

Risk Communication

Here is a simplified risk communication formula. It is intended especially for situations of low trust and high risk, impact, or outrage — where the messenger is the expert with important information but comes from an agency or company that the audience does not trust. Here are the basics:

Risk Communication

In general, keep the message and language simple and direct.

1. Empathy
2. Company/intention statement
3. Three important things
4. Company/intention re-statement
5. Future actions

After Vincent Covello

If you have a general audience, keep the language simple and direct. (Use “use” – do not utilize “utilize.”)

If your audience is other managers, etc. — then use the appropriate lingo.

However, if your audience is other managers who will need to communicate with a general audience, keep using everyday, simple, and direct language to reach the most people.

If you want more details:

1. Empathy — Empathize with people’s opposition, concerns, or fears. It is not a question of having to agree with people’s fears. Because perception is reality, acknowledge people’s concerns. Let people know that they have been heard.
2. Company/intention statement — Make a simple, direct statement in everyday language of the company’s or organization’s general intention.
3. Three important things — Offer three key pieces of information to form the foundation of the real situation. Without telling people that they’re “wrong” — this is the opportunity to correct people’s misconceptions.
4. Company/intention re-statement — Make a simple, direct re-statement in everyday language of the company’s or organization’s intention.
5. Future actions — Describe the direct actions that the company or organization is going to take.

Risk Communication During the Covid Pandemic

An example

Because people's perceptions are important, it is crucial to address people's concerns whether or not you experience those same concerns. Therefore, share information with everyone who might be worried.

For example, if a worker tests positive for Covid, notify everyone in that person's group, not just those that were identified through contact tracing. Do not use the approach of — "If we haven't contacted you then that means you are okay." — because it creates confusion and raises even more concerns because of the unknown. Simply, keep everyone informed on a regular basis, even if you have no new information.

With this in mind, use the basic elements of risk communication as you inform others:

1. Empathy — *We want all of you to know that one of our co-workers has tested positive for Covid. At this time they are showing no/mild/severe symptoms. We realize this is of great concern to you and to all of us.*

(Note: In order to protect the quarantined worker's privacy, let people know what you can and cannot tell them.)

2. Intention statement — *We want to make sure that all of you are healthy and safe, and that you feel safe.*
3. Three important things —
 - a. *We will keep you up to date as we learn more.*
 - b. *We are currently tracing any contact this person has had within our group. Those that have been in contact with this person will be asked to self-quarantine for 14 days.*
 - c. *If contact-tracing shows you haven't been in contact with this person, it is still safe for you to continue working. However, we will keep you up to date regardless.*
4. Intention re-statement — *As we continue to guard your health and safety...*
5. Future actions
 - a. *We will keep you informed as we learn more.*
 - b. *We will adapt our work schedule and workload while this person is in quarantine so that you can maintain your health and safety.*
 - c. *We want you contact us with any concerns you have about this situation.*