

# the communicators' NETWORK

The year 2009 will be remembered as the year of unfortunate farewells. But how do you say goodbye to a longstanding CEO? This month members of the network shared their stories and ideas to give leaders a memorable send off. Also, measurement expert Angela Sinickas offers her thoughts on the optimum size of an internal communication function, and find out how to launch a pledge campaign to engage employees in a new company strategy.

QA

**Q** Can anyone suggest some interesting and different ways to say goodbye to a longstanding chief?



**Terry McKenzie**  
Sun Microsystems

When our Sun co-founder and CEO Scott McNealy stepped aside, we hosted a

global townhall, with 35,000 employees around the world hooked by phone, satellite, laptop and in person. The townhall coincided with our annual VP leadership conference, so we had 200 vice presidents in the auditorium to experience the session in person.

McNealy's successor, Jonathan Schwartz, gave a surprisingly emotional talk about what Scott's leadership meant to him personally, and the hundreds of thousands of people who had a career thanks to Scott's vision.

Scott chose not to formally speak; he felt there was nothing left for him to say. Instead, he and Jonathan took questions from the audience. Questions ranged from the serious: "Jonathan, how does your vision for Sun's future differ, if it does, from Scott's?" to the personal: "Scott, what advice would you give Jonathan on how to juggle his demanding CEO role with his role as the father of two young boys?"

All employees had the opportunity to ask questions. We rotated questions from the live audience to email submissions to phone inquiries. (Of course, we were ready with questions should nothing come up but those weren't needed).

The event was made personal and even more meaningful because Scott brought his wife, four little boys and his mother to the townhall. Scott's mother even asked a

question during the Q&A, to which Scott responded, "Ahhh, Mom! Don't ask me that!" The audience loved that personal touch.

The warm environment and personal family touches helped employees through this emotional moment of saying goodbye to their co-founder. They saw how much this company and its employees meant to Scott, and allowed him to exit a hero, while welcoming in the new regime.

The cost of the event was about \$35,000, due to having to make the broadcast available in over 100 locations. The employee communications department set up the event and facilitated the session.

**Nagesh Ramamurthy**  
Cegedim

Some years back, as a Wing Commander in the Indian Air Force (IAF), we decided, among other things, to capture on video the activities of the last few days of our Commandant Air Cmde at Air Force Technical College, Bangalore, India. We assembled snippets captured over the period of his tenure at the institute, and then added interesting tid-bits, including some mimicry of his special traits. We then presented this nicely edited video in a box at the railway station when we went to see him and his family off.

On another occasion, when the head of our Bangalore center was returning to his parent organization, we had a special photograph taken of him along with the

entire organization of 350 employees.

In my opinion, the best way to see off a long-standing boss is to have the entire team at an offsite place – have a picnic, or just have a fun evening, ensure that the speeches are not overly sentimental, that there's time for the boss to interact with all – for his spouse to see how much he/she is loved or appreciated, then hand out a lasting memento that will remind him/her of the good times. The trick is, of course, to ensure that there's no meandering at the end of the evening, a quick but touching goodbye is essential!

**Q** What is the industry best practice/trend in terms of size of communications departments?



**Angela Sinickas**  
Sinickas Communications Inc.

I've done a lot of communication

infrastructure research and counsel for clients in different industries. You should really start with how communication can ideally support your business goals (interviews with executives, focus groups with employees, a survey). Identify the demand for communication content/campaign support to achieve those goals. This will depend partly on the extent to which your communication function is intended as a mass broadcasting system versus how much time is spent enabling better operational communication flow. Then, determine the right infrastructure of two-way communication channels to reach your various stakeholder groups for the content to flow through. Once you figure out the total "demand" for communication, you can tell how many individuals you'll need to supply communication support.

The "right" ratios of communicators to employees, or internal versus external communication will also vary greatly among companies based on factors that include:

- If your company makes products or provides services. Service companies need more employee communicators since they have more employees in direct contact with customers.
- If your company has employees who are all online or you have a mix

including employees without online access, which requires managing both online and print communication vehicles.

- How many business units you have, and how large they are.
- How geographically dispersed the company is.
- How centralized/decentralized the company is, which determines how many communicators need to be dispersed in the units/geographies and how many should be in a centralized office.
- Whether the company is publicly traded.
- Whether the company is in a highly regulated industry.
- The extent of major change going on.

Finally, the size of the company will greatly affect these ratios. For example, let's say that you determine that a weekly online newsletter is a required element of your communication program, requiring a full-time internal communicator. If your organization has 1,000 employees, then you have a 1:1,000 ratio. If you're doing the same weekly newsletter for a 100,000-employee company, you've got a 1:100,000 ratio. Same number of communicators needed to accomplish the same task, but it looks more efficient when applied to a larger employee base. That's why you really need to look at your own needs first, not external comparisons.

**Q I'm looking to initiate an employee pledge campaign to engage colleagues around the new company direction and try to get away from the broadcast approach that has now reached saturation point.**



**Elvin Turner**  
DPA Comms

I don't think you can avoid some form of broadcast. I can understand you wanting to avoid it as the principal means of engagement but I still think there's value in having a context piece and basic outline that people can tune into/out of and come back to as a point of reference at a later date.

The most effective way that I've seen this done is to get the heads of business units making tangible pledges that they commit to following through. One year later (or less if possible) they report back to the business on their progress.

The "executive pledge" is followed by a rollout across each business division where teams are encouraged to have a conversation around the new vision, what it means to them personally, what new opportunities this presents to them and what new value they believe they can bring to the business as a result. This then becomes the pledge and creates a dynamic link between the new vision and the new value (or contribution) that each team will make to help deliver it. If you take out the "new" element, you run the risk of vanilla "pledges" such as, "I'll keep doing more of the same."

Managers are responsible for reporting back their value pledges to the business unit head, who in turn commits to giving feedback and support. This can then become a useful repository of potential innovation stories that you can then use to build evidence of the new vision bearing fruit.

You can also try measuring/encouraging/incentivizing people alongside the pledges. As I'm sure you know, many people will try and duck when anything new comes their way. Putting in some measurement practices, for example aligning pledges to PDPs or bonuses) can help, but so too can rewards for great contributions that are aligned to the new vision. For example, the team that submits and delivers on the best pledge wins a trip somewhere special. This type of approach can also feed in to annual awards programs quite successfully (if you run them), such as employee innovation awards. If you don't have one, this could be a good reason for starting one.

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### Stephen Martin's 10 tips for CEO communication

Melcrum editor James Bennett recalled 10 tips from Clugston Group's CEO on how CEOs should communicate to employees during and after a recession, shared at Melcrum's SCM Summit in October.

1. Communicate, communicate, communicate: Communicate more regularly than ever before.
2. Always be seen by employees — leave your ivory tower and listen to what frontline employees have to say.
3. Inform widely and get large-scale opinion from employees.
4. Eliminate the culture of executives in suits and workers in overalls/uniform — this puts employees off and communication is immediately lost.
5. Brown bag lunches — my door is always open and I regularly have lunch with my employees but only when it suits them.
6. Refresh your communications as often as possible.
7. Ask and consult your employees at all times — go around the office/construction site/shop floor and ask all of them what they think.
8. Demonstrate you have listened and stick to your promises.
9. Talk to them at a time that suits them.
10. Invest in training of frontline supervisors and managers — if you don't nothing will change.

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