



VTLO TIP SHEET

SINK OR SWIM:
7 Steps
TO COMMUNICATING
Change

*We can help you swim—
not sink—in the waves
of change.*

Call or email us today to arrange
a free, no-obligation telephone
consultation.

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Organizational change places extraordinary demands on corporate communication teams.

Your workload expands far beyond the steady state. You must support the change program leaders and ensure employees receive information and have the opportunity to be heard. As the communication leader, your peers in the business and the functions turn to you to keep the lines of information and feedback open and flowing.

While change is the norm in most companies, there are times when the magnitude of it increases exponentially. Mergers and acquisitions and the subsequent integration, operational excellence programs, global transformation initiatives -- any of these can threaten to swamp your resources.

Vitiello Communications Group is a leader in strategic change communication. Based on our 20+ years' experience, we offer the following seven steps to prepare you for success in leading change communication:

1. Read the horizon.

Proactive, engaged communication leaders know what's going on in their company and in their industry. Stay connected to people at all levels of the organization. Read blogs—especially those that are critical of your industry. Visit discussion boards where employees and customers vent. Set your RSS feed to the financial and global media outlets that cover your company. Be aware of internal and external rumors without contributing to them.

2. Form a core team.

In advance of a major change initiative, select the key communicators you will depend on to provide support. Identify your strongest contributors who have solid relationships with peers in Legal, Human Resources, Information Technology, Finance, Marketing and Customer Service. Over time, provide professional development experiences that expand their skills and build camaraderie as a special unit. Be ready to deploy them throughout the organization when called upon to support change.

3. Launch the program.

Whether you are launching an operational excellence program or announcing a major acquisition, stay close to the leadership team to gather data, understand nuance, and represent the employees' point of view. Decide the communication channels that best serve leaders and employees before, during and after the announcement. Prepare key messages with the information you currently have and request that leaders be transparent about what is known, but that they refrain from speculating.



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4. Chart your course.

Draft a strategic communication plan that addresses the audiences' need for information in logical increments of time. It's natural for information needs to be greatest directly after an announcement, followed by a period of time where opportunities for dialogue can help employees understand how the change affects their work group and themselves. As the change program progresses, course corrections are inevitable. Be sure to capture them in your strategic plan to keep it current.

5. Create a conduit.

It's critical that information flows swiftly and clearly -- and in two directions. Communicators can facilitate the dialogue between leaders and employees using existing channels such as intranet content, email messages, dedicated inboxes to gather questions, town halls, and webcasts. Equip managers and supervisors to engage employees in discussion. Provide them with communication toolkits that help them convey information consistently, articulate the organization's vision for change, and gather employees' opinions, questions and perspective.

6. Expect stormy weather.

Anticipate that any change will require an adjustment period as people absorb the information, react to it emotionally, and adopt new behaviors. Effective change communications should help employees translate the new organizational strategy into "what's in it for me." This will help reduce distractions and ultimately drive the organization to stronger business performance. Realize that "internal" communications can very quickly become "external" with the press of the "send" button. Work with Public Affairs and Legal ahead of the launch to review your company's media relations policy and to develop a public statement even if you never need it.

7. Gauge progress.

Measure how far employees have come in understanding and acting on the organizational change and how much further there is to go. Collect employee feedback through surveys, spot polls, focus groups, online chat forums, dedicated email boxes, informal interaction and anecdotes gathered from colleagues. Provide regular updates of employees' opinions to change leaders and allow it to inform and enhance your communication approach.

Vitiello Communications Group specializes in strategic change communication. We partner with leading companies to provide communication consulting and tactical implementation in situations such as mergers, acquisitions, operational excellence initiatives, relocations, global transformations and reductions in force. Our senior-level team has the experience and know-how to work alongside leaders to help them engage employees, drive organizational change and achieve business performance goals.