COMMUNICATION
Campus Crowdsourced

UMD’s Thriving Workplace Initiative hosted an open-invitation Campus Conversation on the importance of good communication. The Thriving Workplace Survey gauges effective team communication using three metrics: in the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work (Q04); in the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress (C11); and, my organization treasures diverse opinions and ideas (C02).

Over 150 ideas were generated during the Campus Conversation through small group conversations and individual reflection. The collective response illustrates what good communication looks like—productive dialogue, check ins, open doors, regular feedback and encouragement—and what it creates: less turnover, more respect, a sense of belonging and importance, and improved morale. What is the secret to good communication? Below we share what you said about communicating effectively 1-to-1, as a team, and as a university.

ONE-TO-ONE COMMUNICATION:
Individual communication is a manager’s first line of defense in understanding their employee’s workload, challenges, and development. Developing two-way, one-to-one communication reinforces an employee’s contributions and value and builds trusting relationships. How can supervisors establish regular, meaningful, and personal communication with their employees? Here were some of your thoughts:

- Ask more questions. Follow up with “tell me more.”
- Make a habit of sending notes of encouragement or recognition. Do you often get wrapped up in your work? Consider adding a calendar reminder and choose a different employee to write to each week.
Consider meeting an employee over breakfast, lunch or a cup of coffee instead of in the office. The change of scene interrupts patterns and can elevate a regular meeting to something special.

Re-consider the e-mail. If your e-mail has a question in it, pick up the phone instead. Or better yet, walk down the hall.

Don’t underestimate the spontaneous “walk and talk,” whether it’s to grab coffee or simply walk the building. Insert “here, let me walk with you” into your vocabulary. These quick conversations can be incredibly productive. Going to pick up coffee alone? Recruit an employee to join you.

Make sure you physically see your people daily (or at least weekly), particularly if they are in different locations.

"Say 'goodbye' at the end of the day. It's another way of checking in."

Even if you don’t have an answer, acknowledge the receipt of e-mails, particularly if there is a deliverable attached. Radio silence makes it appear the sender (or their efforts) is not important.

Communicate even when the answer is no.

Let employees know you value their opinion by inviting them to sit with you and share their perspectives on a particular problem or issue.

Get to know your employees on a personal level, without being too intrusive. Ask them about something they’ve already shared or use something displayed on their desk as a conversation starter.

Rephrase what you hear to make sure you understand.

Establish and reiterate clear expectations with individual staff.

Avoid saying, 'that’s how we’ve always done it,' or 'that’s policy;' seize on ideas and feedback that can improve existing methods.

Ask, “what do you need from me?” and follow through.

Visit—and meet with—employees in their work environment.

Set time each week to discuss future goals that is separate from project/work updates.

Say “thank you.”

Be aware of personal gaps in your understanding of effective communications and take steps to hone your skills.

Prolifically recognize a job well done in different ways and different venues. Some ideas include a personal note; cc’ing the employee on a note to your superior; a “reply-all” shout out; the weekly staff meeting; or a spontaneous conversation in the hallway.
MASS COMMUNICATION: COMMUNICATING AS A TEAM

How, when and why supervisors communicate to their employees as a team can be the difference between a highly-motivated department and one that’s not invested. Here are some ways you can foster an engaged, cohesive and enjoyable team environment:

- Institute the phrase, “there are no bad ideas here.” It fosters innovation and an inclusive environment.
- Allow room for mistakes and room to learn from them.
- Ask employees to share what they learn in training and development activities with the rest of the team.

OVERHAUL THE STAFF MEETING

Tips to make them anticipated events

- Make them opportunities for top-down sharing; go over what’s happening on campus and share how it effects your team
- Check in with each member of your team at each meeting
- Seek input from your staff on the agenda
- Consider walk around or stand up meetings with your team or meet in an open space rather than a conference room
- Build in wait time to make space for everyone to contribute
- Are your weekly meetings truly dreaded events? Ask, “what can we do to energize these meetings?”
- Save meetings for issues that cannot be addressed or solved by e-mail
- Use meetings to crowdsource productivity or other workplace challenges, like time management or streamlining your inbox
- Hold “brag sessions” at staff meetings, encouraging employees to share small victories or achievements outside of work
- Share meeting notes and action items with your group immediately after the meeting

- Reveal your own failures to staff.
- Share what you are working on as a manager and what campus administrators are working on, where you can.
- Keep staff updated on the progress or status of action items that will impact their work.
- Create casual opportunities for interaction, like coffee breaks. Is your team virtual? Plan regular chat sessions via skype or zoom where work is not discussed.

Be approachable. Check in with your team just to say ‘hi’ and keep your door open whenever possible. Remind people regularly that you want to hear from them.
• Help people understand where your team’s work fits into the bigger picture and the significance of what they do.
• Create new pathways form communication, such as online shareables. A great example getting a lot of traction at UMD is Airtable, a cloud-based collaboration platform.
• Inject humor into your communication where you can; its disarming, engaging and even motivating.

AVOID THE VOID

"Don't simply “push out” information, rather, present it in forums where you can garner reaction and feedback."

ALL POINTS BULLETIN: UNIVERSITY COMMUNICATIONS

A campus the size of UMD is like a small city, making effective communication challenging yet essential. What can campus administrators put into practice to foster transparency, awareness, and community? Here’s what you said:

• Instigate “listening tours” or “talk backs” for administrators and management to gather ideas and help the campus community feel heard. Equally important, follow up afterwards.
• Make employee completion of required trainings and campus events part of a supervisor’s PRD as well as staff.
• Allow campus administrators (particularly the president) to be more visible and accessible.
• Establish campus-wide networks for individuals with similar jobs.
• Offer immediate transparency on negative campus events and how they affect faculty and staff; create opportunities to discuss.
• Provide talking points for campus leaders (deans, etc.) for addressing campus tragedies with their staff.
• Create more opportunities for two-way communication.
• Invest in technology to make communication easier, such as project management software.
• Develop communities of practice that gather around certain topics to generate ideas and enthusiasm.
• Raise awareness of UMD’s Center for Leadership & Organizational Change (CLOC) and their resources for all levels of staff and faculty.

• Raise awareness of the University’s Ombuds services.
• Address chain of command hiccups around communication that frustrate people and hold things up.
• Focus on building relationships across campus by leveraging partnerships and breaking down silos.

Be mindful of 'losing the important in favor of the urgent.'

• Shake up the hierarchy by permitting unit staff to communicate up and down.
• Ensure campus communication is not promotional but meaningful and transparent.
• Communications should be coordinated and disseminated predictably, particularly in
times of great change (such as construction or arrival of new administrators).
• Report out changes being made in response to feedback. Explain what you did not do
and why.
• Offer more sessions like TWI Campus Conversations that are short and provide tips and
tools.
• Provide more brief communications about campus initiatives, responses and news that
affect workflow and quality of work life.

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Join members of the campus community at upcoming Campus Conversations to
discuss dimensions of a thriving workplace and generate strategies for action. Click here for the 2018-2019 schedule.

Need more ideas? Have a specific challenge?
Visit the TWI Resource Library for videos, strategies, and more.

ter.ps/twilibrary