



Engaging Words

A writer's guide to truly meaningful
internal communication.

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**How do you create the most engaging,
meaningful internal communications possible?
The kind that colleagues are motivated to
respond to, and act on with enthusiasm?**

To find out, we ran workshops and talked to teams from all around the Aegon. The result was a clear set of recommendations, based on **one overarching theme** and **five underlying principles**.

This guide outlines those ideas in a format you can draw on when writing your own internal communications. They're also illustrated in two worked examples.

So what are the ingredients of truly engaging communications?

Read on...

A sense of Oneness

The **universal theme** at the heart of all our internal communications.

In communications, emotion is as important as information.

While the *information* we include in a communication enables people to **know**, it's the *emotional cues* that make them **feel** - which ultimately influences how they **act**. It doesn't have to be overt or intense emotion, but it needs to be there, and it needs to be the right one.

Internal communications can tap into all kinds of emotion, but there's one governing feeling that should always be in our minds when writing: **Oneness**.

Oneness is our need for connection: the coherent, *human* connection that unites all of us at Aegon. We're *many* teams, and we're *one* team. We're all here to serve the customer, and we all have each other's back. We respect and acknowledge one another's roles, responsibilities and expertise.

In communications, Oneness means breaking down the barriers between different roles and departments. It means getting as close as we can to the feel of a person-to-person conversation, using natural, warm, everyday speech.

It means demonstrating *understanding* through every aspect of our writing: tone, structure, word choice, the sequencing of messages. It governs the things we *don't* say, as well as those we do.

It means connecting with each other as human beings.

How do we evoke Oneness?

The five key principles.

1. Be clear about the “why”

When a colleague engages with a piece of communication, they’re already asking a number of “whys”.

“Why should I read the next sentence?”

“Why should I do what I’m being asked to do?”

“Why should I care?”

The answer “because it’s my job” only goes so far. How *well* that person engages with your communication depends on how many of these “whys” you can answer, and how much that resonates with the reader. A really strong communication will answer one or more of these questions *early on* – ideally in the opening paragraph, or even in the title.

The “why” is also about the “you”. We’re all complex beings, and we all have different motivations for doing things, but our core emotional drives are pretty similar. When deciding which “why” to address, try asking which “part” of reader you are speaking to? The customer-focused colleague? The loyal employee? The caring manager who’s committed to supporting their team? The diligent worker? The creative individual looking to achieve their full potential? Know your audience, and you’ll know the “why”.

Some common, powerful “whys”:

- Why is this important to Aegon?
- Why is this important for our customers?
- Why is this important to my team?
- Why am I the right person to do this?
- Why is this the right thing to do?
- How will this benefit my team?
- How will this benefit my career?
- How will this be recognised and rewarded?

Key insight:

One of the most powerful, unconscious “whys” is: “because the person who wrote this understands what’s important to me and my team, and has tailored their communication accordingly”.

2. Simplify, Simplify, Simplify

Also known as “cut to the chase”.

As long as your tone remains natural, warm, and everyday, **keeping things simple** automatically increases engagement. That’s because the reader senses that only the things they *need* to know are included – and by extension that the content is specifically tailored to them.

The key to simplicity

This isn’t just about keeping content to a bare minimum. It’s about **sequencing your messages effectively** so the most important points come first, with the others following in descending order of importance.

For example, if there’s an **action** you need the reader to take, lead with that and then give the context and reasons afterwards.

It’s a technique used by journalists, magazine columnists (and, yes, advertisers) to keep readers reading and maximise engagement. It gives the reader control, allowing them to decide when they know what they need to know, and move on.

It also tends to keep things shorter, clearer, and easier to consume – all things that managers and their teams value.

3. Recognise the pivotal role of Managers

As internal communicators, we know how important managers are to the process. For most team members, the manager is their “leader”. The directors at head office, however approachable, simply aren’t that relevant on a day-to-day basis.

Managers are therefore key to making internal communications **land with their team**. As such, the communications we create must **empower them as much as possible**.

How do our communications empower managers?

- By giving them **a clear, powerful story** to tell their team (see the other **four principles** for what that looks like).
- By recognising that **managers have their own style** and may be **highly creative communicators** in their own right. If they’re not, the way we write can help them.
- By giving them licence to bring the content we create to life **in their own way**.
- By making sure they have a clear understanding of **“the why”** (as it applies to them, their team, our customers and the Aegon family) - along with some **powerful ways of articulating it**.
- By making communications easy to manage and consume (in particular, see Principles [2](#) and [4](#)).

4. Make it Meaningful, Relevant and Consistent

A communication will only achieve its full effect if the reader feels that it's a) **relevant**, b) brings something **meaningful** and **useful** to their attention and c) is consistent with other messaging that comes before and after.

Ways of maximising meaning and relevance.

- Before writing anything, make sure it **adds something** the reader won't already have seen – whether it's a new theme or a **necessary reinforcement** of an earlier message. If it's the latter, make sure you find a new angle on the material (e.g. a different way of stating the "why").
- Look for discreet ways to reflect **the language and style used by managers** and teams in their own interactions.
- Allow for the fact that teams have their own dynamic - **their own ways of communicating and working together**. Make sure each communication has its own strong voice so they're motivated to use it (see the **other four principles** for how to do this).

5. Help people feel “At their Best”

Really effective internal communications help people *feel* “at their best”. And when we feel at our best, we generally *are*. While we’re all different, if you strike a couple of the chords below in your writing, you can be sure it will resonate more strongly.

Writing cues to help teams feel “at their best”.

- **Make them feel recognised.** There’s no more powerful way to engage people than by recognising commitment and success.
- **Make them feel heard.** Rooting your content in the wants and needs expressed by colleagues helps to maximise its relevance, and their sense of agency.
- **Make them feel supported.** Every we write should be geared towards helping teams do their best for customers – from the initiatives we describe to the words we choose and the way we structure our messaging.
- **Make them feel empowered.** Build trust by emphasising areas where colleagues have licence to make their own decisions, for themselves, their teams and their customers.
- **Make them feel valued.** Demonstrate that the bank, their team and our customers need them, for the unique qualities they bring to the table.
- **Make them feel like an individual.** Remind them they don’t have to conform to fit in. That they *can* and *should* bring their whole selves to work. That they’re at their best when they do so.
- **Make them feel part of something.** This brings us right back to that all-important feeling of Oneness – the universal theme that underlies all of our communications. We are all Aegon. We’re there for each other, bonded by respect. We’re part of one team.

See the five principles in action

To see how these principles can be applied in actual communications, take a look at our worked examples:



Manager's Briefing email



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Intranet page



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