

HALLMARK

New leader competencies and communication plan

When a female senior manager from corporate headquarters was named to serve as general manager at one of the company's major operations facilities, Dean Rodenbough, corporate communications director at Hallmark, worked with one of his team members to develop a communication plan tailor-made to her needs and desired outcomes to help smooth the move. It was deemed necessary not because the facility was in trouble, but for a more sobering reason: There were concerns about the reaction of some of the "old school" male operations team at the plant to being led by a woman.

LAYING OUT THE STRATEGY

The communication strategy was developed with various standard key areas: goals, outcomes, key messages and core audiences.

Most progressive, however, was the behaviors and competencies angle. The "tactical plan" (see stage 6 in the figure, overleaf) is a standard list of actions – a key competencies framework for the leader, focused on *activities* to give her exposure and visibility. But this is supplemented by an expertly constructed measurement framework that is, in essence, a "behavior" plan – going beyond mere activities or competencies to list the typical intangible *cultural* and *climate* outcomes that will have been achieved, if the new leader is meeting her communication goals (stage 7a, page 97). "The whole thing was a real success – and the plan really helped her to see how or where she could make a difference," says Rodenbough. So much so that his team have created (and been asked to create) similar plans for several other key leaders since.

Fig 4.1: Hallmark's communication plan for a new senior manager

Leadership Transition Communication Plan

1. **Goal**
Gain acceptance and support of key audiences to enable the facility to meet or exceed its business goals in the short- and long-term.
2. **Objectives**
 - Build relationships with each of the key audiences during first 90 days.
 - Be visible to employees.
 - Be approachable and receptive to input.
 - Make concerted effort to relate to employees at all levels.
3. **Key audiences**
 - Direct reports.
 - Key peer group across entire Operations division.
 - Key internal customer contacts.
 - Management group at facility.
 - All employees.
4. **Personal communication issues/style**
 - *Birthday/significant service anniversary cards*: Hand write and deliver to all exempt. Attempt to get on the floor and acknowledge as many as possible front-line employees.
 - *Demonstrate an interest in employees*. Ask about kids, sports, vacation, etc. Take the time to listen and follow-up.
 - *Share your good sense of humor*. Laugh, smile, and tell personal stories and anecdotes. Tell stories about your work experience with employees from different areas of the company to build a personal connection with people.
 - *Join in employees' impromptu discussions*. Have casual meetings in break areas.
 - *Ask your staff to pinpoint one exempt/non-exempt per week for you to recognize via voice mail, e-mail or in person*. This can be simple recognition about timeliness in responding to request for information, etc. Make sure to recognize a variety of individuals and groups.
 - *Clothing/jewelry* ... not too upscale. Need to project a comfortable and approachable image.

5. Key messages

- I have a lot to learn and am anxious to get started. Because I don't have an extensive operations background, I plan to spend a lot of time "on the floor" meeting people and experiencing what we do first hand. I'll rely heavily on your collective knowledge, skills and commitment to excellence. I'll also count on your continued collaboration across departments as we finish the year just as strong as it began.
- My predecessor did an excellent job of communicating, listening, and supporting/encouraging continuous improvement. I'll continue to focus on providing leadership in these areas.
- What I do bring to the table ... what I've learned from my previous assignments.
- Experience in product development/marketing, marketing research, cost management and inventory control.
- Strong leadership/management with small and large work groups.
- A passion around process improvement and continuous learning.
- Mutual trust and respect is critical to success at any level.
- Learn from the successes and the failures.
- Know what's expected of you and how what you do fits into the bigger picture.
- Underscore support for performance management and importance of holding managers accountable for effectively managing their staff.
- There will not be any sweeping changes or big decisions anytime soon. Will maintain focus on priorities established earlier this year.

6. Tactical communication plan

Timetable	Audience	Activity
Within 90 days	Direct reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain regular staff meeting commitment. • Participate in your staff's team meetings to hear from a broader constituency. Stress integration between functions. • Meet one-on-one to review individual goals.
	Key peer group and internal customer contacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule introductory meetings and assess desired level of future interaction.
	Facility management group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adapt company president's monthly senior management voicemail and record and send to your staff. Customize message by spotlighting division accomplishments and issues. • Convene monthly business performance update meetings using corporate toolkits. Accommodate Q&A.
	All facility employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walk the floor. Commit to spend 40-50% of time on floor during first 30 days; 30-40% during following 60 days. • Publish a personal point of view column in facility newsletter at least monthly. • Participate in employee service anniversary/birthday/retirement celebrations whenever possible.
After 90 days	Management group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one or small group/functional lunches focused on key business issues.
	All employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain commitment to quarterly town hall sessions. For first few town halls, consider having questions submitted prior to sessions. Or have focused topics that you feel comfortable fielding cold questions about. • Monthly lunchtime Q&A sessions.
	Employee diversity resource groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for a briefing and overview of issues. Share your commitment to their efforts. Ask about their needs.

7a. Measurement: Self and leader assessment

- New business leader to rate their results for each statement in the box below on a 1-5 scale after 30 and 90 days. Her supervisor should complete as well.

30 days	90 days
As I walk around, people acknowledge me and seem comfortable with me approaching them to introduce myself.	As I walk around and/or eat in the facility cafeteria, people acknowledge me and perceive me as approachable – they may come up to me to introduce themselves.
Each of my staff members has prepared for me an orientation plan.	I have completed all orientation plans and I continue to spend time in each departmental area doing each of the respective job tasks.
I spend 40-50% of my time on the floor. My supervisor still has to provide me with gentle reminders to “get out on the floor.”	I continue to spend 30-40% of my time on the floor. My supervisor can’t find me sometimes because I’m out on the floor.
I have awareness of my staff’s top issues.	My staff acknowledges that I am engaged in and supportive of their efforts to address their top issues.
I’m asking a lot of questions (including the same one multiple times), and some more worthwhile than others.	I’m asking more of the right questions . . . most of the time.
My staff bring issues to my attention, knowing that I am not likely to discover them on my own.	My staff do not always have to bring issues to my attention because I’m discovering them on my own more frequently.
I have not made any sweeping changes, only acknowledged perceived opportunities.	I have developed a list of opportunities for discussion and prioritization with my staff.
I have a contact list put together (names of people to “get to know”).	I have a more formalized relationship development plan put together and approved by my supervisor.
I have familiarized myself with the facility’s cost centers and YTD performance against plan.	The facility’s favorable budgeting position has not weakened and a solid budget plan is approved for next year that my staff feels is achievable.

7b. Measurement: Employee assessment

Conduct focus groups or administer survey using the following questions:

1. I feel comfortable approaching the facility manager.
2. I believe the facility manager listens to employee input.
3. I believe the facility manager is candid in her communication with employees.
4. In the last 90 days, I have (check all that apply):
 - read the facility manager’s column in the newsletter
 - participated in a town hall meeting
 - seen the facility manager on the floor multiple times
5. I believe the facility manager is visible enough to all employees.
6. I believe the facility manager has a genuine interest in employees.
7. I believe the facility manager is willing to address difficult business issues.
8. I know and understand the priorities for our facility.
9. I believe the facility manager does an effective job of keeping the organization informed of progress against our priorities.
10. Our facility manager could be more effective if . . . (open ended comments).