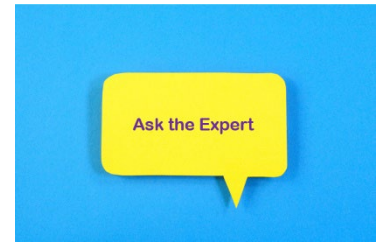


EMPLOYEE MATTERS: ASK THE EXPERT

Ask the Expert is a monthly column published in the Employee Matters newsletter authored by experts from across the University and focused on common workplace challenges. Please find archived columns below this month's column.



APRIL 2025

AUTHOR: JANET WALZER, ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND CHIEF OF STAFF

TOPIC: BEST PRACTICES FOR COMMUNICATING DURING TIMES OF CHANGE

Q: As we go through change, are there tips on how managers can communicate to their teams effectively?

A: Communicating during times of change can be challenging, but it is so critical. Even a little communication can go a long way. In the absence of communication, some of us fill in the blanks with information that might not be accurate. Below are some pointers regarding change communications.

- Try always to explain the “why” when communicating with your team. Without a reason, staff are left to wonder and might not be able to absorb the information nor accept what is being communicated.
- Say as much as you can and acknowledge if you are not able to provide details. Be direct with statements such as, “This all I can share with you right now,” or “I am not able to provide any more details.” To set expectations, when necessary, directly state that certain matters will always remain confidential.
- Keep the lines of communication open and intentionally invite your team to ask questions. It is perfectly acceptable to say “I don’t know” when you don’t know or not completely sure. Your team will appreciate your candor and transparency.
- Check in with your team members whether you have an update or not. You do not have to have more information to follow up with them.
- As appropriate, share with your team how you personally manage change.
- Offer resources and one-on-one meetings. You might end up repeating information and that is okay -- sometimes it takes repetition for messages to be absorbed. More communication is always better than less.

MARCH 2025

AUTHOR: SARAH KLAPER, UNIVERSITY OMBUDSPERSON

TOPIC: CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE WORKPLACE

Q: In my department, issues are handled in an interesting way. When someone’s behavior is problematic, people go to the director instead of addressing it one on one. The director then

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changes a policy or process for everyone to address the behavior of one person. This result is low morale and everyone walking on eggshells.

A: Telling someone that you are upset with them or their behavior, or giving negative feedback in any way can be challenging and intimidating. However, that level of conflict is a normal part of daily life, both inside and outside the office. Ideally, we should be able to talk with each other directly to address concerns before they become big issues that require policy and process change.

A simple roadmap for quick feedback in a non-judgmental way includes the following:

- **Describe** – Describe the problematic behavior that you have observed or that has been relayed to you. Just state the observations; avoid being judgmental when describing the behavior. “I have noticed that you are late to every department meeting.”
- **Ask a question** – Ask your colleague about the situation in a genuinely curious way. For example, “help me understand what is happening here” or “could you help me understand your perspective on this?” They could share information that helps you to understand a dynamic or underlying issue to address. If they share information outside of your area of expertise or outside of your role (mental health concerns, challenging family dynamics, medical issues, etc.), know that you can refer them to your HR Business Partner, the Office of the Ombudsperson, Employee Assistance, Office of Civil Rights and Title IX Compliance, etc. to help them address the issue facing them.
- **Explain** – Given what they have told you, does that change your perspective on the behavior? If not, explain how the behavior is disruptive, hinders team dynamics, prevents your team from being effective, etc. “Being late to meetings tells your colleagues that their work is not important and that you do not respect them. It also prevents us from getting work done in a timely manner.”
- **Specify** – Specify what change you need to see moving forward. “In the future, I need you to be on time or early for meetings.”

If you continue to have challenges, please reach out to your local HR, your HR Business Partner, or the Office of the Ombudsperson for additional assistance and strategy on how to handle the situation.

JANUARY 2025

AUTHOR: JANET WALZER, ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES AND CHIEF OF STAFF

TOPIC: BEST PRACTICES FOR EMAIL COMMUNICATION

Q: We communicate in an email-heavy workplace. I get frustrated by some of the emails I receive, and I bet I am guilty of sending ineffective emails myself! Can you share some best practices and/or tips regarding when email is not the best method to communicate -- as well as ways to make my emails more effective.

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A: Yes, many of us rely on email to get our jobs done. It is easy to quickly send an email without thinking it through, but as you noted, there are consequences to sending automatically. Here are some tips to help you determine when and how to use email.

- Carefully consider if email is the best method to deliver your message.
 - Would it be better to set up a call/Zoom or in-person meeting due to the complexity of the topic, or because it requires a dialogue?
 - Is the content sensitive, confidential, personal?
 - Could your message be interpreted in more than one way?
- Do not use email in the following circumstances:
 - When you are angry, upset, emotional.
 - When you want to speak with your manager/staff member about your/their performance.
 - When there have been 3 back and forth exchanges already.
 - When the email should not go further than the intended recipient(s).
- Use specific subject lines and as needed, note urgency, required action, etc.
- Use standard punctuation and grammar (versus texting style).
- Get to the point; if you need to use subheadings, your message is too long.
- Delete any extraneous text if you are forwarding a message.
- Reply to all questions that have been asked (or acknowledge when you do not know the answer(s)) to avoid follow- ups.
- Re-read your message to make sure it is professional and clear. If you are wondering if you should send it – don't!
- Only copy those who should be in the loop on that particular message.
- Make sure your signature/contact info is up to date.
- Schedule messages in Outlook to be delivered only during business hours.