible for different communication pieces with no single person overseeing the process almost guarantees that something will "fall through the cracks."

- Involve senior management in your survey communication. This is particularly important in the initial announcement of the survey and in the initial feedback to employees. Involvement of top management indicates credibility of and commitment to the process.
- Utilize established communication channels in the organization (e.g., an intranet, newsletters, employee meetings) but be willing to develop additional channels if necessary. You do not want to add to the bureaucracy; at the same time, you want to communicate that the survey is important to the organization.

2. Pre-survey Communication

Once the decision has been made to conduct a survey, inform all management personnel:

1. The purpose of the survey
2. Anticipated timelines
3. Their role in the survey process
4. How confidentiality will be ensured

Informing managers before all others allows them time to plan and prepare for employee questions. It also reinforces the fact that they are important players in the process. Some organizations put together "FAQ" sheets or "talking points" to help managers with the communication about the survey to their employees.

Two-to-three weeks before the survey, send at least one pre-survey notification to all employees. The message should come from a

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top executive in the organization such as the President or CEO, in order to reinforce its importance. The content of this communication should explain why the organization is doing the survey, when it will be done, who will be asked to participate and what will be done with the results.

As for how to communicate this information, you may find it beneficial to utilize alternate methods to how the survey will be distributed. If people will be invited to take the survey via email, you may wish to utilize the intranet or company newsletter to send a pre-notification. Because some people have a tendency to ignore emails, an alternate pre-notification method may help tune them into the fact that they should be expecting a survey in their inbox. Some companies choose to have an all-employee “kick-off” meeting at a location where all can meet.

Organizations might also find it helpful to rally support for the survey by conducting an internal public relations campaign using videos, posters, or other promotional material. One company produced survey-themed coffee sleeves and had them available in the cafeteria; another put their survey slogan on pens and distributed them to all employees. Efforts such as these can help keep the survey in the forefront of employees’ minds. While this is a good idea for everyone, it can be especially important if it is the first survey the organization has conducted, or if participation in previous surveys has been lower than desired. The company should also encourage managers and supervisors to remind employees about the upcoming survey at weekly staff/department meetings.

In large organizations, a division or location manager sometimes issues a second communication one week before administration. This message reiterates the objectives of the survey, and contains a personal request for participation, reminding employees of the

importance of hearing as many viewpoints as possible.

3. Administrative Communication

At the time of administration, the need for participation must be reinforced along with additional information that must be communicated.

This communication should include:

1. Reiteration of the survey objectives – why the organization is doing the survey.
2. A reminder that participation is voluntary, while re-emphasizing the importance of participation.
3. A reiteration of the procedures for ensuring confidentiality.
4. The cut-off date for electronic surveys and return date for paper surveys.

Other information that may need to be covered in special circumstances:

For electronic administration: Be sure to emphasize the procedures for ensuring confidentiality; this is a major concern for online surveying. Also, inform employees whom to contact if they have difficulties accessing the electronic survey.

For mail administration: Enclose complete instructions about the process for returning the survey (e.g., sealing it in an enclosed Business Reply Envelope and mailing it, or dropping it into a central collection box). Also, if employees are mailing surveys back, be aware that they may think your return date is a “mail by” date unless you are very specific.

Reminder/thank you: About midway through the administration period, send out a reminder via e-mail (for electronic administration) or postcard



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(for paper) to all employees who were given the opportunity to participate in the survey. It should thank those who have already submitted their surveys, and encourage those who have not, to do so. Reminders can boost response rates by 20-50%. For a longer administration window, use two reminders, spaced at least a week apart. But stop at two; more than that has little effect and may irritate people.

4. Post Survey Communication

Determining the optimal forum for communicating results really depends upon the organization's culture and size, as well any pertinent time constraints. Results can be disseminated via an executive report or presentation on an organization's intranet, an employee newsletter, departmental and/or organizational presentations, posters placed in common employee areas, etc. Again, the forum in which results are communicated is inconsequential, what's important is that results are promptly communicated and properly understood.

Managers should in turn be held accountable for communicating this information back to subordinates along with the areas in greatest need of improvement and established next steps. Decisions regarding precisely how much department or work group level detail to share with subordinates should depend upon the extent to which subordinates need to be involved in bringing about change based upon the survey results.

References

1. Fox, Crask, & Jonghoon, 1988; Shannon & Bradshaw, 2002

5. Action Planning & Follow-Through

Action Planning & Follow-Through One of the final components of an effective Employee Survey Communication Strategy is to engage managers, and subsequently employees, in communications to solidify action-plans and ensure appropriate understanding and follow-through. Communications should first be directed toward ensuring that managers understand how they can help support both organizational-level change and change within their own particular work groups or departments. Action planning goals at the department-level should be broken down into discrete steps that are explicitly communicated. Key indices for monitoring progress toward goal fulfillment should also be explicitly communicated, since the combined influence of attainable goals and continuous feedback heighten motivation and ensure continued progress in the right direction.

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