

TIPS FOR 

**BREAKING** DOWN  
**COMMUNICATION**

SILOS IN THE  
**FIRE SERVICE**



PowerDMS®

# Tips for Breaking Down Communication Silos in the Fire Service

Communication between the different roles within a fire department is a constant challenge, especially with personnel scattered between stations in shifts. Unfortunately, communication silos can lead to issues with performance and even safety. To help you break down communication barriers in your agency, we interviewed three experts and compiled their insights into a helpful checklist of action steps.



## Hold staff accountable to communication

Accountability is the first step to promoting a culture of communication in your organization. Your team can only succeed when they are made aware of expectations, upcoming events, and current SOPs. It's your responsibility to make it happen. One expert suggested three ways to increase accountability in your agency:

1. **Validate your employees' knowledge with a test**
2. **Require sign-offs on shift logs and critical memos.**
3. **Host monthly or weekly face-to-face meetings.**



## Gather feedback before a new initiative

*"It's important to get buy-in from employees early. Don't blindside your staff."*

Brian Sipe, Fire Chief

**SPRING LAKE TOWNSHIP (MI) FIRE DEPARTMENT**

Want to make sure everyone is on board with your communication tactics? Before revising or publishing a new standard of practice, gather feedback and gauge how it will affect people. Think of this as “sprinkling the idea” to your staff and observing their response. This can give you early buy-in from your team as a whole.

Whether you have one-on-one conversations with your employees or take a broader approach through employee surveys, make sure everyone is on the same page before taking strides forward.



## Choose one or two communication mediums and stick to them

Too many communication platforms can cause confusion. It’s important to pick one or two and stick with them. When evaluating what would work best for your team members, don’t be afraid to try new things. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- **Simple emails.**
- **A weekly or monthly newsletter.**
- **Bulletin boards around the office.**
- **Face-to-face engagement.**
- **Automatic alerts from a software tool like PowerDMS.**



## Over communicate

*“Over communicate whenever you can. Employees can always delete an email that doesn’t pertain to them, but having redundancies is always smart.”*

Chris Quinn, Assistant Fire Chief

**CAPE CANAVERAL (FL) VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT**

When it comes to ensuring safety in the firehouse and in the field, make sure your team can never say “I didn’t see that.” It can never hurt to be redundant. Don’t just send alerts to the shift leaders who may not be around to take the message.



## Err on the side of transparency

*"A lot of things are already publicly accessible in the fire service, so you may as well be as forthcoming as possible, both with your agency and your community."*

Chris Quinn, Assistant Fire Chief

**CAPE CANAVERAL (FL) VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT**

If you want to improve internal communication, prove you can be trusted. Brian Sipe recommends being as transparent as possible, empowering your team and resisting the urge to hold back relevant information like a gatekeeper. While you want to be as open and honest as you can, Chris suggested to keep other, more sensitive issues—like compensation—private.



## Create opportunities for frequent face-to-face interaction

*"There are several creative solutions for making sure all the members of a fire department are on the same page, but nothing beats face-to-face interaction."*

Rebecca Desch, Accreditation Manager

**BRADENTON (FL) FIRE DEPARTMENT**

Even as technology advances, face-to-face interaction is still an irreplaceable part of keeping internal communication alive. Rebecca says signing off on SOGs, SOPs, and other organizational documents gives staff a sense of ownership and empowers them to think critically about things they may have passed over before. This is especially true when using PowerDMS, where custom tests can be administered to ensure understanding prior to signing.

If you want to increase in-person interaction, go beyond the office bulletin board and think about:

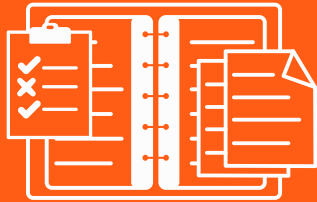
- **An open-door policy.**
- **Weekly or monthly in-person interaction with your team members.**
- **Group social events or team-building activities.**
- **Business meetings with all levels of your organization.**

According to Rebecca, "PowerDMS serves as a catalyst for face-to-face interaction because, after employees sign off on a document, they are inclined to ask questions about the content. This creates a powerful sense of ownership and responsibility in what they've signed."

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