

Verbiage to Evangelize

A guide for communicating change after consensus has been reached

THE IDEA

In “The Realities of Consensus,” I talk about the two-way contract of consensus, and a leader’s responsibility to take decisions back to their team with good intent, without sowing discord or undermining what’s been decided.

When that decision means change, what you communicate, when you communicate it, and how you communicate it matter.



How to use this resource: Use this resource as a guide for moving information through the organization after a decision has been made. Start with who needs to know what and when, then use the communication guidance and talking points to help leaders share the change honestly, clearly, and without undermining the consensus that got you there.

1

Determine who needs to know what, and when

Let’s say your team has determined that you need to make a change. This could include:

- ◆ A change in strategy
- ◆ A new goal or milestone
- ◆ A new hire or promotion
- ◆ A merger or acquisition (M&A)
- ◆ A restructuring or reorganization
- ◆ A reduction in force (RIF)

To manage change effectively, information generally needs to flow downhill:

Execs → VPs & Directors → Managers → Individual Contributors

But the details should flow in increments. Individual contributors don't need to know everything that is going to happen with everyone. They need to know what's important to them.

HOW MUCH INFORMATION

Execs **100%** → VPs & Directors **90%** → Managers **75%** → Individual Contributors **10-50%**

These are estimates, but you get where I'm going with this.

When do they need to know?

Execs **months or weeks before** → VPs & Directors **weeks before** → Managers **days before** → Individual Contributors **day of**

2

Decide how the information will travel

Depending on the organization, culture, people, size, and nature of the change, communication might happen:

- ◆ From execs to the entire organization in an all-hands or town hall
- ◆ From execs to leadership in a leadership meeting, with leaders responsible for taking the message back to their teams
- ◆ From execs to individual leaders, who then communicate with their teams

There's no right or wrong way; there's just the right or wrong way for your organization. Execs should work with PeopleOps to determine the best approach for their team.

3

Give managers a communication framework

Once a manager has been notified, give them communication points to work from. Here's an order I've seen work well:

- ◆ Start with "News to share."
- ◆ Acknowledge what they may have already heard. (Rumors happen.)
- ◆ Discuss WIIFT (What's In It For Them) and underscore a growth mindset.

- ◆ Acknowledge the cons or concerns they may already be thinking about.
- ◆ Provide time for Q&A, but be careful to stay on script.

What to do

Keep it positive without being toxic. Find the good without being too perky. In short, be honest, candid, clear, and fair.

What not to do

Don't tell your team you're still not onboard. Don't imply that you plan to ignore the executives' direction. And don't silently, loudly, brazenly, or subtly sabotage the decision.

4

Give leaders language they can use

TO EMPHASIZE CONSENSUS

- ◆ The executive team looked at this from multiple angles.
- ◆ Leadership has spent days working through a solution.
- ◆ I first heard about this in ___ meeting, and at that point, I knew this was going to be the best way forward.
- ◆ Leadership is onboard with this. We know this is the best way to [goal].
- ◆ I trust ___, and I know there is intention and deliberation behind this. I'm onboard.

TO NAVIGATE GOOD

- ◆ We're excited about...
- ◆ I'm most eager for...
- ◆ My favorite thing about this is....

TO NAVIGATE ROUGH

- ◆ There's no doubt this will be rough, but I'm confident that...
- ◆ I'm not going to brush past the fact that this will be difficult.
- ◆ I'm certain each of you is considering what this means for you and your teams.
- ◆ I'd welcome the opportunity to discuss your concerns.
- ◆ The thing I'm most concerned about is ___, but when I consider ____...

Always remember the motivations of your team members at an individual level.

Bring the positive change back to them and what they need. If they can see how it will help them better meet their goals, they'll be more willing to change. If they can't, you may not have done a good enough job explaining what the team went through to get here.