



# White's Boots Internal Communication Plan

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## Overview

Planning for organizational growth can shake the foundation of even the steadiest and sturdiest of companies, causing a distillation of core values to rise to the top. This elevated transparency, according to Wilson's *Strategic Communications*, can invite both trust-building opportunities and trust-breaching conflict, where communicated values and enacted behaviors publicly question a company's ethical competency (Wilson, Ogden, Wilson, 2023). *Strategic Communications* also states that "Trust is earned when words and actions are in harmony", providing a clear starting point to assess, analyze, and address issues at hand, while working to design more effective systems for proactively perceiving issues *before* they develop into threats (p. 266).

The initial goal of expansion into the European footwear market now presents White's Boots with the opportunity to engage in the corporate responsibility of "getting the house in order" (Caywood, 2012). This act of diligent preparation for future growth, along with sustainable business practices, will leave customers, stakeholders, and employees satisfied. The degree to which a company advances towards goals, at a healthy relational pace, is reliant upon adopting an "inside out approach to growth", which the CPA firm Carr, Riggs, and Ingram, claim cultivates a healthier internal company culture, which can inspire employees, retain customers, and lay a strong foundation for organizational advancement (Riggs, 2018).


The potential threat of a worker's strike represents the rise in the volume of a once-quiet conflict, and according to Boston University's conflict resolution center, at the



root of all conflict lies unmet needs (Boston, 2023). The university also claims it is not agreement that is the goal of conflict resolution, but it is the *process* of understanding and valuing a perspective, that matters most to involved parties. With an interest in strengthening current relationships, and magnetizing future employees, conflict becomes an opportunity for a better understanding of the changing needs of a people group, and begins the communications that help a company advance through, and beyond, crisis.

A successful internal communication infrastructure, capable of supporting both internal and external stakeholders, is a reflection of a brand's value system. Getting clear on what those values are, and how they are acted out within current and future operations, is paramount. Moral behaviors, enacted within specific situations, also serve to expose a company's motives, bringing accountability to the public, and establishing opportunities for self-regulation in the ongoing task of maintaining credibility (Wilson, et al., p.259). How this potential threat of strike is handled will serve to help, or harm, the brand's reputation - a potential deciding factor of White's Boots' future credibility and trustworthiness.

Edelman, a global communication firm that partners with organizations to evolve, promote, and protect brands and reputations, claims a company's ideology is an extension of identity (Edelman, 2023). Unfairness in society, torn social fabric, and low trust in government, point to the continuous presence of corruption, lack of diversity, and inequality. Edelman's "trust barometer" presents White's with the opportunity, and




responsibility, to lead in expressions of ethical competency, balancing the issues at hand while working to create an optimal workplace.

Through the design of a strategic internal communications infrastructure, White's can provide transparency in livable wages, opportunities for advancement, and employee ownership in solving societal problems. Edelman charges leadership to stand at the helm of societal issues such as sustainability, wages and skills, diversity, equity, and inclusion while engaging in conflict resolution to bridge trust gaps between the company, employees, and the public.

This current threat of an employee strike at White's Boots reveals a trust breach. Black Enterprise, in the article, *Keeping Employees Happy*, declares that trust-building mandates are essential for conveying to internal and external stakeholders that a company is capable of driving economic prosperity by providing quality jobs, fair wages, and continuous skills training (Alleyne, 2011). Huffmaster, a strike services organization, also agrees that wages and skills development are the leading factors of employee dissatisfaction impacting organizations, leading to costs of delayed shipments, missed deadlines, canceled orders, supply-chain disruption, and significant loss in sales and revenue (Huffmaster.com).

In *Depictions of Strikes on Social Media* (2023), Mangels explains how social media is an easy and successful tool for spreading messages and organization efforts of striking workers. The low risk of bureaucratic filters, middle manager interpretations, and inauthentic representations of the context of the strike provides a safe platform for



people to be seen, and heard, unapologetically, and without fear of retaliation. Mangels also claims that how the public views a profession influences whether support is garnered for the workers. With a loyal base of hard-working, blue-collar, workboot-wearing consumers, White's may be faced with a poor public perception if employee needs are not met.

Politically, presidential and local government officials may stand in public support of the workers involved in strikes, even more so during election season, where choosing sides is a risk of potential or peril for a political candidate (Funk, 2023). What could hurt the economy will be considered a hurt to a vote or bid for election in the political landscape. Impartial to White's Boots, a lack of available workers is currently affecting many sectors of the economy, like that of the United Auto Workers, Hollywood writers and actors, Amazon employees, and places like CVS, where pharmacists in Kansas City simply did not show up for work one day and plan to continue the refrain until the company promises to fill open positions and increase staffing levels (Funk, 2023).

Adding more workers to balance the workload appears to be a consistent and resounding trumpet across America, with wage issues and working conditions at the heart of the strikes. With a strong labor market and low unemployment rate, Harry Katz, professor of collective bargaining at Cornell School of Industrial and Labor Relations, says bargaining power has shifted to the laborers (Zahn, 2023).

## Situation Analysis

Gallup, a global analytics and consulting firm, defines employee engagement as “the involvement and enthusiasm of employees in their work and workplace” (Gallup, 2023). Engaged employees are desirable by employers because of their increased levels of productivity, but without a return on investment through pay, reasonable workload, or advancement opportunities, the relationship is bound for conflict. Reaching the threat of a strike indicates a breakdown in employee relations within the organization, when an increase in workload has produced an increase in provisions, and where failed internal communications have resulted in unmet needs.

As the trade of bootmaking takes years to master, workers at White’s Boots are essential to the brand’s production of “hand-sewn”, “hand-stitched” and “hand-welted” products (Whitesboots.com). The threats of work stoppage, missed deadlines, canceled orders, and loss in sales and revenue, could pose a peril to the reputation of the brand’s current demand as well as its larger goal of European expansion. Without authentic management support for adopting and adapting effective communication systems, the current opportunities and future constraints may never be fully actualized or enacted upon; leadership must spearhead behavior and champion congruent actions (Dougall, 2008).

## Core Problem and Opportunity

Without a communications infrastructure embedded into corporate strategy, White's Boots may fall short of its organizational potential to expand operations and sustain future growth.


## Goal

To design and implement an internal communication infrastructure for increasing employee engagement and employer accountability.

## Objectives

### I. Quarterly Engagement

Establish quarterly engagement interviews for each employee. Adopting the *four flows theory* (McPhee, 2015) provides White's Boots with quarterly or developmental junctures for administering internal communications with an opportunity for leadership to engage in relational dialogue along an internal workflow continuum. From onboarding, and skills certification, to department coordination and advancement opportunities, the *four flows theory* provides a template for regularly scheduled communications that inform organizational health. Edelman's Trust Barometer would then help to guide the analysis to see where White's Boots has aligned, or misaligned, their stated values with actions and behaviors.



With a clear values system, and the process of administering the *four flows theory*, measuring trust becomes less ambiguous. This transparency, and commitment to the value of ongoing internal communications, provide a clear and viable template for bolstering current operations, making changes, healing any trust breaches, and moving ahead with stronger, more unified, employee relationships.

## II. Meeting Templates

Design a template for meetings that invites discussion of personal and professional goals, challenges and opportunities, grievances, and opportunities for advancement. Gallup (Gallup.com) recommends a 12-point motivational questionnaire for meeting employee needs, where the four elements of human design (social, emotional, intellectual, and physical) are considered and measured for employee retention and satisfaction (VanderWeele, 2017).

Questions range from, “How satisfied are you with your company as a place to work?”, and “Do I have the tools and equipment to do my job right?”, to inquiries into the health and well-being of the human resource, such as: “When was the last time I was recognized for good work?”, and “When is the next opportunity to learn and grow with the company?” Employee satisfaction, expressed through social media channels, works to inspire the expansion of brand awareness to consumers who choose to purchase based on quality leadership and integrity-driven companies (Lewis, 2000).



### III. Career Fairs

Schedule recurring career fairs for future employees to learn about employment in the skilled trade of custom-bootmaking. VanderWeele's *Promotion of Human Flourishing* (2017) states that employees who can see a future for themselves, and others, within the infrastructure of a company are more motivated to produce good work and remain loyal to the organization.

The transparency of a skills-based approach to hiring and developing talent helps companies avoid unsatisfied and unmotivated employees while inviting innovation (Roslansky, 2021). These fairs provide current employees with leadership development opportunities, where skilled craftsmen are invited to participate in designing and operating apprenticeship training models. Career fairs also serve as invitations to industry partners for collaborative sustainability within the trades workforce.

### IX. Registered Apprenticeships

Design, register, and implement apprenticeship certifications for custom-bootmaking trades. Working with accreditation associations to standardize a White's Boots apprenticeship can bridge relationships with the US Department of Labor and WA state legislation while offering company tax breaks, flexible

training options, a minimization of liability costs, and employee tuition benefits (Apprenticeship.gov).


## Possible Solution

Slogan: *Our boots aren't the only thing we design to meet harsh demands.*

Employment at White's Boots holds to the same standards as our products: quality, craftsmanship, and innovative engagement for "increasingly rare" and "enduringly valuable" team members. Standardized quality control measures applied to each stage of the boot-making process host parallel junctures for measuring, evaluating, and actively addressing employee engagement and well-being. From onboarding, skills certification, collaboration, and advancement opportunities, White's Boots continually produces a product and a workplace culture that is "built to withstand mother nature and designed to accompany father time."

## Conclusion

White's Boots website (whitesboots.com) states, "The White's Legacy is more than a boot: it is the heavy tread of the determined men we have served and will continue to serve wherever we find them." Turning statements about the boots to describe the employment culture of the company serves to provide the same "strong foundation" and "sure footing" for team members who make the product possible. The competencies listed for employment at White's, such as "reliable, dependable, team



player, listening and communication skills”, must also be demonstrated by operations and practices of organizational leadership.

Dougall’s Issue Management (2008) states, “Sustainability of competitive advantage depends as much on an organization’s abilities to effectively negotiate non-market forces—issue and stakeholders—as on the effective satisfaction of economically motivated constituents in the marketplace.” If White’s website claims its product “passes through skilled hands at every stage of the construction process”, it must also be said about the people whose skilled hands are part of the process. When these two standards align in expressed value and strategic infrastructure, success is sure to follow.

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