

A man in a white dress shirt, a bright green tie, and black trousers is walking away from the camera on a lush green grassy hill. He is carrying a black briefcase in his right hand. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The overall mood is one of optimism and forward movement.

THE LEADER DIFFERENTIAL:

# Five Steps to Thrive

*(Not Just Survive)*

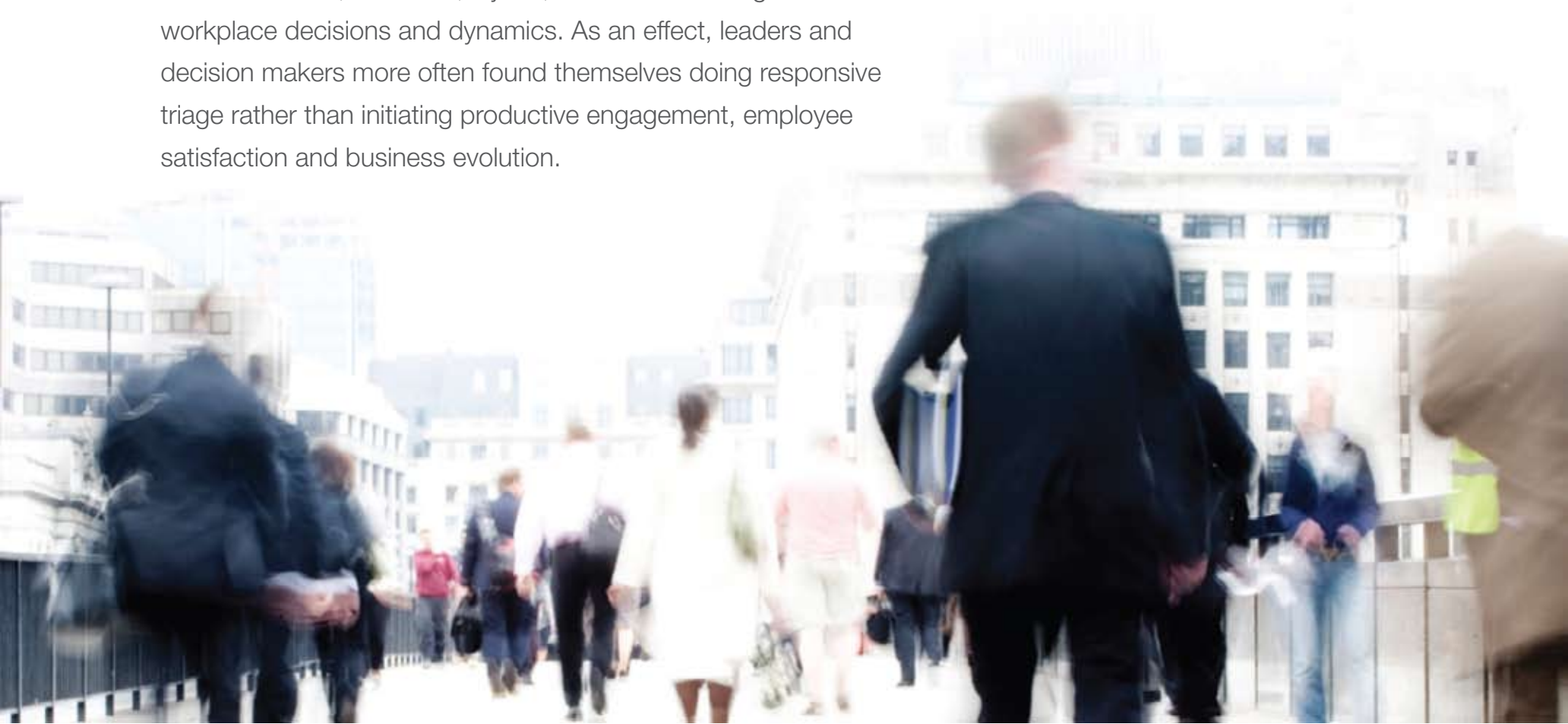
**An Internal Communications Primer for Leaders**

BY DAVID GROSSMAN, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA

THE  
**GROSSMAN**  
GROUP

# Times have been tough for business communication.

Economic crisis, cutbacks, layoffs, and reduced budgets defined workplace decisions and dynamics. As an effect, leaders and decision makers more often found themselves doing responsive triage rather than initiating productive engagement, employee satisfaction and business evolution.

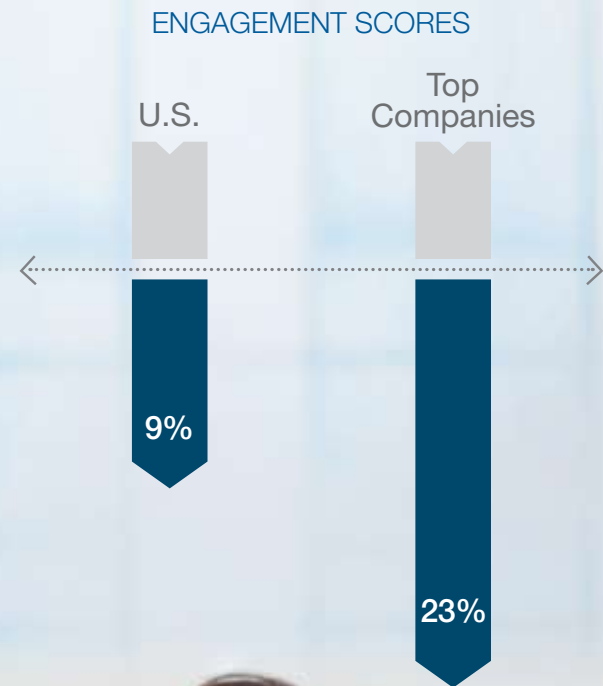


Leaders, take note. There's a "new normal" inside organizations today. Setting aside the usual array of workplace challenges—increased globalization, competition in the marketplace, changing workforce demographics, an increase in virtual employees, and further pressures on work/family balance, to name a few—you now face a workforce that is more skeptical and, in some cases, more wounded than ever before.



According to the consulting firm Towers Watson, engagement scores for all employees in the U.S. declined by 9% in 2010.<sup>1</sup> Worse, engagement scores for top-performing companies have dropped by 23% during the same period, as companies have implemented significant cost-cutting measures.

So what does this mean for you as a communicator? **A lot.**



<sup>1</sup>Towers Watson, "Strategic Rewards Study" (2009 / 2010)



Sure, thinking about the big effects of something as *(seemingly)* small as a drop in engagement probably makes you want to pull the covers over your head and go back to bed till it's all over.

Probably even more so if your current communications plan involves staying in survival mode, rather than overhauling your entire strategy to compensate for lost morale. But the truth is the challenges of the past offer opportunities for the future. With fresh assessment, clear goals, and a path to effective communication—along with empathy, courage, and compassion—you can set your company or clients on the path to not just survive, but thrive in the coming months and years.



# How are you going to **make a difference**?

Here are the five steps  
you can take to propel your company,  
agency or team into the next decade.



# Get a mirror

(for yourself or for your leadership team).

1 2 3 4 5

You're aware that employees listen to what you say, but you might not realize that they are also paying close attention to what you are doing.

The truth is that body language speaks, and often louder than words. And there's no better way to think about how others are seeing you than to visualize a mirror that is in front of you all the time. Reflect on what others are seeing and reading every time they interact with you, and develop the awareness not only to act the role of the leader you want to be, but to role model the actions and characteristics that you would like to see in others.



# Get a mirror (for yourself or for your leadership team).

1 2 3 4 5

## Role Modeling 101

- **Do you want to send a message that you're open and available to your team?** Walk the floors or halls of your company, keep your office door open, or join your team members for lunch or during a break.
- **Want your team to know you're listening?** Repeat or paraphrase what they tell you so they know you not only heard them but are processing/ thinking about what they've said.
- **Want your team to know you care about them?** Ask them how they're doing or what's on their mind. And if they offer an idea on something that could be improved, take action on their idea.
- **Want employees to follow certain procedures?** Use the same procedures yourself, and explain why you're using them and how they help.





# Get a mirror

(for yourself or for your leadership team).

1 2 3 4 5

Great leaders know themselves and have an understanding of how others see them.

As a leader, think about putting an actual mirror on your desk as a constant reminder to reflect on your role and on the influence you can have. You need to understand your leadership style and to know that communication and effective management begins and ends with you. The more you reflect on your role as a leader, the more that mirror will reflect the positive and influential image that those in the company see, too.



## Xerox CEO: Engaged Employees Are Critical to Business Success

Xerox CEO Anne Mulcahy is credited with turning Xerox around—taking it from \$18.5 billion in debt to earning \$1 billion in net profit in 2006. She, for one, feels that communication plays a critical role in her success. In a recent interview with Costco Connections magazine, she said, “The power of what you can do in a big company when people truly believe and are aligned around goals is pretty extraordinary.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Costco Connection, “No Carbon Copy” (2009)

# Plan your communication

# 1 2 3 4 5

As with every other strategic discipline inside organizations today, communication is planned from the beginning with a clear assessment of the business outcome you want to achieve with each initiative.

If you're a natural communicator, you might be wondering why communicating with your department needs a formal, structured strategy. There are myriad reasons, but the most important one is that "just do it"... just doesn't work.

I can tell you from experience that leaders often feel their communication efforts are better spent on external initiatives—initiatives that have the potential to directly affect their bottom line and business growth. But when they begin to add up the collateral damage resulting from a high decline in engagement, they begin to realize the very direct importance of an internal communication strategy.



# Plan your communication

1 2 3 4 5

Like any communication plan, you have to think outcome, audience, message, method, and evaluation. But don't feel like you have to have all of this information to go out to the team or company.

This approach is paralyzing and inefficient, and it's a sure-fire way to feed the rumor grapevine, potentially sabotaging your initiative before it even gets off the ground. Chances are you already have enough information that is valuable to employees.



# Plan your communication

1 2 3 4 5

How much information is *enough* information?

Naturally, it depends on the situation, but in the case, for example, that you've got a big elephant in the room—a reorganization, a high-level executive change, a merger or acquisition, a round of layoffs, or anything else that could be seen by employees as directly threatening their positions at your company—tell them what you know, what you don't know, when you're going to find out additional information, and stamp out myths or misperceptions. The key here is transparency, which means addressing the issue at hand before it spirals out of control.

A truly good plan creates a well-informed workforce, and a well-informed workforce can be one of the most powerful weapons in your company arsenal.





# Plan your communication

1 2 3 4 5

## Difficult Messages Made Easy

It's never easy to communicate difficult information to employees, but with these six essential steps, you can prepare for the toughest conversations:

**1. Identify the problem.** Are business results not where they should be? Do staffing changes need to be made? Are there undesired behaviors that need to change?

**2. Identify your desired outcome.** Are you trying to put business news in context for your employees? Do you need your team to understand changes that are underway? Do you need desired behaviors to become the norm among your staff?

**3. Identify your audience.** Do you need to inform your entire staff? Is it a small group of employees? Is it one employee? And should they all hear the message at the same time, or should some people hear it first?

**4. Structure your key messages/conversation.**

- What do you want your audience(s) to think, feel and/or do?
- What will you say (in a calm, constructive way) to employee(s) so that they understand the situation and your concerns.
  - Consider how to start the conversation.
  - Identify the questions you will ask (to see input/check for understanding). For example, "Tell me how you feel about what I just said."
  - Have stories or examples to share to illustrate your main point.
  - Outline specific actions being taken and/or that your employees need to take.

**5. Consider how you will say your message.** Select the right time and place to have a conversation with privacy and without distraction. Encourage dialogue so you can get real-time insight on how employees are receiving the information, what's on their minds, and if they understand what you are saying.

**6. Follow up.** Do your employees have questions? What's on their minds?



Listen first. Listen second.  
*THEN* communicate.

1 2 3 4 5

There's a reason we have two ears and one mouth.  
Ask the necessary questions first, then actively listen.

Then listen some more.

Check your understanding by paraphrasing what you hear and allowing employees to correct you. Allow employees to vent. Empathize and re-frame issues where needed. Your goal should be to help them understand what's happening, why it's happening, and how it affects them. Get out of your own way, let go of your ego, and understand that it's not about you—and even when it is, your team is more concerned with your leadership style than your personal flaws.

Listen first. Listen second.  
***THEN*** communicate.

1 2 **3** 4 5

## Choosing Your Best Communication Channel

Once you know what you want to communicate, it's important to think about how you communicate it.

Here are some simple tips to keep in mind when choosing a channel to communicate your message most effectively:



### Use face-to-face communication when you want to:

- Address topics that require immediate action.
- Discuss complex, confidential, or sensitive topics or issues.
- Gather immediate feedback and input.



### Use email when you want to:

- Provide directional, important and timely information to targeted audiences.
- Direct the receiver to a website or online source for more information.
- Share detailed information and data.



### Use voicemail when you want to:

- Communicate urgent, brief messages that require quick action but don't require proof that the communication was made.
- Request a same-day or next-day response.
- Communicate with team members who are traveling.

You're always communicating,  
so control the message.

1 2 3 4 5



Leaders are always communicating  
whether they intend to or not.

Don't assume that because you're not saying anything, you're not sending any messages. Your employees will read into your behavior when you withhold information or avoid communicating just as much as when you directly and openly communicate. You may think you're doing your employees a favor by keeping them out of concerns or in waiting to tell them about change until it's a foregone conclusion, but think again...

By **NOT** communicating, you make your employees feel undervalued and underappreciated. And you *create* questions and churn—the very things you were trying to avoid.

Effective communication provides the right information, prevents misinformation and drama, and can engender a sense of pride, commitment, and trust that keeps employees coming back and giving their best effort. It's also consistent, constant, and honest.



You're always communicating,  
**so control the message.**

1 2 3 **4** 5

## Managing the Company Rumor Mill.

All organizations have a rumor mill. It's a natural part of the employee network. And as much as leaders would like to shut it down, they can't. But they can manage it.

Here are five easy strategies for managing the company rumor mill:

**1. Maintain your credibility and use it to your advantage.**

Credibility won't stop rumors from developing, but it will unleash the truth. Communicate what you know, when you know it, and make sure your messages are consistent across all touch points.

**2. Be open, but be careful.** We know that remaining silent in tough times feeds anxiety and fuels the rumor mill. But being too open can hurt more than it helps, especially if it adds to people's fears.

**3. Pulse your people.** Ask your direct reports what they're hearing from their people on a periodic basis. Or, better yet, walk the halls and ask employees what's on their minds. Having a better sense of what keeps employees up at night will help you get ahead of any rumors that might be waiting in the wings. The best part is that employees will know you're listening and that you care about what they are thinking.

**4. Anticipate and address concerns.** When people are worried about what they don't know, they often imagine the worst and share their concerns with others. If leaders don't anticipate and address concerns, the vacuum will be most certainly be filled by rumors. Get out in front of anticipated worries by understanding the mindset that causes them and immediately addressing those concerns.

**5. Include your own messages in the rumor mill.**

Engage thought leaders who typically feed and influence the rumor mill, along with supervisors throughout the organization. When employees hear the same messages from their supervisor (always their preferred source) or from the CEO, read it on the intranet, and hear it through the rumor mill, they're more likely to believe it and, most importantly, to act on it.

Think about who else can benefit  
from your information.

1 2 3 4 5

At the end of every meeting, or when  
you make key decisions, ask yourself:

*Who else needs to know this information, how will they get it, and who will  
get it to them?* This ensures that you are keeping others apprised of their  
need-to-know information and everyone aligned.

Think about who else can benefit  
from your information.

1 2 3 4 5

## The Effects of a Disengaged Workforce.

Not sure if it's worth it to communicate key pieces of information to people in your company? Consider the following liabilities that stem from a disengaged workforce:<sup>1</sup>

### **More absenteeism.**

In a 10,000-person company, absenteeism due to disengagement results in about 5,000 lost days per year, which is valued at \$600,000 in salary paid in which there was no work performed.

### **More turnover.**

Business units comprised of mostly disengaged employees have 31 percent more turnover than those made up of mostly engaged employees.

### **More theft.**

Work groups with high numbers of disengaged employees lose 51 percent more of their inventory.

### **More injuries.**

Work groups with engagement scores in the bottom quartile average 62 percent more accidents in the workplace.

### **Lower customer scores.**

Work groups with higher levels of engagement lead to 12 percent higher customer scores than those on the lower end.

### **Lower productivity and profitability.**

Work groups in the top quartile of engagement are three time more likely to succeed, average 18 percent higher productivity, and 12 percent higher profitability.



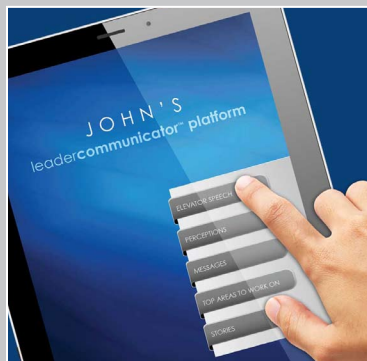
<sup>1</sup>James Harter and Rodd Wagner, "12: The Elements of Great Managing" (2007)

Everything a company and its leaders want to accomplish happens through people, making communication a critical business tool and an important differentiator.





## Imagine having your own personalized business messages and stories in the palm of your hand.

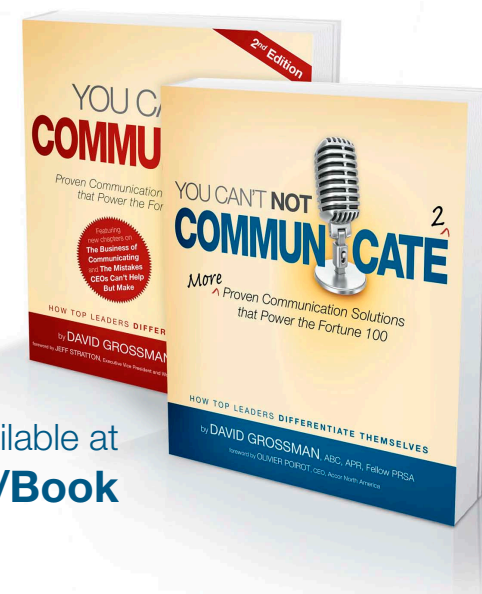


[Click here to learn more](#)

Our leader**communicator**™ platform is now available for the iPad or tablet, enabling leaders to have quick and easy access to their core messages. Not unlike a political platform, the award-winning leader**communicator** platform is a customized tool for senior leaders to help them develop and articulate strategy, drive change, and engage employees to achieve business results. It's never been easier to ensure leaders stay on track with the messaging they want to drive.

**David Grossman**, ABC, APR, Fellow PRSA is the founder and CEO of The Grossman Group

David is both a teacher and student of effective communication and counsels some of the world's leading organizations on internal and leadership communication. He's author of the highly acclaimed, *"You Can't **Not** Communicate: Proven Communication Solutions That Power the Fortune 100"* (Second Edition) and its follow up, *"You Can't **Not** Communicate 2."* David is often quoted in media, providing expert commentary and analysis on employee and leadership issues. Specifically, he was featured on *NBC Nightly News*, *CBS MoneyWatch* and in the *Chicago Tribune*. Share your internal communication challenges or tips with David at [dgrossman@yourthoughtpartner.com](mailto:dgrossman@yourthoughtpartner.com).



Available at

[YourThoughtPartner.com/Book](http://YourThoughtPartner.com/Book)

As featured in:

