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A Communication Audit Helps You Communicate Better

Whether you are growing, changing, or introducing new business technologies, a communication audit is helpful, if not essential

A COMMUNICATION AUDIT. THIS IS A COMPREHENSIVE, systematic evaluation and analysis of your company's communication. A communication audit unveils what is truly happening as opposed to what is thought to be happening. It:

- ◆ Encompasses the activities conducted in a communication assessment and its resultant findings (although here it is more robust).
- ◆ Identifies the people who create the messages and information being communicated.
- ◆ Evaluates the clarity and value of the communication.
- ◆ Critically looks at the various methods of communication (such as Web sites, newsletters, emails, blogs, videos, and other publications, as well as interpersonal skills and managerial communication), pinpointing problem areas and identifying successes.

A communication audit must be thoughtfully planned and implemented, and the results carefully assessed to achieve the greatest impact.

The Scope of a Communication Audit. You can focus on a number of communication areas to evaluate and analyze. This focus can be the broad-based communication for the entire company or for an individual division or group. It can be a specific communication method (such as interpersonal communication or your internal Web site) or for a specific vehicle (such as your corporate publications).

Sometimes the scope of your company's communication is simply too large. Breaking your communication efforts into smaller, more manageable chunks enables more targeted, accurate findings. Your scope simply depends on what you want to achieve in a particular time-frame.

The exact scope of an audit depends on your company: on your particular problems and needs.

When to Conduct a Communication Audit. Communication audits are always helpful, if only to keep up with the needs of a changing staff and a changing business climate.

If you have never conducted an audit, now might be a good time especially if your company has grown substantially. When a company experiences any substantial growth, communication channels tend to break down—what once worked becomes antiquated and stresses its ability to carry the ever-changing and ever-increasing amount of information.

Communication audits are indispensable when a company is undergoing any significant change to your business, such as when you experience a layoff or change in staffing; merge with or acquire another company; implement a new technology; launch a new product, service or line of business; enter a new market; or any other disruption to your everyday business operations.

In these cases, the results of an audit can identify those key communication areas that are vital to your moving forward as smoothly as possible whenever your company experiences these inevitable transitions.

A COMMUNICATION PLAN. This plan takes the findings of an assessment or audit and defines a plan of action that enables you to communicate better. A communication plan has four main parts; it:

- ◆ Clarifies the quality of your communication by summarizing the comments garnered through conversations with employees.
- ◆ Evaluates the effectiveness of your communication vehicles and channels, as well as the messages and information being communicated.
- ◆ Recommends steps for improving communication and making it more effective, including specifics on methods, channels, and personnel.
- ◆ Outlines a timeline—both short-term and long-term—for implementing the recommendations.

A Communication Plan, thus, maps the roads you can travel to communicate better and attain the resultant benefits.