

6 Tips to Communicate Complex Policies

By DIANNA BOOHER APRIL 14, 2020



Change almost always meets resistance. If all policies met a receptive audience, you'd be working in Utopia. So if you're up for dealing with reality, then spend ample time and effort to prepare your policy presentation to address and overcome resistance. Here's how:

State the goal and include the proper details

State the policy and the goal: To improve something? To expand a benefit? To monitor or limit overuse? To regulate something? To allow more flexibility? To improve decision making in complex cases?

After the why, overview the policy particulars. Keep asking yourself, "So what?" What does this change mean for them personally and for the organization? What are the exceptions? Does the policy apply differently to specific groups? How? What does compliance look like for their individual roles? What's the timeline? What does the leadership team expect as an outcome? What does compliance NOT look like?

Adopt the show-and-tell approach

Communicate with co-workers by setting up a “show-and-tell” environment. Make good use of whiteboards if you’re presenting ideas live or use electronic drawing tools as you present online (versus already prepared visuals).

These “in the moment” explanations allow people to hear your explanations AS you talk. This “explain as they absorb” method requires less energy for the listeners. They don’t have to understand the visual on their own, and THEN understand and apply your commentary to what they’re seeing.

Physicians describe what they’re seeing on an X-ray as they overview surgery procedures to a patient. As a caregiver for a spouse, children, and two parents (plus myself), I’ve never encountered a physician who emailed or allowed online access to an X-ray—and THEN offered an after-the-fact explanation. The explanation always happens simultaneously—for good reason: clarity.

Select Applicable Metaphors and Analogies

Trainers definitely understand the value of metaphors and analogies to convey complex technical information or procedures. For example, for years, systems engineers have communicated the complexities of computers, the internet, and software design by using traffic analogies: “routing traffic,” “developing on and off-ramps,” and “spider webbing to avoid congestion.”

Know when to be persuasive, not just informative

Mind your mission. Are you simply telling co-workers how the policy will work? Or do you need to sell them on why it will or should work? If selling a change in policy, include good reasons that will benefit them individually or as a group.

Also, keep in mind that everyone needs to sell their own credibility and accuracy.

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Use precise, technical terms—but ONLY when you need them

When you're jewelry shopping, you know that the most gaudy, ornate pieces are not necessarily the most valuable. Ditto for words. Choose the words that communicate with your audience. Especially avoid legal phrases without interpreting them in a layperson's language.

Enlist co-workers as “panelists” to encourage questions

Either choose or have co-workers choose representatives to serve on a panel in front of the room (or on video if doing the roll-out online.) The lay panelists will ask questions as representatives of the entire audience. By their questions, you'll be able to assess what employees already know, what they want to know, and what they need to know.

Provide time for audience members to write on paper or text their questions to a panelist. Then the panelists will read the questions to you. In much the same way as this format works for politicians in “town halls,” the panelists provide a layer of anonymity for those audience members who dread being in the spotlight to express a concern or ask a question.

Their questions provide great feedback to you about obstacles or concerns to be overcome in enforcing a new policy. Without such a “forced” question session, you may not discover glitches or resistance until the new policy fails.

Prepare well for policy roll-outs. You often don’t get a second chance to gain buy-in and cooperation. Any further attempts to right wrongs appear to be fumbles and recoveries.



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Dianna Booher’s latest books include *Faster, Fewer, Better Emails*; *Communicate Like a Leader*; *What MORE Can I Say?*, *Creating Personal Presence: and Communicate With Confidence..* She’s the bestselling author of 48 books, published in 61 foreign editions. Dianna helps organizations communicate clearly and leaders to expand their influence by a strong executive presence. National Media such as Good Morning America, *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, Bloomberg, Forbes, FOX, CNN, NPR, and *Entrepreneur* have interviewed her

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