



SCENARIO: COMMUNICATING SUCCESSFULLY

STAFF PARTY, PART 1

Introduction

Jane walked into the all-staff meeting with the best of intentions. As the company **CEO**, she knew more than anyone that the upcoming holiday party was an important event for all the employees. So, Jane had a three-part plan to communicate with the employees about what to expect at this year's gathering. She would tell them about the party in person during the monthly staff meeting. Then, when she got back to her office, she would send a companywide email summarizing the main points from the meeting. Finally, she would record a voicemail message and send it to her four departmental managers, outlining what her expectations were and offering to set up a conference call with them next week to discuss matters.

As Jane saw it, she had checked all the communication boxes, and now it was time for her to execute her plan. However, there was one thing she had overlooked—her audience.

On Broadcast Mode

The company holiday party was a highlight of the year. It was not only a time for the employees to have fun, but also a chance to celebrate the company's achievements. Jane usually shared these highlights in a short, good-humored address at the beginning of the event. But this year she had a more ambitious program in mind to praise the accomplishments of all of her staff and to allow her core managers to shine. Her plan was to explain how the party would work at the monthly staff meeting.

Jane began by announcing that the date for the holiday party would be December 17. Then she went on to say that the company's four managers would make presentations at the party about their department's accomplishments. She believed this would be a great encouragement to everyone in the company, allow key people a speaking opportunity, and share knowledge with those who may not have been familiar with what was going on in other parts of the company. But she hadn't discussed her plans with her managers yet, let alone asked for their feedback on the plans. And, although Jane didn't think of it this way, the managers thought Jane was ordering them to do something. They saw it as a sign of disrespect.

VOCABULARY

CEO

the chief executive officer and highest-ranking position in a company



Each of the managers had his or her own individual reactions as well. One thought, “This just sounds like more work to me. Doesn’t Jane know we are in our busiest *quarter* of the year?” The second suspected Jane was dissatisfied with his department’s performance and that having to report on its quarter publicly would make him look bad. The third manager had recently *downsized* her department, and morale was low, but Jane clearly didn’t care. The fourth manager hadn’t really heard much of what Jane had said at all. He was still thinking about December 17—that was the date on which many of his staff would be out of town for a training program!

Most of the rest of the employees were equally unenthusiastic about what they had heard from Jane. Some shared the concern that it hadn’t been a good quarter for their section, and some just felt frustrated that the party would now be a meeting with a lot of speeches. They wondered whether attendance was going to be required. Because the meeting had started close to noon, people were getting hungry and began to slouch in their seats. Many were eager to get back to work to finish tasks that were due by close of business. They were fidgeting and checking their cell phones and email.

But Jane plowed on, and at the end of her talk offered to fit in a few questions. She knew she had an important doctor’s appointment in an hour and didn’t want to be late. One employee asked about the catering at the party and whether there would be more vegetarian options this year. The question irritated Jane, who thought it was a minor detail and that the questioner had missed the bigger point she was trying to make at the meeting. She dismissed the question with an irritated “I don’t know,” folded her arms, and glanced down at her watch. To the staff, she seemed to have lost interest in the meeting. Only one of them, her personal assistant, knew Jane was worried about the doctor’s visit and would have to leave soon.

Jane asked if there were any more questions and began to gather up her notes in preparation for leaving. No one seemed inclined to ask any further questions. Jane muttered “thank you, everyone” and began to move toward the door. Just as she did, one brave soul had raised his hand to tell her the date of the training was the same as the date of the holiday party. But Jane didn’t see him and had soon disappeared out of the room.

VOCABULARY

quarter

a three-month period in business, often abbreviated as Q1 (Jan.–Mar.), Q2 (Apr.–June), etc.

downsize

shrinking the size of a company by reducing the number of employees



Failure to Communicate

Before she left the building, Jane had remembered to swing by her office to send the companywide email as well as the voicemail messages for her managers. Then she jumped in her car and drove off to her doctor's appointment. But as she did, she couldn't help but feel things had somehow gone wrong—and not at all as she had expected. In short, she had failed to communicate.

How could Jane have done better?