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Communication Strategies for In-House Lawyers in Diverse Corporate Environments

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Communication Strategies for In-House Lawyers in Diverse Corporate Environments

By Jane Mallor McBride

On any given day, an in-house lawyer may be communicating with staff, with outside counsel, with other in-house lawyers, with representatives of other companies or third parties, with their business clients in the US, or with global business clients. The in-house lawyer may be a woman lawyer communicating with men; or a millennial lawyer communicating with baby boomers. Cultural and diversity differences among speakers and stakeholders may abound. With the corporate world growing more and more diverse, and the in-house practice of law being so incredibly varied, in-house lawyers need practical communication strategies that take that diversity and practice variety into account.

As if that wasn't enough stress, there is also another layer of complication in client communication for in-house lawyers. Our clients are often also our bosses or the senior management at our employer. With this unique client relationship, effective in-house client communication doesn't just impact how we practice law. It impacts how we are perceived by senior management. It impacts our future at our company. It impacts our salaries and bonuses. It even impacts how easily our job gets done.

In short, effective client communication is absolutely critical to the success of in-house lawyers. **The better we get at understanding our audiences and effectively communicating, the more likely we are to be successful.**

With success in mind, here are some practical tips for more effective client communication in diverse corporate environments.

One: Know Your Audience

Begin by paying attention to who you may be communicating with so you can do some communication strategizing in advance. Is it a business person? A man? A woman? A millennial? Gen Z? Someone from another country or culture?

Get to know and understand the similarities and differences in communication styles and preferences among the potential diverse groups that make up your communication audiences.

While these tips for understanding different audiences are an excellent starting point for better communication, it is important to stay aware of the individual and their preferences as you get to know them better. And don't be too quick to make assumptions.

For example, there are around 2 billion millennials on the planet. It's easy to assume that they are all pretty much the same. Yet 63% of Indian millennials rate becoming a leader or manager as "very important", while in Japan, that number drops down to 8%. And even within same cultures, not all members of any group are the same.

The following are some differences and similarities to keep in mind, along with some tips that may help you to understand your audiences better.

Generational Differences

Technology has impacted millennials and the newest generation to enter the workforce, Gen Z, more than any other generations. They spend more time on technology and they have had less face to face experiences than prior generations. Consider this: Gen Z literally grew up with smart phones in their hands; millennials played computer games in their youth and were connected to their smartphones from their tween or teen years on. Understanding the impact of technology is key to understanding generational differences.

For example, Millennials and Z's are used to immediate feedback – immediate likes to their Facebook and Instagram posts, immediate grades on their online tests. Baby boomers and Gen X'ers need to understand that their millennial and Z colleagues are looking for quick feedback, not because they need to be babied, but because they are used to immediate feedback on virtually everything. AND they are not always looking for a compliment – that feedback can be positive or negative, so long as they get feedback. Giving feedback is beneficial for both parties. According to Gallup, millennials are twice as likely to be engaged on the job if they meet regularly with their manager. The feedback doesn't have to be

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