

3 Steps to Building Engagement Through Better Communication

Establishing a healthy communication rhythm around your scheduling processes help increase employee engagement while also easing the inherent stressful task of creating an actionable schedule. The following three steps will serve as a walk-through to better construct a cohesive scheduling communication strategy.

Step 1: Needs Evaluation

Albert Einstein reportedly said, “If I had an hour to save the world, I would spend fifty-five minutes defining the problem, and only five minutes finding the solution.” We couldn’t agree more. When it comes to developing a communication strategy around the schedule, every minute spent understanding the needs of the organization on the frontend will save hours implementing on the backend.

Identify the scheduler(s)

Identify the person(s) in charge of creating and enforcing the schedule for your organization. Getting all the schedulers on the same page is paramount to identifying the pros and cons of the current scheduling communications process.

Identify schedule communication

Talk to all schedulers to understand how current employees communicate back and forth with their manager/scheduler. Some key areas to focus on are how employees are notified of new schedules, shift changes, time-off requests, shift trades, team adjustments, availability concerns, and overtime policies.

Identify communication gaps

Once the current scheduling communication process is understood, areas for improvement will likely arise. Common oversights include limited accessibility to schedule, no ability for workers to trade shifts, lack of real-time notifications, no visibility into worker availability, limited capability for last-minute change alerts, and a lack of mobile-friendly communications.

Conduct employee analysis

While it may seem obvious, engagement begins by getting to know your hourly employees. While not meaningful in and of themselves, considerations like age, gender, cultural backgrounds, work habits, where employees work, how they adapt to change and other employee details may help you better understand your workforce and their communication preferences.

Consider scheduler’s personalities

Getting to know your employees is only half of the picture. Schedulers/managers may have communication preferences not shared by your hourly workforce. Understanding how each audience prefers to relay information is critical to developing a cohesive communication plan.

Resource availability

Take an honest look at your organization to determine the appropriate level of effort you can pragmatically take on. New tech-enabled communication tools are quick and efficient, however many solutions are costly need to be maintained and updated regularly.

Current communication tools

Consider your communication landscape by reflecting on what tools are currently available. In addition to acknowledging the success and failures of your current processes, examine other communication biases like the formality, cadence, prevalent senders, typical receivers, roadblocks, and other related inclinations.

Prioritize needs

In our experience, most organizations have multiple areas where scheduling communication can be improved. The challenge is figuring out which hurdle to jump over first. We suggest prioritizing based on highest measurable business impact.

Step 2: Make a Plan

Once you have a good feel on your current scheduling communication process and the needs tied to it, the next step is to create an action plan to amplify the best parts of your current process and resolve the areas for improvement. It is important to keep senior leadership in the loop of any resource commitment or technology investment your plan requires. Open communication with all leadership stakeholders will help tailor your plan to meet their needs, while also gaining a sense of buy-in for your plan.

Set actionable goals

Actionable goals are both feasible and measurable. Think through goals that tie your schedule communications needs together with improving the productivity and engagement of your hourly workforce. Possible goals include:

- Reduce clock-in lateness by implementing shift alerts to keep your workforce up-to-date on their shift commitments.
- Accelerate shift fill rates by giving your workers the right tools to opt-in to shifts and communicate when they are available to work.
- Reduce no-shows by increasing schedule accessibility with a mobile -friendly solution.
- Reduce overtime costs by setting overtime rules and easily communicating to those who are available to work.

Identify key messages

Once your goals are set, identify the key messages you need to communicate to your workforce to be successful. Popular key messages include scheduling reminders, timeclock alerts, workforce notifications, change requests, team broadcasts, shift acknowledgements and any other communication you need to achieve your goals.

Define roles and responsibilities

Remember, tools are only as powerful as those wielding them. You need to identify the correct personnel in your organization that you need to implement a robust scheduling communications plan. Think through the resources you need, starting with the technical support needed for implementation, all the way to the practical help required for the day-to-day operation.

Choose communication tools

Once you have identified your communication goals and the key messages you need to deliver, the next step is to determine if you have the right tools in place. If not, take some time to research the scheduling communication tools that currently exist. Make sure to look for a solution that aligns with your business need. Many tools promote workforce scheduling, but lack the complexity to handle labor laws, CBAs, and legal regulations schedulers need to take into account.

Segment workforce into groups

Organizations commonly group hourly employees by shift detail, job function, or skillset. Maintaining this segmentation for communication purposes allows schedulers to quickly send messages to only relevant staff. Targeting the right personnel, closest to the time of need is principal for good communication.

Map implementation

It's now time to turn a list of ingredients into a recipe. Bring together your goals, key messages, communication tools, needed resources and workforce segmentation into one scheduling communications plan. Once you have your plan in place, the next step is to take action.

Step 3: Take Action

Mark Twain put it best, "The secret to getting ahead is getting started." It's time to turn plan into practice. We believe that the way organizations communicate scheduling details to their hourly workforce can create a competitive differentiator amongst the hourly labor pool. In other words, people are attracted to organizations where their schedules are known, easily accessed and communicated regularly.

Inform & educate your workforce

Improving your scheduling communications is exciting news for your hourly workers. Any process changes should be positioned as a commitment to bettering the lives of your hourly workers. Be sure to offer documentation and training opportunities for any new communication solutions or process updates that require a new workflow.

Set expectations

If you don't set expectations, others will set them for you. It's important for your workforce to know that this is a marathon and not a sprint. Ask them for their patience as you uncover all the wrinkles that need to get ironed out and request their feedback on what is going well and areas in need of improvement.

Encourage participation

As adoption grows, reach out to those who are not participating on the same level as their coworkers. Try to understand their hesitations and resolve any of their concerns. Remember, improving scheduling communications is meant to drive employee engagement. In-person meetings, new tool trainings and listening to negative feedback go a long way to encouraging employees to engage.

Measure, measure, measure

Famously, mathematician Karl Pearson observed, "That which is measured improves. That which is measured and reported improves exponentially." Without measurement, success is in the eye of the beholder. Create reports and analyze how your scheduling communications plan is measuring up to your goals.

Request feedback

Beyond passively collecting metrics, you should actively seek ongoing feedback from those invested in your scheduling practices. First-hand sentiments will provide real-world insights to validate or contradict your initial assumptions. Always echo an appreciation for feedback. No matter how scathing a critique may be, it's all information you can use to better employee engagement.

Modify communications plan

As W.C. Fields so lovingly put it, "Remember, a dead fish can float downstream, it takes a live one to swim upstream." Once you've established a working communications model, don't just go with the flow. In addition to collecting feedback and measuring your current process, continue to look outward for new opportunities to improve.