

KERIN E. STACKPOLE
kstackpole@pfclaw.com

Managing Change Through Good Communication and Continuing Engagement

Presented by:
Kerin E. Stackpole, Esq., SPHR
Paul Frank + Collins P.C.

KERIN E. STACKPOLE, ESQ., SPHR

Kerin E. Stackpole is a Director at Paul Frank + Collins, where her practice areas include employment law, business counseling and general civil litigation. A native of Burlington, Vermont, Kerin is admitted to practice law in Vermont, Maryland and the District of Columbia. Kerin is an honors graduate of the Washington College of Law, American University and of Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts.

Kerin was the Chair of the Employment Law Section of the Vermont Bar Association from 2000 until 2004 and in 2008 she received her certification as a Senior Professional in Human Resources. Kerin has been recognized as one of Vermont's top labor and employment attorneys by Chambers & Partners (USA); Best Lawyers of America and Super Lawyers.

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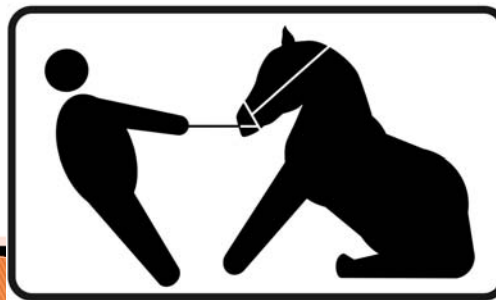
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By Kerin E. Stackpole, Esq.

Paul Frank + Collins P.C.
One Church Street
Burlington, Vermont
802-658-2311



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The Nature of Change

- ▶ Laws and Regulations Change Constantly
- ▶ Money is tight and coming slowly.
- ▶ The Workforce is Changing
- ▶ Services May Need to Change To Meet Needs
- ▶ There are fewer people available to do work
- ▶ The pace of change and of information transfer ever increasing
- ▶ Change is a constant necessity
- ▶ Change often results in failure before success (think New Coke...to Classic Coke and Dasani...)

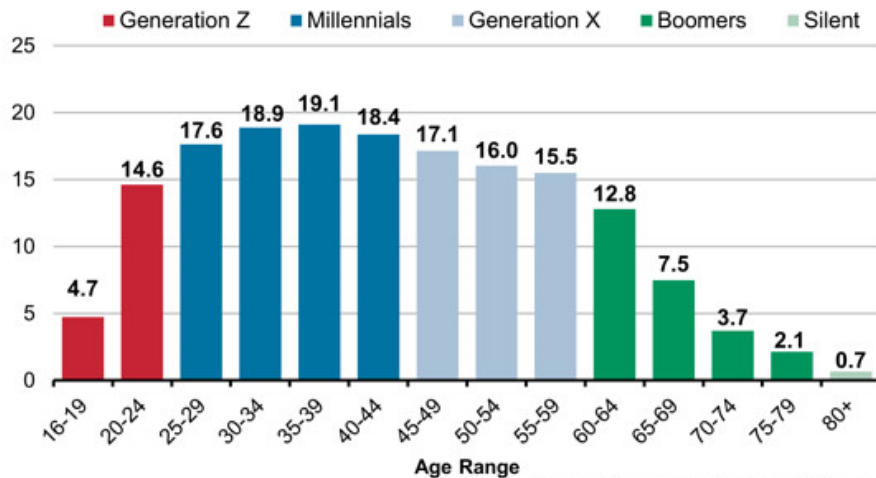
Change is Necessary

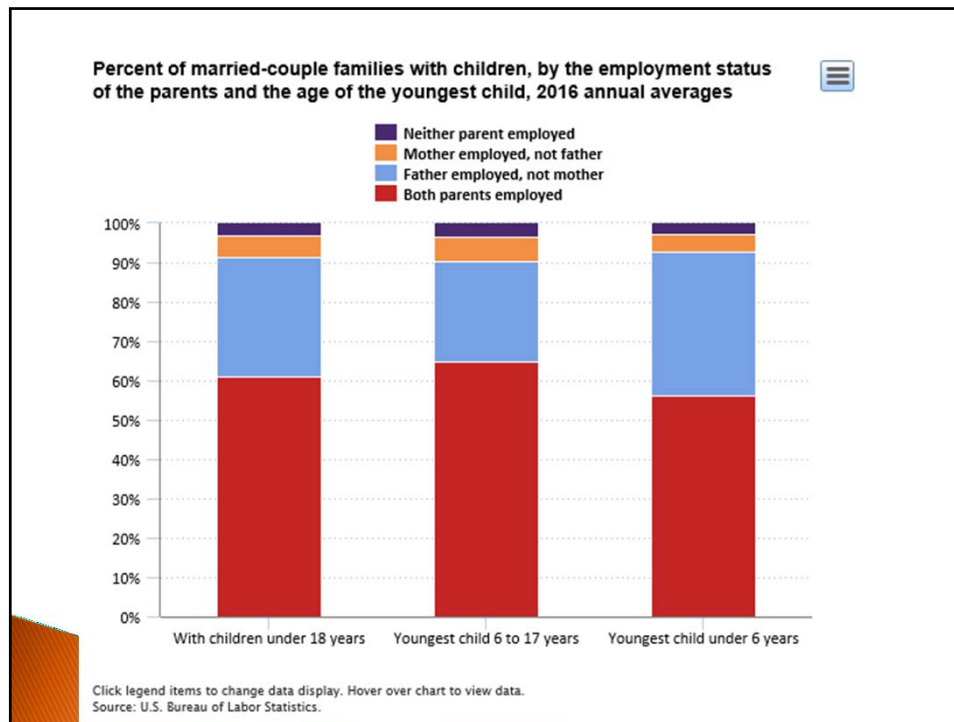
Change is Exhausting

Changes in the Talent Pool

The Workforce in 2025

Projected size of U.S. labor force (in millions) by age, for the year 2025





What do employees want?

- ▶ According to a Bentley University in 2014, 77% of job applicants sought jobs with “flexible work schedules” (including working remotely).
- ▶ In 2018, a Quick Books survey of employees showed that only 18% of workers actually had flexible work arrangements and 44% of employees without them were currently planning to leave their employment because of lack of flexibility.

Turnover hits all-time high in 2018, reaching 19.3%.

- ▶ That's nearly a full percentage point from 2017 and more than 3.5% since 2014.
- ▶ Salary.com compiled data from approx. 25,000 organizations of varying sizes in the United States.
- ▶ By industry, hospitality (31.8%), health care (20.4%), and manufacturing and distribution (20%) had the highest rates of total turnover.
- ▶ Utilities (10.3%), insurance (12.8%), and banking and finance (16.7%) had the lowest.
- ▶ By area of the country, the South Central region (20.4%) and the West (20.3%) had the highest rates of total turnover. The Northeast (17.3%) had the lowest rate of total turnover in the country.

Source: salary.com

According to SHRM (2019 data)

- \$223B** → **The Cost of Turnover Due to Workplace Culture Issues.**
- 60%** → **U.S. Workers Who Say Their Manager Does Not Know How to Lead a Team.**
- 1 in 3** → **Workers Leave Their Jobs Because of Their Managers**



**“Earn Your Leadership,
Every Day.”**

– Michael Jordan

Ingredients for Successful Employment

- ▶ Culture of Respect
- ▶ Clear Expectations and Direction from Supervisors
- ▶ Honest and Timely Feedback
- ▶ Opportunities for Learning
- ▶ Opportunities for Advancement or Meaningful Work
- ▶ Recognition of/Appreciation for Good Work
- ▶ Accountability
- ▶ Growth

How Successful Change Happens

- ▶ Consistent Commitment of Senior Leaders.
- ▶ Clear articulation of how this CHANGE serves your VALUES – You GOTTA BELIEVE
- ▶ Building a shared awareness of the NEED FOR CHANGE and the consequence of FAILURE.
- ▶ Picking the Right Team to Lead the Change on the Front Lines of Management.
- ▶ DEFINE THE PROCESS and ASSIGN RESPONSIBILITY FOR EACH PHASE OF IT.

How Successful Change Happens

- ▶ Allocate sufficient resources for change.
- ▶ CELEBRATE SUCCESSES as they happen; and BREATHE.
- ▶ Understand the RESISTENCE.
- ▶ Meet Resistance with Information, Training, Support, Flexibility and Persistence.
- ▶ No Blame. If it is broken – ADMIT IT AND FIX IT.
- ▶ Communicate, Communicate, Communicate.

The Myth of At Will Employment

- ▶ Employer and Employee each have right to end relationship
- ▶ No reason, no notice
- ▶ There are lots of exceptions
- ▶ Contracts, policies, past practices, discrimination etc.
- ▶ If you let someone go for cause, make sure they see it coming.

Communication is Key



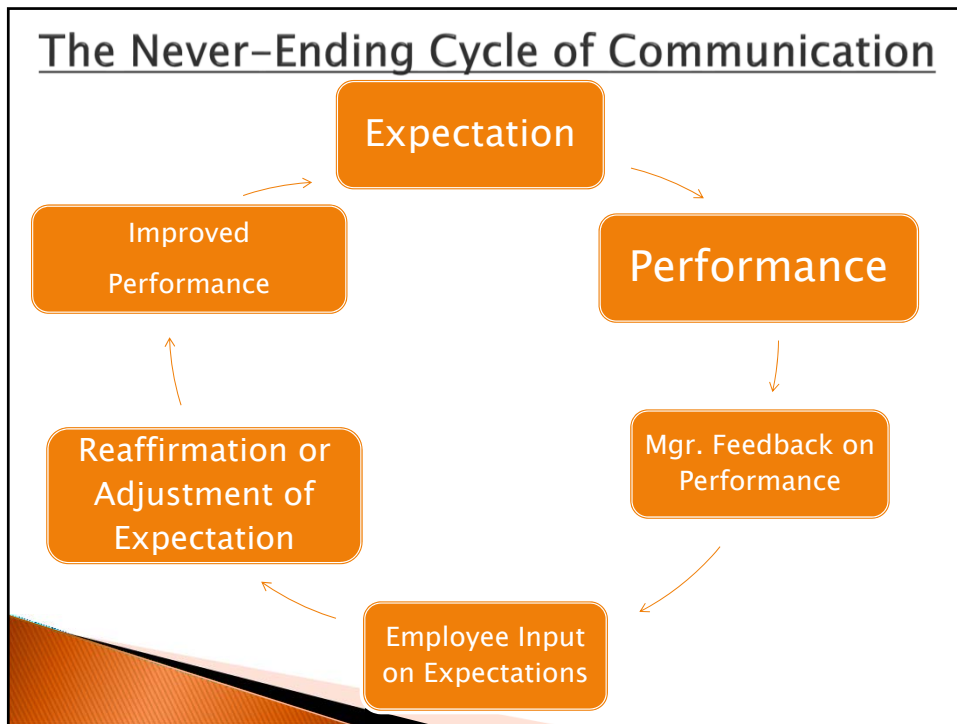
Good Communication – More Like Waffles than Spaghetti



Break it Down; One Piece at a Time...



All Mixed Up; Too Much to Digest Easily



Communicate, Communicate, Communicate

- ▶ Routinely Communicate Your Values and WORK GOALS
- ▶ Use a diverse group of messengers (not just you): mentors; team member success stories; industry examples, customer/client feedback, etc.)
- ▶ Use different mediums, to catch different audiences (in person, phone, video conference, email, staff meetings, all staff emails, evaluations, thank yous etc.
- ▶ **Give TIMELY AND HONEST Assessments of Success/Failure**

Be Strategic About Your Communication Styles

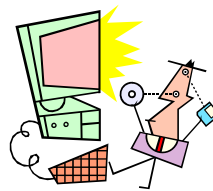
- ▶ Different Employees Learn Differently
- ▶ Communicate and Change in different formats and forums, to maximize results



Visual



Auditory



Kinesthetic

How and What to Communicate

- ▶ Choose the METHOD carefully.
- ▶ **TWO WAY COMMUNICATION IS OFTEN BETTER THAN ONE WAY COMMUNICATION!!!!**
- ▶ If it is time sensitive – MEET, or PICK UP THE PHONE!
- ▶ Tone matters – Two Way Communication allows for your employees to truly understand, through words and TONE.
- ▶ 1st time you communicate requirements – Let it be in person or through a method of 2 way communication.
- ▶ Follow up with an email – so everyone is on the same page.
- ▶ Set a time to CHECK IN on the PROGRESS – and KEEP THAT APPOINTMENT

Create a Culture that Embraces Change

- In a job interview – how do you set the expectation that change is happening? Expected? Normal?
- In orientation of employees – how do you describe change? Teach employees to expect it?
- When you are training employees – how do you get them to expect and embrace change?

Create a Culture that Embraces Change

- How do you support people dealing with constant change?
- How do you hold someone accountable for driving change or accomplishing change in their part of the organization?
- Do you celebrate change?
- Do you reward change?

It Is the Simple Things That Matter

- Model the Behavior You Expect
- Set up check ins on a regularized schedule
- Invite Dialogue – Open Door Policy
- Be “present” when employees come to you.
- Create opportunities for dialogue with regular staff meetings or check ins

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Create Opportunities for Communication

- ▶ Training Programs
- ▶ Team Huddles
- ▶ Town Hall Meetings (All Staff Gatherings)
- ▶ “Walk the floor”
- ▶ Performance Management Processes (Eval, Discipline)
- ▶ Effective use of Intranet or other internal communications (newsletters)
- ▶ Intra-Community Outreach (celebrations of success)
- ▶ Retreats or Team Building Gatherings
- ▶ All Staff Celebrations

Invite Questions – Actively Listen

- What do you think is the issue here?
 - What is creating this issue?
 - Can you give me some examples?
 - Can you be more specific?
 - Get the Who, What, When
- ▶ Listen carefully to the employee and by your questions, get them to really think through their issues.
- ▶ Ask: What is the outcome you are looking for?

Invite Questions – Actively Listen

What factors are YOU in control of in this situation?

- Explore with them what THEY can do to solve the issue.

What factors are OTHERS in control of in this situation?

How can others be encouraged towards appropriate resolution?

Invite Questions – Actively Listen

- How is this impacting your ability to get your job done?
 - Get employees to BE SPECIFIC
 - This is about getting the employee to reflect; just as much as it is about you learning about the problem.
- How can I learn more about this situation? Who else could give me perspective?

Build Towards Solutions

- ▶ What solutions would you suggest?
 - Which part of this solution can you own?
 - Which part might be owned by others – who?
- ▶ What is your plan for resolution?
- ▶ What tools do you need to resolve this situation?
 - This is an opportunity to coordinate; and to set expectations.

Build Towards Solutions

- ▶ What do you think is a reasonable timeline to address this issue?
- ▶ Set Specific Timelines. Make them CALENDAR INVITES – so all calendars have the same info!
- ▶ Let's be clear on the deliverables – at the end of these time frames – what can I expect?
 - Set Clear and Defined Expectations.
- ▶ Ask the Employee to Repeat Expectations –
 - “Just so I can make sure we are on the same page....”

Support and Appreciation are Important

- ▶ Always thank the person for his/her perspective and communication.
 - “This is important information for me to have, thank you.”
 - “I appreciate you bringing these issues to me. They are important.”
- ▶ Thank them for bringing solutions forward.
 - “I really appreciate that you thought this through and have presented possible solutions.”
 - “It is important that with every problem we identify, we also identify solutions and take ownership of that solution. You have done that here, and I appreciate it.”

Support and Appreciation are Important.

- ▶ “It may take me some time to address the issues you have raised, but I really appreciate the time you took to bring them to my attention.”
- ▶ “This was a good discussion. We have some things to do. We have a game plan. Let’s take it one step at a time. Please keep me informed of your progress. Thank you.”

So, you did all that...but it is not working...

- ▶ Before you start “documenting” – start TALKING
- ▶ Be prepared; Practice what you will say.
 - Why is it not working? Be SPECIFIC.
- ▶ Talk to the Employee THROUGH TWO WAY COMMUNICATION
- ▶ MAKE SUFFICIENT TIME FOR THE CONVERSATION.
- ▶ Be Calm, Be Respectful, Be Firm

Courageous Conversations

- ▶ TIMING IS EVERYTHING – BE QUICK
 - Same shift; within 48 hours of an event; No more than a WEEK.
- ▶ Be direct and specific about the behavior at issue.
- ▶ Be clear and direct about your expectations for change
- ▶ Give the employee a timeline for expected change (e.g. immediate and sustained)

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Courageous Conversations

- ▶ Be clear and direct about consequences – make sure employees know that separation could be a consequence.
- ▶ This does not mean threatening employees with termination.
- ▶ This means an honest discussion that the behavior needs to be corrected, or there will need to be further action to make sure it is corrected.

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Courageous Conversations

- ▶ This also means honest discussion that discipline – up to and including termination – could result if satisfactory change is not achieved.
- ▶ This takes skill and discretion.
- ▶ It takes courage and practice.
- ▶ Follow up with employee and document.

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Courageous Conversations

Documentation is important:

- ▶ An email—with expectations, timeline
- ▶ A disciplinary document
- ▶ A specific comment on an evaluation
- ▶ In person meetings
- ▶ All of the above
- ▶ Keep the timeline short
- ▶ Set a time for follow up
- ▶ Make sure tone and content show you are serious, and that you are willing to provide support

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Courageous Conversations

Dear John –

This is just a quick note to follow up on our meeting of today.

During our meeting, we discussed the fact that you have not been consistently participating on our video calls. When you join, you are often late or you drop off early. And when you are on the call, your participation is minimal.

We recognize that this meeting format is not ideal, but each of us has a role in making it work.

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Courageous Conversations

Please also make sure that you come to meetings promptly, stay for the whole meeting unless excused in advance, and that you are prepared to contribute [ADD A SENTENCE WITH SPECIFICS – IDENTIFY RULES OR POLICIES SPECIFICALLY]

If you have questions about any of these requirements, please let me know immediately. I am here to support the work you do.

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Courageous Conversations

- ▶ MANAGER NOTE, another option: set a meeting:
- ▶ I would like you to meet with me on [ADD DATE], so that we can review [specifics of work to be reviewed]. The goal would be for me to better understand the issues you are encountering, and for me to provide specific suggestions for meeting those challenges. I would also be interested in hearing any suggestions you have for ways we can improve communication among team members.

Courageous Conversations

MANAGER NOTE: If improvement is not made – the next communication will also include something like this:

[My expectation is that you will show immediate and sustained improvement regarding [ADD SPECIFICS – attendance, timeliness of projects, showing up to meetings on time and participating in a meaningful way, etc.] If you are not able to make these improvements, we will have further conversation. Continued failure to meet these standards could mean discipline – up to and including termination.]

Courageous Conversations – Evaluations

- ▶ Be consistent in documentation and conversations.
- ▶ If an employee is struggling, it should show up on their evaluation.
- ▶ Do not be an “easy grader.”
- ▶ Do not avoid giving honest feedback on an evaluation because it will prompt a difficult conversation.

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Fairness and Consistency

- ▶ FAIR DOES NOT MEAN SAME...But Fairness and Consistency are Generally GOOD.
- ▶ How have you handled situations like this before?
- ▶ Be honest – have you applied this rule consistently and fairly throughout your staff?
- ▶ Or, have you sometimes enforced it, and sometimes not?
- ▶ If you have been inconsistent, you will need to go back and establish the baseline again, and you may not be able to take disciplinary action.

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Fair and Consistent Application of the Rule

- ▶ Look at your patterns.
- ▶ Are there certain people you come down on harder than others?
- ▶ Are you holding everyone responsible for the same standards?
- ▶ Have you articulated the same standards to everyone in the department, or this role?

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Consider Mitigating Factors

- ▶ Is this a “first offense?”
- ▶ Were there contributing factors that the employee could not control?
 - Business interruption due to COVID
 - Illness
 - Hardship of some sort
 - Other employees who were also at fault
- ▶ What does this person’s entire employment record look like?
- ▶ What is their disciplinary history?

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Timeliness Matters

- ▶ Do NOT DELAY, if corrective action needs to occur.
- ▶ Delay has been found to undermine an otherwise solid disciplinary process.
- ▶ If you delay, you may have to push your deadlines for action, your expectations, and your disciplinary deadline, out. This can cause frustration for management and can lead to bad outcomes.

Summary

- ▶ Change is Hard.
- ▶ Managing Humans is Hard.
- ▶ Both take time and patience.
- ▶ Both require constant communication and consistency.
- ▶ Live your values. Most importantly – Be fair. Be Respectful.

Lead. Be Accountable.

- ▶ Identify and Publish Core Values
- ▶ Set an Example for Others – Live those Values
- ▶ Create policies and culture that embody those Values
- ▶ Continually Communicate Values
- ▶ Hold Each Other Accountable for Behavior and Communication
- ▶ Follow your Policies
- ▶ Promptly Respond to Issues
- ▶ Consistently Follow Through

LEADERSHIP

ACCOUNTABILITY