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Foreword

Dear reader,

Every aspect of public relations has had to evolve to keep up with a changing world, and employee communications is no exception. The way employees use social media affects brand reputation; the speed of information dissemination makes it more important than ever to communicate quickly to stem the tide of rumor; a new generation entering the workforce has values and motivations different from the generations preceding it. As organizations look to serve some of their most important stakeholders—those inside the organization—they must continually seek to emulate the example of PR experts who keep their practices up to date.



Those experts, whose advice we have compiled in this book, will tell you that internally focused PR can make a big difference in motivating employees. David Alexander, CCO at **Rotary International**, for example, shares how you can “deepen employee connection to your cause... through programming that links their participation to the achievement of organization goals.” But as Bradford Walton, director of communication at **The Home Depot**, points out, “True associate engagement is a journey, it doesn’t happen overnight.”

Yes, it’s a journey with several paths beyond direct motivation. It requires that you work with leadership during crises to demonstrate to employees that steady hands are at the helm. It requires working effectively with HR, marketing and other departments. It requires demonstrating to the leaders of tomorrow, the younger employees in your force, that you share their values and appreciate their voices. And if you can truly succeed, you’ll go beyond mere job satisfaction, creating a legion of advocates for your organization and its mission.

In this sixth volume of **PR News’** Book of Employee Communications Strategies & Tactics, our authors, drawing on diverse backgrounds in brand, agency, nonprofit and academic PR practice, bring you practical advice for setting internal social media guidelines, structuring your team within the larger organization, nurturing talent and much more.

I want to thank our contributors for their thoughtful words wrung from dedicated practice; I trust that you, reader, will feel thankful for them as well.

Sincerely,

Ian Wright
Managing Editor, PR News

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Table of Contents

Foreword	5
Chapter 1 – PR’s Role in Employee Communications.....	11
How PR Generates Brand Advocates by Collaborating With Internal Communications <i>By Keerti Baker</i>	<i>12</i>
Revisiting Organizational Values for Culture Change Communications <i>By Susan Berthelot and Mark McElroy.....</i>	<i>17</i>
Weaving PR Strategies Into Your Employee Communications Program <i>By Tracy Zampaglione</i>	<i>20</i>
How a Federal Laboratory’s Communications Team Tells Its Quarterly Story in One Cool Page <i>By PR News Editors.....</i>	<i>23</i>
5 Tips to Help You Make the C-Suite More Relatable and Personable to Employees <i>By Anne May Navarrete.....</i>	<i>26</i>
Tips and Tactics to Help PR Communicate More Effectively With CEOs and the C-Suite <i>By PR News Editors.....</i>	<i>28</i>
Leading the Charge: 5 Steps to Get Salespeople on Board With PR <i>By Liz Sophia McClellan</i>	<i>30</i>
Activating an Army of Associates: Engaging Employees Through Volunteerism <i>By Bradford Walton</i>	<i>32</i>
Chapter 2 – Motivation and Morale.....	37
Welcome to Safety Week: Where Enthusiasm Drives Engagement <i>By Vicky Campo</i>	<i>38</i>
How to Improve Your ‘Organizational Clarity’ Grade by Being Brain-Friendly <i>By Liz Guthridge</i>	<i>42</i>
After the Ink Dries: 6 Competencies to Lead Effective Post-Merger Change <i>By Deborah Hileman.....</i>	<i>46</i>
What’s in It for Me and Why Should I Do It? Addressing Diverse Motivations <i>By Ella Minty.....</i>	<i>50</i>
The Stay Interview: A Strategy to Reduce Turnover and Retain Your Top Performers <i>By Leesa M. Schipani</i>	<i>55</i>

TEN10: How One Brand Built Engagement Globally Through Recognition
By Keith Burton and Dharma Subramanian..... 59

Next Trends in Engagement: Great Content, Fewer Emails, Shorter Meetings
By PR News Editors..... 63

How to Ensure Your PR Team Is Fully Engaged, Motivated and Appreciated
By Wendy Lund..... 65

Enhance Company & Employee Performance via Vacations and Clearer Expectations
By Mike McDougall..... 67

Bolstering Organization Motivation and Morale Through Connection to the Mission
By David Alexander..... 69

Chapter 3—Internal Social Media Guidelines and Recommendations 75

The 3-Step Social Media Policy for Employers to Employees
By Ingrid Kibler 77

Everything to Everybody: Communicating With Stakeholders in Every Role
By David Quiñones 80

Mobile Tech Lags Behind for Company Intranets as Pressure Builds for IC Pros
By PR News Editors..... 86

Chapter 4—Leading and Nurturing Your PR Team..... 89

6 Ways for Leaders to Grow Their Employees Into Future Leaders
By Justin E. Pettigrew..... 90

Assessing and Improving Morale With Free Job Perks for Enormous ROI
By Jessica Rosenberg..... 93

How to Make Your Team’s Brainstorming More Effective and Productive
By Susan Blanchard 98

Recruitment and Retention: 6 Tips for Building Great Employee Teams
By Bob Pearson..... 100

6 Tips to Help Communicators Better Engage With Remote Employees
By Jessica Nielsen..... 102

3 Skills That Aspiring PR Pros Need—and How Mentors Can Help Them
By Jacqueline Strayer..... 104

What Young PR Hires Are Thinking and How to Help Them Succeed
By Evan Martinez..... 107

Boost Employee Morale and Impact Company Operations via Engagement <i>By Autumn Manning</i>	109
Chapter 5—Communicating With Employees in Crisis.....	115
Don't Forget: Communicating With Your Employees During a Crisis <i>By Eden Gillott Bowe</i>	116
7 Ways to Manage Employees Dealing With Various Personal Crises <i>By Lauren Izaks</i>	119
Walk Before You Can Run: How to Establish a Crisis Communication Plan <i>By Samantha Kruse and Kelsey Chapekis</i>	122
How Proactive Employee Engagement Provides a Crisis Safety Net <i>By Gabor Sarlos</i>	125
What 'The Martian' Teaches Us About Employee Communications in a Crisis <i>By Jeremy Boylen</i>	129
Chapter 6—Communicating With Different Generations of Employees	133
Discovering the 'Y' in Generation Y: Key Learnings on How to Integrate Millennials <i>By Jennifer Barrett and Anthony Melito</i>	135
How to Spread Information to Different Generations of Employees During a Crisis <i>By Robert S. Fleming</i>	138
From SMS to F2F: How to Make Different Generations' Preferences Work for You <i>By Christian Hunter</i>	144
How to Recruit, Retain and Engage a Millennial Workforce in Public Relations <i>By Stephanie A. Smith</i>	147
Cultivating the Intergenerational Workplace Paradigm: 5 Key Factors <i>By Jamie Ward, Regina Luttrell & Karen McGrath</i>	151
5 Ways to Build Better Coexistence Between Millennials and Managers <i>By Heather Harder</i>	154

Chapter 7—HR’s Collaboration With PR 157

Driving Change: A Case for Partnership Between HR, Communications and Strategy
By Katie Fitzgerald 159

How to Create a Winning Employee Social Media Advocacy Program
By Dawn Lassiter-Brueske 163

HR Plus PR for Effective Employee Engagement and Employer Branding
By Melony Shemberger 167

Corporate Restructuring PR: How to Manage When Layoffs Loom
By PR News Editors 170

Chapter 8—Your Brand Evangelist Plan 173

The First Follower Within Your Organization: An Advocacy Analogy
By Joshua M. Habursky 175

New Ways to Communicate Values to Employees and Turn Them Into Advocates
By Maree Jones 178

Brand Ambassadors: Using Employee Social Media Channels to Get Brand Buzz
By Anita O’Malley 183

Chapter 9—Recommendations for Organizational Structure 189

How a Fast-Growing Nonprofit Rebuilt Its PR Team Using Agency Principles
By Marisa Long 190

Brand Execs: Integrated Comms Leads to Data Sharing, Digital Transformation
By PR News Editors 194

For Truly Revolutionary Silo-Busting, Break Down the Wall Between PR & IT
By Kevin Kautzky 198

Board of Contributors 200

Index 202

1

PR's Role in Employee Communications

How PR Generates Brand Advocates by Collaborating With Internal Communications

By Keerti Baker

Times have changed for public relations. Formerly categorized as purely an external communication tool, the power of PR has become recognized as a valuable asset to any organization's internal communications strategy. Legacy views of PR are too narrow for where organizations and communications have evolved to today. PR should no longer be equated to press releases and external media. PR has grown to support and, at times, lead on internal communications, a function that used to rest predominantly under the remit of human resources departments.

With organizational structures and internal teams becoming more complex, the need for clearer, timely and proactive internal communication has risen. Employees not only need to be kept informed, but also need to be positively engaged with. 21st-century living and its hectic pace have also seen an increase in the trend of home or remote working. This increases the need for employees in satellite offices and employees who work remotely to feel that they are part of the wider team and not isolated.

Tasks that sit within the HR function of an organization can be more effectively accomplished by collaborating with the proven tactics and methods of PR. Although there is a line between PR and HR functions, it is getting blurrier with time, with several aspects of internal communications crossing over to benefit from what PR can offer.

Given the discipline's distinct characteristics and various practical applications over the years, it is not a surprise that PR has evolved to play a vital role in internal communications. Here are some of the reasons why PR works so well to complement internal communications:

1. **Strategy:** PR's strategic approach to communication means that internal messages are drafted to reflect the organization's business objectives as well as objectives set by HR personnel. For instance, if the organization's goal is to increase market share in a particular product category, employees are informed of any progress or otherwise. Similarly, if the HR department has been tasked to reach particular employee demographics or roll out messages about any internal employee schemes, a strategic process is essential to ensure there is a plan of what messages need to be communicated to which audiences and when. In many instances, internal communication can solely become a task that is responsive to an internal occurrence. While necessary, this type of reactive communication should not be the driving reason behind internal communications. Having a proactive approach similar to that which is used by PR will ensure that both reactive and proactive messages are communicated in a timely manner to meet strategic objectives.

Who Owns Internal Communications?

As the lines between PR and HR continue to blur, the evergreen question most communications professionals are faced with is: “Where does the responsibility for internal communications sit?”

Although internal employee relationship management is an HR function, the specialty of communicating falls to PR professionals. They have a constant task of communicating an organization’s news to external audiences and have devised strategies, techniques and methods to look after multiple projects and an ever-expanding workload that now includes digital platforms. Specifically, PR has established itself as a discipline that engages with diverse audiences to deliver complex messages in a simplified manner. For internal communications to be used to its best potential, HR and PR must work in partnership to deliver composed messages in a strategic way and ensure they are synergized across the organization, its teams and appropriate communication channels.

PR’s role in engaging, motivating and structuring internal communication plans is only complementary to the overall communication objectives that are set in conjunction with HR’s goals. These goals should wholly align with the organization’s overall goals for internal communication, whether it is streamlining messages, eliminating internal silos or creating a strong employee culture.

HR may continue as the logical custodians of employee relations, but a central communication department with PR principles and/or PR professionals at its core will serve to enhance internal communications. While internal communications always will be a democratic discipline in its own right—one that is owned in varying degrees by all employees—the true guardians and leaders of internal communications are CEOs and senior managers. If the fundamental value of PR’s role in internal communication is cascaded from the top down, the task of collaborating and engaging becomes easier.

2. **Content:** Content really is king and there isn’t another discipline that comes close to generating as interesting, motivating and engaging content as PR does. With a core function of spotting angles and stories and generating positive goodwill, PR always will reign supreme when it comes to content generation. For internal communicators, content droughts hamper the most earnest of efforts and campaigns, but this characteristic of PR not only plugs the gap, but also urges new ideas by employees, which in turn enables smarter content planning.
3. **Timing:** Employees need to be communicated with in a timely manner. There is nothing worse than finding out a crucial piece of internal news in the office canteen or near the water cooler. It leads to unwanted segregation amongst teams, a lack of team spirit and a disjointed workforce. PR’s characteristic of meeting press and copy deadlines enables internal communications to follow a clear process to communicate messages. Internal communications should consider internal approval processes and what cascade levels are in place to reach all employees. Furthermore, all relevant communication channels should be used to keep messages consistent to reach different generations of employees. PR’s timing and methodical approach can significantly aid with this.
4. **Tone:** Different communication channels, such as internal newsletters or memos, the intranet, posters, internal

announcements and emails, should have a consistent tone that reflects the organization and its brand. Consistent tone and the proverbial “house style” can often be overlooked in IC. It is very underrated compared to the importance of meeting deadlines and broadcasting internal messages. PR pros, whether in agency or in-house roles, are well versed in juggling multiple projects and clients with their own tones and house styles. The PR function can define the tone of IC messages whether they are informal, corporate, laid back, passionate or impassive, and ensures they are consistently delivered in a professional manner.

5. **Quality:** In many instances, IC can focus on the quantity of messages and their frequency, as internal communicators are tasked with regular employee engagement. PR can balance this requirement by ensuring that the quality of messages is enhanced with interesting, relatable and topical messages. While specific and frequent messages have to be part of the overall internal communication plan, creative and interesting internal stories with news about employees captures the attention of different ages and levels of employees. PR can lend personality, culture and voice to the internal communications of an organization.
6. **Mediums:** IC needs to consider what channels employees use to access information. Is it permission-based or is it mandatory, i.e. can employees opt in to receive information, or are there certain announcements or messages that need to reach them? Using PR planning methods can ensure IC messages reach all intended audiences via all relevant

mediums, such as: newsletters, the company intranet, emails, posters, personnel briefings, text messages and internal social networks like **Yammer**. PR's ethos and experience in dealing with multiple audiences and media perfectly equips it to ensure messages are consistent across applicable channels to reach all internal audiences.

7. **Embargoes:** At times, internal news and announcements precede the release of external news. PR's strict embargo procedures lend valuable experience to IC. This avoids any awkward or embarrassing situations where employees share anything confidential with external media or clients. Access to social media and networks also can prove challenging when looking to maintain control over what employees can share externally. PR's method of defining clear procedures and a chain of internal command can clarify any ambiguity in this matter so employees know whom to direct any sensitive inquiries to.

The very nature of PR and PR professionals facilitates easy two-way communication and relationship building to encourage dialogue between employees and management.

Theory vs. Practice

Theory and practice can be two very different truths. This is especially so when it comes to the evolution of PR as a strategic business partner to internal communications and HR. Theoretically, HR and PR operate as separate functions in many organizations, but in reality, their outputs are integrated and converge on almost a daily basis. The line between HR

and PR is becoming an increasingly blurry one.

PR can help meet internal communication objectives, making the influential co-relation between HR and PR apparent with the following examples:

1. Increasing employee morale

PR can work with different departments to build internal relationships with stakeholders and business units. As an unbiased third party, the PR function is not privy to any HR-related matters or confidential employee matters. For the task at hand, it is only concerned with how internal relationships can be formed and built upon to achieve the communication objective. The very nature of PR and PR professionals facilitates easy two-way communication and relationship building to encourage dialogue between employees and management.

PR can strategically partner with HR initiatives to support increasing staff morale. First, PR can play a useful role in identifying opportunities to “shout about” different stories and news within the organization. Second, PR can generate a positive voice to enhance organizational culture, internally broadcast news about teams and colleagues and help keep people informed. By generating a positive buzz and vibe, PR can not only increase staff morale, but also encourage future participation from teams that would like to get their news known to the wider organization.

Sensitive news can also be viewed differently by employees when it is sent out by HR as opposed to it being sent out from a central communications team driven by PR. PR gives IC messages a consistent and professional tone, especially where difficult messages need to be cascaded across an organization.

2. Engaging with different tiers of employees

One of the biggest challenges facing IC is the engagement of stakeholders and team members in each level of the organization. PR can build long-term relationships and bridge potential gaps with teams and colleagues who are perhaps known to work behind the scenes and may feel less involved with the organization.

PR can identify and communicate the value added by each tier in an organization. A structured approach ensures all departments and service levels are considered for internal communication. Each team should be given the opportunity to speak to the wider organization via IC. This extends to senior leaders within the organization who are hugely influential in providing direction to employees, increasing morale and motivating teams. PR also acts as a valuable communication agent between senior management to refine, soften and tweak internal messages and deliver them in the desired manner. Consistency of messages not only establishes a house style that is welcomed by employees, but also builds trust.

3. Reaching all employees

Each organization is different and employees prefer receiving information in different ways. There are employees who don't log on to the company intranet unless there is need to reference a particular document, and then there are others who prefer to check the intranet for any company news before they begin their day. The point is that PR's approach to utilizing all elements of the communications mix will serve IC well when it comes to reaching different generations of employees.

IC can adopt PR's principles in following a defined format and a checklist approach to ensure all communication channels are updated with IC messages to reach the entire employee demographic.

How PR Empowers IC

When applied to IC, the tried-and-tested principles and practices of PR enhance the delivery of messages. It works in two ways, by connecting with employees and letting employees connect with the organization's values and goals. This alignment results in an enviable organizational culture where employees feel appreciated, listened to and valued.

Generating content from within the organization gives employees a voice and empowers them to share what they have achieved. When focus is shifted onto employees, they become more open to receiving internal news about themselves, their teams and people they work with. As a result, any barriers to receiving and absorbing IC messages can be removed and employees become more receptive to messages delivered by the organization.

This powerful two-way traffic of information can benefit any organization as employees become clearer on what role they play in an organization's success, what the organization's goals are, what the brand stands for and

what values and culture they are part of.

PR and Internal Brand Advocates

Ultimately, the success of internal communication is shown when employees become strong brand advocates of their own accord. This organic process is one that happens over time. PR partners with IC to educate employees with key messages so they, in turn, become informed brand champions. This internal influx of information and motivation empowers employees to become positive external advocates when required. The reputation of an organization always can be measured by how happy its employees are to work there. This positive reiteration can be achieved by internal communications that is empowered by the strong working practices of PR. ■

Keerti Baker is media and communications manager, VOW Europe (Part of EVO Group). @Keertibaker

Revisiting Organizational Values for Culture Change Communications

By Susan Berthelot and Mark McElroy

The late business management visionary Peter Drucker reportedly said, “culture eats strategy for breakfast.” **Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta** first vice president Marie Gooding recalled this quote when discussing why the bank decided to revisit its organizational values in 2015.

Gooding discussed how culture can define and limit strategy, and that the organization needed to get the culture piece more clearly defined. Bank strategy looked good on paper, and performance was strong. But the culture of the bank—expressed by five organizational values—was not clearly articulated.

In a 2014 survey of hundreds of employees across the bank’s district, 50% of respondents said they knew the five values, yet none could name them all. The bank values simply weren’t memorable. This realization became the catalyst for a comprehensive values-refresh project.

Project Framework and Environment

The bank’s president and first vice president challenged a cross-functional team to come up with a plan to more crisply define the institution’s values. A successful project would conclude with a well-received launch of authentic values by 1,600 employees across the Federal Reserve district. The second step would be a deep integration of the values as the foundation for how employees work.

Here’s the framework that was adopted for this culture change initiative.

1. **Listen First** (What values resonate with employees? How do they feel about the values?)
2. **Be Authentic** (Do values express how people really feel? What are their individual stories?)
3. **Continue to Connect** (Do values capture and keep people’s attention? Are they memorable?)

Bank staff work at seven office locations and more than 200 remote locations. The employee population is diverse in both the demographic sense and in job types. About one-quarter of employees are considered non-desk workers and don’t have frequent access to email and intranet communications, so it can be a challenge to reach them.

Another consideration for the audience is long tenure, averaging 14 years. This aspect made it especially important to make the values refresh meaningful for the long term, and not just another “flavor of the month” campaign.

The results and recommendations follow.

Listen First

The first step in a culture change communications project is to send leaders on a listening tour across the organization. Recruit leaders to visit all locations and business lines, to listen to a broad range of employees, in roundtable discussions and in one-on-one meetings.

Next, listen through research. The teams

researched values across the Federal Reserve System and in external organizations, and reflected on the bank's historical values. The research produced two guiding principles: (1) To make the values memorable, it was decided to limit the number of values to three, and (2) the values should be single words, paired with taglines and short, inspirational passages.

When you listen, you may be surprised at the heartening response. 400 bank employees (25% of staff) in six cities shared their ideas with leaders. Employees quickly identified Integrity as the essential bank value, with Excellence and Quality tying for second place. For the third value, a small but vocal group favored Diversity, while a diverse majority of employees favored Respect. Emotionally charged conversations raised concerns that success of this project might be undermined by a debate over words.

Emotionally charged conversations raised concerns that success of this project might be undermined by debate over words.

When you encounter debates about key decisions, it is best to trust the process. In this case, bank leaders kept listening.

Motivated by the bank president's sincere desire to "get this right," employee conversations were extended as were moderated meetings to build consensus among officers and senior managers. After additional site visits and meetings, bank leaders felt confident enough to choose Integrity, Excellence and Respect as the refreshed values that would define the institution's culture.

Be Authentic

To be authentic with culture change, you've

got to share ownership. Out of many conversations with employees, three strong themes emerged, and they became the bank's refreshed values. In the bank president's words: "These values are not tablets from on high. They are the articulation of what employees shared with us about how they feel about the organization."

To encourage employee ownership, incorporate their voices in communications. It was decided to pair values presentations with unscripted employee voices, photos and animated word clouds. The rollout plan included an all-employee town hall launch event, talking points for managers, collateral featuring employee faces and voices and an employee six-word story campaign (see sidebar).

Continue to Connect

Following the program launch, the president and first vice president made visits to every bank department to talk about the values and invited employees to submit six-word stories about the values. Within a few months, employees submitted more than 230 stories. Each story represents an individual employee's skin in the game.

For culture-change communications, it's essential to facilitate conversations for the long term while avoiding campaign fatigue. The values have been reinforced with banners, in online video talk shows, in intranet stories of employees living the values and on electronic displays around the bank. In a culture where online commenting on intranet articles is rare, articles on values-related intranet stories regularly receive dozens of comments, with one story receiving 69 comments after publication.

Employees' six-word stories are being integrated into a keepsake booklet, permanent art projects, signage and an online values resource center. Next, the values messages will be integrated into recruitment and onboard-

Atlanta Fed Values, in Six Words

When the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta refreshed its organizational values, leaders wanted employees to take the values to heart and own them personally. The implementation team recommended a six-word stories campaign. Within a few months, more than 230 (of 1,600) employees had submitted original six-word stories.

Background

Ernest Hemingway was once challenged to write a story in six words. He wrote, “For sale: Baby shoes, never worn.” Although some dismiss this as literary folklore, the six-word story was born, and it’s been popping around the writing world for years. Six-word stories do not have to be sad—they can be inspirational.

Project Description

The six-word stories project invited employees to own the values by submitting a short statement about how one of the values resonated with them. It was easy to submit stories through an online form.

The project was the cornerstone of how the bank discussed the refreshed values for the long term. The stories appeared on the bank intranet and digital signage, in printed materials and on art installments. Stories were often

paired with a photo of the employee who submitted them.

Guidelines for Great Six-Word Stories

- Personal statements are better than generic ones.
- Be creative—it’s your story.
- Think of how a value has touched you, or how you embody a value, or why a value is important to you—then summarize it in six words.
- Your story doesn’t have to be poetic; just write about what the value means to you.

Examples of Employee Stories

Value: Integrity

“True to others, true to myself.”

“Be the person my dog sees.”

Value: Excellence

“Made a mistake. Learned from it.”

“We double-check, then check again.”

Value: Respect

“We are different yet the same.”

“Recognized my marriage before America did.”

ing materials, management training and the strategic plan.

Wrapping It Up

For culture-change initiatives, you’ll be successful if you put in place a thoughtful process such as Listen First, Be Authentic and Continue to Connect. Plan for a sustainable conversation, and offer personal images and stories all along the way.

In 2015, not one employee knew the bank’s values. Today, all of its employees have embraced them as their own. This was validated in the bank’s 2016 employee engagement survey, in which 97% of employees responded

favorably to the statement, “I have a good understanding of the values of our bank.”

A few months after introducing the refreshed values, the president said it best: “No program in the history of the bank has been so universally praised and so well-received.” ■

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