Communicating in Today's World

Workplace Communication Outside the Workplace

There was a time when people left the workplace at the end of the day, went home and didn't communicate with co-workers until the next morning when they arrived at the office. Today, it's not uncommon to be watching TV and, at some point in the evening, answer a short email from a co-worker during a commercial.

> Scenario:
> In the time span between everyone leaving the office sometime around 5 pm and the next morning, a team has made the decision to send an appraiser out to a worksite to assess the cost of selling an inactive pump jack. The appraiser received the confirmation e-mail at 11 pm just before retiring for the evening. He arrived the next day at the site, a 4-hour drive away from the city, at noon.

This kind of workplace communication is less of an anomaly and more the norm. Employees are leaving the workplace with their laptops and cellphones in tow, changing the definition of workplace location. It is not about the physical location of the office as much as it is the where the employee is located.

The implications for employee health and wellness, including personal relationships and a connected workforce, are worth addressing so workers do not feel as if they are a cog in the great big profit making wheel. It is important that organizations create practices or policy that acknowledges this new workplace environment appropriately.

Here is what we have at the moment:
* Very competitive businesses where time is a huge commodity
* Decentralized departments, team and pods
* Workers spread out across large geographical areas
* 24/7 mentality
* Collaborative and flexible team player expectations
* Employees working interactively with technology
* Constant change

Some employees embrace this work environment, some question it but deal with it as a necessary part of being employed, and still others look for alternative ways to earn a living. Whatever opinion we hold, we know that technology is going to factor in to the solution. We also know workplace stress is prevalent and people are constantly trying to assess when to say it's all too much. Extreme jobs; those requiring 60 or more hours per week and affecting about 33 percent of the workforce, are changing the face of the workplace. It doesn't line up with the work-

life balance culture of the Gen Xer's and definitely not the *modus-operandi* of Gen Y.

There arises an ethical question about the feasibility of allowing a workplace to develop where employees eventually burnout or leave. We operate in a world where information and thinking is what many employees are paid for. We can't just turn it on and off. We need to align the needs and interests of the organizational culture, human resource and technology departments, as well as leadership and workers. How do we do that?

Guidelines for workplace connectivity

- Create a work environment that does not completely blur the lines between technology and the employee.

- Organize in-house technology in a way that develops performance and productivity, improving the work experience.

- Understand that employees have lives outside of work and the quality of their off hours is vital to productivity and morale on the job.

- Establish a family-friendly organization that promotes vacations and flexible work schedules. This includes managing workloads and schedules accordingly.

- Return to a 37.5 or 40 hour work week expectation where applicable and reward employees for finding balance.

- Model a leadership and work style that does not create a 24/7 expectation.

- Use realistic time lines for projects.

- Allow employees to have a voice regarding their life balance and allow them to take responsibility for setting boundaries.

Add more ideas as shared by your fellow students on the discussion thread.

Current social media

With 300 million Facebook, 20 million Twitter and 43 million LinkedIn users, it's impossible to ignore the impact online communication has on our personal and professional lives. More than half a million people play online video games daily, connecting and communicating on a global level that is unprecedented in the history of human communication.

We gather information while on line using Google Chrome, Firefox, Safari and Explorer, to name a few of the most popular internet browsers. High traffic websites such as Wikipedia are used regularly for quick searches as well as in-depth research projects.

Instant messaging (IM) is also being used for workplace as well as social purposes. Where MySpace once dominated, there are many sites for IM, including MSN, Yahoo Messenger and AOL to name a few, but many social media sites have IM capabilities.

Social media

One of the fastest growing marketing concepts, social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, as well as company websites, are becoming essential to competing in today's marketplace. Communicating with consumers and anyone interested, including stakeholders, make this a quick way to get information out to the masses. There are many more niche sites for industry and interest groups coming online every day.

Each of the major sites listed has its own unique qualities that are enhanced by effective use of blogging. Putting our website and social media information on a business card will be as common as printing our phone number. In fact, the time is here where it is becoming expected!

While some workers do not understand the use of social media such as Twitter others are embracing its usefulness. Technology writer Clive Thompson refers to tweets as "ambient awareness": quick, abbreviated status reports from members of our extended social network.

Think of social media as an
extension of face-to face communication.

Kath Blair, Calgary based, Gen Y Marketing Manager

Wrap-up points to remember

On the road to better communication:

- Recognize communication is always with you

- Communicate to keep a balance between your work and personal life

- Develop a personal and professional social media policy

- Keep integrity in your communications to avoid difficult situations

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