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## How do Companies Communicate with Nonexempt/Offline/Non-Desk Employees and Keep Them Confident and Engaged During Times of Organizational Change?

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# How do Companies Communicate with Nonexempt/Offline/Non-Desk Employees and Keep Them Confident and Engaged During Times of Organizational Change?

## Abstract

[Excerpt] Companies have had to evolve continuously to remain competitive in today's marketplace. Especially in industries with blue-collar workers, automation and other forms of innovation have become looming stress points to many employees. Maintaining employee engagement is a key element of any successful change initiative. Strong leaders are needed to be able to inform, engage, enable, and build trust within the organization, to promote confidence and keep workers satisfied. While much research has been conducted on the engagement of white-collar workers, not much information is available for offline blue-collar workers, who are a part of a growing workforce. If not careful, these crucial employee groups, who are constantly on the move and do not use traditional communication technologies in their daily jobs, can feel overlooked and become disengaged.

## Keywords

Human Resources, HR, nonexempt, offline, non-desk, employees, blue-collar, automation, innovation, employee engagement, change initiative, leaders, trust, workforce, involvement, feedback, ambassadors, FAQs, talking points, non-traditional benefits, rewards, transparency, senior management

## Comments

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### FINAL QUESTION

How do companies communicate with nonexempt/offline/non-desk employees and keep them confident and engaged during times of organizational change?

### INTRODUCTION

Companies have had to evolve continuously to remain competitive in today's marketplace. Especially in industries with blue-collar workers, automation and other forms of innovation have become looming stress points to many employees. Maintaining employee engagement is a key element of any successful change initiative.<sup>1</sup> Strong leaders are needed to be able to inform, engage, enable, and build trust within the organization, to promote confidence and keep workers satisfied.<sup>2</sup> While much research has been conducted on the engagement of white-collar workers, not much information is available for offline blue-collar workers, who are a part of a growing workforce.<sup>9</sup> If not careful, these crucial employee groups, who are constantly on the move and do not use traditional communication technologies in their daily jobs, can feel overlooked and become disengaged. (*Examples of what drives employee engagement during times of change can be found in Figures 1 and 2 in the Appendix*)

### BEST PRACTICES

There is no one solution to effectively communicate with and engage offline workers. Though there is consensus that best practices, if implemented correctly, can be very effective.

**Transparent communication:** It is important that offline workers are aware of new company initiatives, what is expected of them, and how change affects them. There are a variety of disrupters that can cause disengagement. Rumors and gossip fill employees with doubt and can cause distrust among employees who do not understand where their organization is headed,<sup>3</sup> and how changes might affect them. Some tried and true methods to address this include:

- ***Cascading information via supervisors:*** Although content and frequency vary by company, sources suggest having a short daily meeting to allow supervisors to share key information, motivational messages, and invite employee input. These meetings should be scripted and follow company-wide standards to ensure all employees are receiving consistent information.<sup>4</sup> Supervisors should be given sufficient support and thorough education to ensure they can accurately and effectively relay information.<sup>10</sup>
- ***Telephone podcasts:*** One company uses pre-recorded voice messages from company executives that are sent to all offline employees' phones. If they don't pick up, the messages go to their voicemail. This method allows the company to control exactly what employees hear.<sup>5</sup>
- ***Printed table talkers:*** Table talkers are printed brochures that stand up on a table and display information. They can be helpful to provide quick updates in break rooms and other common areas. Information should be easy to digest, relevant and support what was discussed in shift meetings.

**Engage with and understand employees:** There is need to create a sense of involvement and allow workers to feel valued. When employees feel valued, they are less likely to have doubt and distrust. It is also important to understand your audience in order to determine the best way to deliver messages and what type of information to convey. It is also crucial to understand there may be unique cultures at different sites, and engagement methods may vary.

- ***Fly-outs/roadshows:*** Executives can personally go to work sites, engage in casual but informative conversation with workers, and answer any questions that may arise.<sup>11</sup>

- ***Personal Connections:*** Romark Logistics has HR staffers at all its facilities who participate in pre-shift meetings. Offline workers want to see HR on the floor, and that the company understands their needs.<sup>8</sup>

**Two-way engagement:** While getting information to employees is important, hearing feedback from them allows you to build trust by handling work-related issues timely and effectively.

- ***Anonymous Feedback:*** Employees should feel safe when providing feedback.

## ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

Aside from the tried and true best practices, there are a variety of more creative methods that can be incorporated into traditional communication and engagement strategies.

**Low-Tech:** Depending on your workforce, they might not be too willing to use mobile platforms (see *Figure 3 for more details*). Many companies also avoid using employees' personal mobile phones, due to complex privacy issues. Rather than putting posters up in traditional locations such as in breakrooms and on billboards, mirror clings over restroom sinks or leaflets in bathroom stalls tend to capture more attention. A printed magazine can also be published, and delivered to each employee, to communicate all information associated with the changes the firm is going through. Employee profiles can also be added to the magazine to celebrate the contributions of offline workers.

**Employee Ambassadors:** This idea is to have additional on-site points of contact to help execute larger initiatives. Any employee who wants to build leadership skills or be more involved with the change process can volunteer to be an ambassador.<sup>4</sup> These individuals can help in many ways, from helping to replace posters to acting as an additional communication channel.<sup>5</sup> Ambassadors can be trained to be subject matter experts on the particular areas of change. They should be provided with tools, such as talking points and FAQs to enable them to act as an additional on the ground resource for their teams. In many cases, employees will trust their peers more than top management. Ambassadors should be given ample opportunity to convey employee concerns and/or questions, to allow corporate to address any impending problems.

**Employee Benefits:** Another way to help employees feel valued and engaged is to offer non-traditional benefits. Employer sponsored fitness programs have become increasingly popular (*a list of corporate wellness programs is available in Additional Resources C*). Another popular benefits program is "Perks at Work." This platform gives employees access to discounts and rewards of products ranging from diapers to cellphones, and computers to vacations. Some employers also provide shared tablets that offline employees can access during breaks.

## CONCLUSION

There are a variety of challenges with creating communication and engagement strategies for offline workers, especially in times of change. Without access to emails, offline workers rely on supervisors, peers, and internally and externally generated information. This leaves much room for doubt and uncertainty to arise. As such, it is important to try to preempt uncertainty with clear and concise communication. It is crucial to understand offline workers' main concerns, and address these issues as transparently and quickly as possible. There are a multitude of best practices and some new alternative approaches. There is no one solution that fits all, so in times of organizational change, companies should first ensure the concerns of workers are heard and addressed. There should be ways for offline workers to ask questions and provide feedback anonymously. Messages should be consistent, and workers should feel they are valued (senior management visibility/transparency). It could be helpful to create different communication strategies, and survey/pilot with random groups of offline workers to see what type of communication generates the best response.

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Additional Resources A

**Tribe** is an internal communications agency that offers strategic insight on how to engage offline employees. The following links lead to short overviews on communicating with, and engaging offline employees.

- 1) **Worst mistakes in communicating change:** <https://view.joomag.com/tribe-topics-may-2017/0165876001496779679?short>
- 2) **How do other companies reach non-desk employees?:** <https://view.joomag.com/the-tribe-report-10-the-non-desk-best-practices-issue/0466201001428432700?short>
- 3) **Low-tech Channels for Reaching out to Employees without Computers:** <https://view.joomag.com/tribe-topics-feb-2017/0485979001486761979?short>
- 4) **Non-Desk Employees Blog:** <http://blog.tribeinc.com/category/non-desk/>
- 5) **Communication Approach:** <http://2zseci3zt9i8144vhj451m21.wpengine.netdna->

[cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/JUNE-One-Sheet-v2.pdf](https://cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/JUNE-One-Sheet-v2.pdf)

- 6) **Non-Desk Best Practices:** <https://view.joomag.com/the-tribe-report-10-the-non-desk-best-practices-issue/0466201001428432700?short>

Additional Resources B

List of Enterprise Social Software Mobile Applications and Platforms, with information on their customers and services: <https://www.itcentralstation.com/categories/enterprise-social-software>

Additional Resources C

List of Corporate Wellness Programs: <https://www.wellsteps.com/blog/2017/03/27/corporate-fitness-programs/>

## APPENDIX

FIGURE 1: Aon

Rank Order	Top 5 Drivers of Engagement During Times of Change vs. No Change	
	Change	No Change
1	Involved in decision making	Understand career path
2	Understand career path	Involved in decision making
3	Co-workers make personal sacrifices to help the organization	Have the necessary resources to do job
4	Company provides encouragement for development	Company provides encouragement for development
5	Company provides a two-way dialogue	Provided proper training to do job

FIGURE 2: Towers Watson

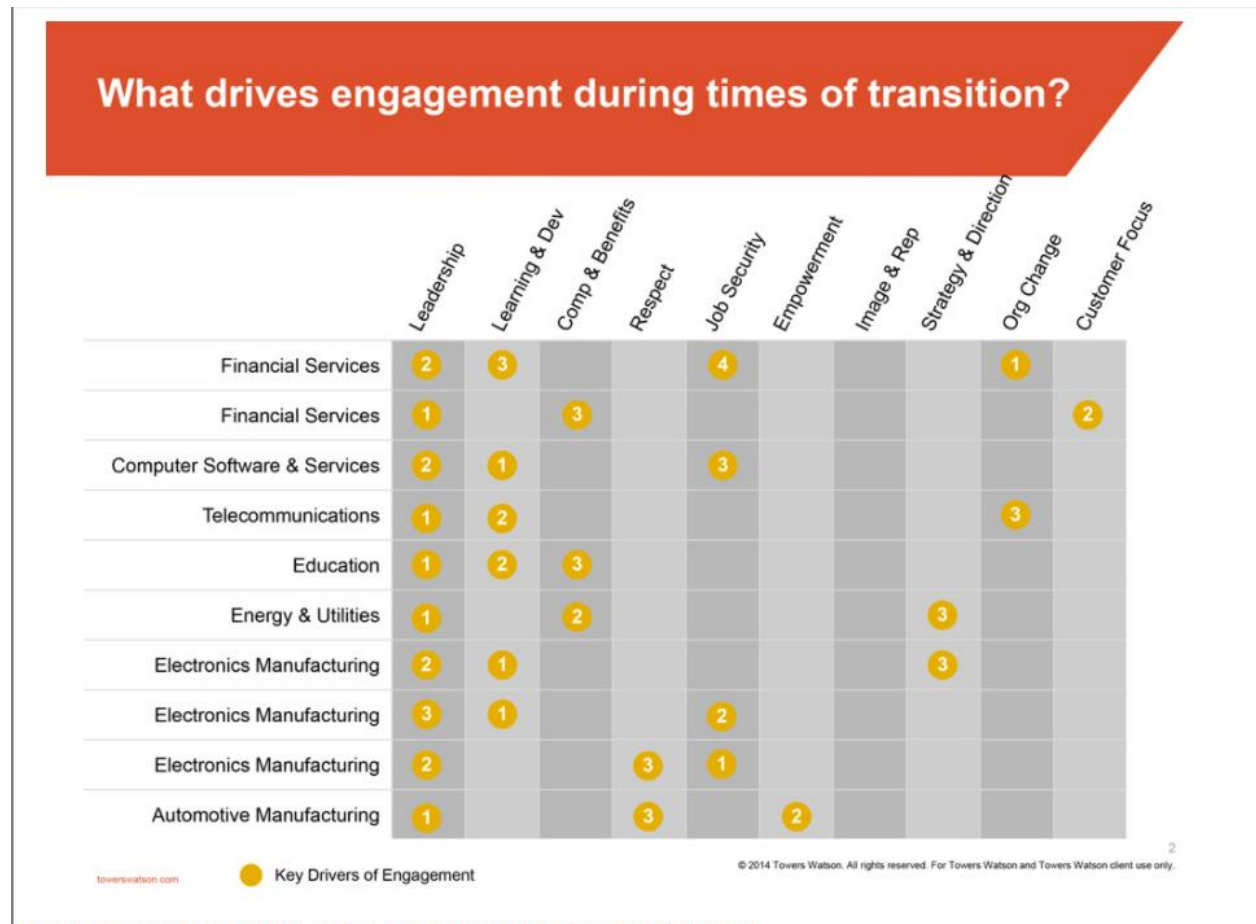


FIGURE 3: Tribe

## Mobile Communications for Non-Desk Employees

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**How do you reach employees who don't have a dedicated computer?** In Tribe's most recent research with employees of large companies nationwide, employees without dedicated computers at work shared the following:

### 1 They don't want to give you their phone numbers

They're much more open to downloading an app to their personal mobile device than sharing their personal phone numbers. And about the same number of respondents said they would be okay with receiving company communications addressed to their personal email address.



### 2 They're really not that into you

When offered the options of receiving company communications via personal mobile phone number, mobile apps or personal email, a full 50 percent agreed with the statement "I wouldn't be interested in any of the above."

### 3 But they might check out the intranet after work

We asked how they would be most likely to access the company intranet, if it was accessible from anywhere (rather than behind the firewall). The numbers below support the appeal of pull versus push communications.

When not at work:

24% "I'd be likely to use my smartphone or table to visit the intranet."

41% "I'd be likely to use my home computer to visit the intranet."

We also asked respondents to share their advice for companies considering mobile devices for internal communications. Here are a few sample comments:

*"Do it. Employees can get info from one consistent source."*

*"Don't do it."*

*"Make it non-compulsory."*

*"Keep it short."*

*"I'd like that I can really access it anywhere."*

*"It's helpful to the employee to have those lines of communication."*

*"Balance is key."*

*"Be respectful."*