



25 Powerful Workplace Health & Wellbeing Communication Tips

a special tip sheet by
HOPE
HEALTH
EMPLOYEES GET IT



Here are the top 25 Health & Wellness Communication Tips we've learned through trial and error over the last 30 years:

- 1. What is your audience persona?** — Who wants your message? Why is it important to them? Content marketing experts emphasize the importance of keeping your content relevant to the audience you serve. That rule applies to health and wellness communication, too. See **“3 Tips for Keeping Your Buyer Personas Fresh and Alive,”** by Anna Ritchie.
- 2. Headlines** — Great headlines break through. Give the headline as much importance as the content. Don't put something in as an after-thought. A good headline can increase readership by as much as six fold. Don't miss this great article, **“The Secret Headlines That Attract Readers,”** by Heidi Cohen.
- 3. “These” is a magic word** — As in... “Successful people do these 7 things differently.” “When blue is too blue? These 5 signs can help you to determine if you have depression.”
“These” implies specificity. Your audience can do something with specific information, which makes what you communicate relevant.
- 4. Eliminate** — What doesn't your audience need to know? If you're talking about blood pressure, for example, a brief review of the topic and an easy-to-use table of the numbers we need to know should about wrap it up. Pretend your audience is on another planet (*which is figuratively often the case*) and the communication transmission is going dead. You've got lifesaving information to share, but what should you say before the connection is cut off? Here's an excellent example of a plain language brochure from CDC, **“High Blood Pressure Fact Sheet.”**
“Most people don't want to know as much as you may want to communicate.”
- 5. Avoid brick walls** — That's what we call a page full of text. Break up copy so it appears digestible. Think sub-heads, short sentences, list, bullets, boxes, call outs, white space, etc.
A little advice from a graphic designer can go a long way. Many designers are starving, so make sure you feed them if you pick their brains. Here's a great book on the subject, **“The Non-Designer's Design Book: Design and Typographic Principles for the Visual Novice,”** by Robin Williams.
- 6. Scan friendly** — Think about the fact most of your audience will not read all of your wonderful prose. People should be able to scan your document quickly and grasp the important points. People also scan to evaluate if it's worth their time to read more. You can win a lot more readers if their scan of your document is rewarding.
Write and design as if everyone scans. Say something of value in the headlines, first sentences, first bullets, and end with a powerful, punchy summary.

7. **Secrets, fears, and mysteries** — We can't help ourselves when we see these types of teases. "5 Things Your Doctor Does to Stay Healthy," "7 Things Drug Companies Don't Want You to Know," "Don't Make These 3 Critical Mistakes When You Exercise," "My Shy 7-Year-Old Kid Just Sat Down at the Piano for the First Time — and Played Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 in E minor."

Come on, let's put some intrigue and zing into it! Tap into peoples' natural curiosity with a creative tease.

8. **Call to action** — Don't forget to ask the reader or viewer to do something. A good technique is to list three strong to-do recommendations in the wrap-up. More than three to do's and you're crossing the line of diminishing returns.
9. **Sell the hole and not the drill** — What happens if someone sleeps better, quits smoking, exercises regularly, and eats fresh foods? Remember it's all about the outcome not the tool. Think more energy, feel great, look great, be able to keep up with the kids, handle the grocery bags like bean bags, stay independent, and of course, have a love life that would be the envy of a *Cosmopolitan*™ magazine editor. Try that line and see what happens to your readership. Check out one of our previous articles, **"Healthy Employees: What do People Really Want From Wellness Programs."**
10. **Pictures & captions** — Use images with captions that explain what's in the image, just like a newspaper does. A picture is worth more than 1,000 words. The human eye naturally goes to the image.
11. **Link to short videos** — Generally, if you can keep informational videos to about 90 seconds, you'll get far greater viewership. When you promote a video, tell viewers its length: anything under two minutes, use seconds. "See this 90-second video on."
12. **Video content** — Production values can be low (*produced by an amateur*) if the information is fascinating, the speaker is compelling, and it's quick (*see #11 again*).

By-the-way, employees take great videos of one another participating in events and when interviewing one another. Pull out those mobile devices and record away. A *GoPro*® video worn by an event participant might provide spectacular content.
13. **Free webinars** — If you keep it interesting, most people will stay with you for the full hour because they believe they're saving so much time and money. Webinars are a deeper learning tool, and work for broader audiences (*community wide or national*). They have value as a workplace communication tool as well. See this excellent report titled, **"On24 Webinar Benchmarks Report, 2013 Edition."**
14. **Onsite events are a must** — People love mini-events at work. Lunch-n-learns, kickoffs, celebrations, etc. We'd never do one without feeding people good food. Kind of a holistic nourishment for body and mind. Let them know a continental breakfast or lunch is included. Food is part of community sharing. This is probably the only exception I'll ever make to using an extrinsic incentive, if you define it that way.
15. **Get right to it** — "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom." That's a great example of a profound opening from the classic novel, "A Tale of Two Cities."

How can you stop reading after that? Make a key point, or set the stage in the opening sentence. Great editors almost always find the opening sentence in the first draft's second, third, or fourth paragraph. We usually find the best first sentence to a document in the first draft's third paragraph.

16. **Illustrations/cartoons don't offend** — Need an image to go with your intuitive eating article? Use a bear. Want to talk about smoking cessation? Use a dragon. We often use a dog's point-of-view when we want to turn the light of a tough lifestyle issue on our audience. Check out our **“The Million K-9 March Against Lazy Humans”** poster, which has won numerous awards for us. A dog can be brutally honest with your audience, but you can't.
17. **Pie charts & bar graphs are your friends** — They seem the easiest types of graphics to understand. We think of them when we run into a set of data points that gets cumbersome to explain. When a visual can do it better, go visual.
18. **You're in competition for peoples' time** — When you send a communication at the workplace you have a built-in advantage in that people will give an internal communication some attention (*especially if you have a track record of being simple and brief*).

But anytime you communicate, and even more so if you use social media, you're up against the entire entertainment industry and news cycles for a time slot. Next time you think people “need to know this” don't forget that means instead of what Beyoncé and Jay Z, the NFL, NCAA, and the rest of Hollywood have to say that day. Good luck with that.

19. **Posters are timeless** — Let's face it: a workplace of people is a captive audience. Announcements, quick messages, and reminders are great poster content. Homemade posters are fine. Ask the artists among you to produce them and they'll get even more viewership. “WANTED, Dead or Alive!” still works for me. People will take time for telegraphic messages that have some apparent value. Here's an example of an electronic, **public health awareness poster** we produced for mall food courts.
20. **Think local** — Participating in local events or initiatives should be part of the fabric of every organization. It's like a farmer's market. Why ship in content from far away, when there are great, fresh sources where you work and live? And don't forget co-worker news, which often gets read or viewed first. Garrison Keillor's PBS radio series, *“News from Lake Wobegon,”* has much to be admired. Keep the home front in mind.

21. **Social media** — Workplaces have not realized the full potential of social media to communicate with employees and other stakeholders. We use Facebook® Group pages (*branded for the wellness program*) as the center of gravity for the wellness program. People can post, form groups, send out invitations, review upcoming events, read updates, watch videos, and more.



22. **Employee volunteers** — Employees can run your wellness program with the right structure, guidelines, and general rules in place. Get a number of people doing a little bit all the time, in an organized, methodical, and efficient manner.

The secret is to schedule and plan carefully. Here's a free, downloadable **“Health and Wellness Communications Planning Guide”** to tie everything together.

23. Editors add value — An editor can keep communications short, sweet, and effective. An editor can give your communication its own voice, weed out bad or incorrect information, and keep the messaging consistent, on target, and graphically cohesive.

If you're doing your own health and wellness content development, make sure a physician or other professional medical reviewers (*medical editor*) weigh in with advice and comment before you publish the information.

24. Repurpose content — A good communication can be delivered via print, electronic for mobile, and display. New articles can link to already published articles that provide additional information. Parts of articles can be used as tips, to support a graphic, or to include in a broader white paper or eBook. You can get a lot of mileage out of a good health message. Here's an **infographic** showing how to get the most mileage out of one article.

25. Build in two-way communication — Always build a feedback loop and make discussion possible among your audience members. This dynamic involvement is essential for continuous improvement, and makes everyone a stake holder in trying to build a workplace of wellbeing. Turn your communications into two-way discussions whenever possible.

What to do now?

- a. **Never try to publish 25 tips about anything** — 3, 5, or 7 tips are probably better. Your readers would have to be crazy to hang with you for 25 tips.
- b. **Head check** — Don't forget the three things about how employees view getting a communication from work. They don't want it; they didn't ask for it; and they don't have time for it. Start there, and you'll have the right frame of mind.
- c. **Start small** — Don't over schedule, over promise, or set unrealistic timetables for your workplace wellbeing initiatives. Take on a schedule that gradually, and consistently, builds a healthy culture. That way, your communication can flow more naturally and the culture can evolve over time.

**So there you have it —
25 tips to up your communication game.**



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