

\* TRIBE

Insight Paper:

# ENGAGING THE FRONT LINE

Communications for employees  
without computers



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## Section 1

# INTRODUCTION

Tribe's perspective



## TRIBE'S PERSPECTIVE

We have the benefit of an outsider's view, because we've seen behind the curtain in so many organizations. We've worked with the employee audience for over 20 years, starting in 2002 with Porsche and UPS.

Since 2009, we've focused our practice exclusively on the employee audience. Over the years, we've worked with some of the world's largest companies and most well-known brands, from Amazon to Cargill and Levi's to Coke.

Early on, we realized that several of our clients were struggling with how to reach employees who weren't sitting in front of computers. We launched our first research project with frontline employees in 2012 and have made the non-desk audience a focus of our practice ever since.

Whatever your internal communications challenge, we've probably seen it before. What's different about every engagement Tribe takes on, and what makes the work so interesting to us, is the culture of each client. For frontline communications, we've partnered with clients in manufacturing, retail, healthcare, hospitality, restaurants, transportation, agriculture, construction and more.

This insight paper shares some of the learning we've gained over our many years of experience. We hope it offers you an idea or two, or maybe a new way of approaching your frontline communications.

**We've worked with some of the world's largest companies and most well-known brands, from Amazon to Cargill and Levi's to Coke.**

## Section 2

# ENGAGING THE PERSON AT THE REGISTER

An employer brand for convenience stores



# ● BACKGROUND

Wawa is a large chain of convenience stores and gas stations. Their history goes back over 200 years to when the company was founded as an iron foundry that eventually became a dairy business. Today there are over 1,100 locations from New Jersey to Florida. It remains a privately held company and a family business.

Convenience store brands typically face high turnover — over 100% each year. Waw's retention is better than most, they'd like it to be even better.

## THE CHALLENGE:

### Retain hourly employees for long-term careers

High turnover is typical in the industry, but Wawa offers much more than a typical convenience store job. Our challenge was to use the strong culture and long-term wealth-building opportunities to keep employees engaged in their roles, to feel supported and celebrated by the company, and invested in creating an excellent customer experience.

Convenience store brands typically face high turnover — over 100% each year.

# ● DISCOVERY

## Stakeholder interviews and employee focus groups

Tribe held 13 stakeholder interviews with executive leadership and multiple focus groups with general managers, area managers, store associates and more. We also visited a few stores to gain familiarity with that environment.

### **The Wawa culture puts stores at the center of everything**

In discussions with corporate leadership and employees in the stores, it was clear that the culture is centered on supporting the people in the stores. Corporate people are there for the stores. Store managers are there for their teams. There is wide acknowledgment that the customer experience is determined by the person standing in front of the cash register.

Both corporate and store groups mentioned the many ways Wawa supports the professional growth of their people, and the financial advantages of the ESOP program that provides the means for employees to own stock in the company. Due to the ESOP, employees own 41% of this \$10 billion company.

An interesting phenomenon in the stores is that the local Wawa is considered central to its community and a crossroads where neighbors run into each other. The store employees are important to the daily lives of their regular customers, know many by name, and take to heart the goal of delivering a great customer experience.

**Particularly for the frontline audience, Tribe finds it helpful to visit the places where employees work. By spending time in the Wawa stores, we could find communications opportunities we otherwise might have missed.**

## Employee quotes

*“Listen, we have people who’ve made coffee in our stores 25 hours a week for 25 years, and they’re going to retire a millionaire (because of the ESOP). Don’t discount making coffee in the stores.”*

*“I think a big part of it is being there for associates. Just being available for them when they need us.”*

*“There are career opportunities in the stores. I was gonna go towards being a state trooper and my GMs absolutely saved me by introducing the idea of this being a career.”*

*“My people know I’ll do what I need to do for them — because I know they work hard.”*

*“Servant leadership is really a foundation that we’re built upon.”*

*“I think about the fact that I do own a small portion of this organization. It would behoove me to do whatever I can to make sure that we continue to be successful.”*

## Audience matrix

Of Wawa’s 33,000 employees, 30,800 were store associates with no email address. That meant that almost all internal communications — except for the cascade and breakroom signage — were directed at just 7% of their workforce.

## THE GAP:

There’s a gap between the cultural bias for putting store employees first and the level of communication and validation that store employees receive. Although corporate is focused on supporting the store employees, there’s almost no communication directly from corporate to the front line.

**Due to the ESOP,  
employees own 41%  
of this \$10 billion  
company.**



# STRATEGY

## Wawa's success is built one customer interaction at a time

Build a connection between owning the customer experience and ownership in company stock.

### Tactics:

- Develop an employer brand
- Build a new channel to reach store employees
- Provide a steady stream of communications



### STEAL THIS INSIGHT:

It's not unusual for us to discover that a company's internal communications are primarily limited to the corporate audience. If you have limited frontline channels beyond the manager cascade, you could be missing the opportunity to engage a huge portion of your workforce.

# EMPLOYER BRAND

The rallying cry for associates throughout the organization

No matter your job role, we want you take ownership of our success — whether that’s face-to-face with customers or supporting those in the store. (The yellow rectangles on the upper right symbolize the brick-and-mortar stores, but also geese in flight. The name Wawa comes from the Ojibwe word for wild goose, so geese are a cultural touchstone for the brand.)



**This emphasizes stock ownership with the ESOP, but it also means owning responsibility or accountability. It means that we take ownership of the customer experience. It means we own the success of our stores and our company. It means we take care of each other in times of crisis, informally and with AIN. It’s about us owning success collectively.**



## **STEAL THIS INSIGHT:**

An employer brand should energize and inspire. Steer away from corporate-speak in favor of language that’s emotional and conversation.

# EMPLOYER BRAND GUIDELINES

Graphic guidelines for internal communications

We introduced a secondary palette to supplement the red and yellow, and a new font that is compatible with their brand font of Avenir. Usage of the graphic motif of bricks/geese is also included in these guidelines.



Mosk 400 - Normal  
 a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z  
 A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z  
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Mosk 600 - Semi-Bold  
 a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z  
 A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z  
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

Mosk 900 - Ultra Bold  
**a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z**  
**A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z**  
**0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9**

Body Copy - Avenir Next Condensed Regular  
 a b c d e f g h i j k l m n o p q r s t u v w x y z  
 A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z  
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9



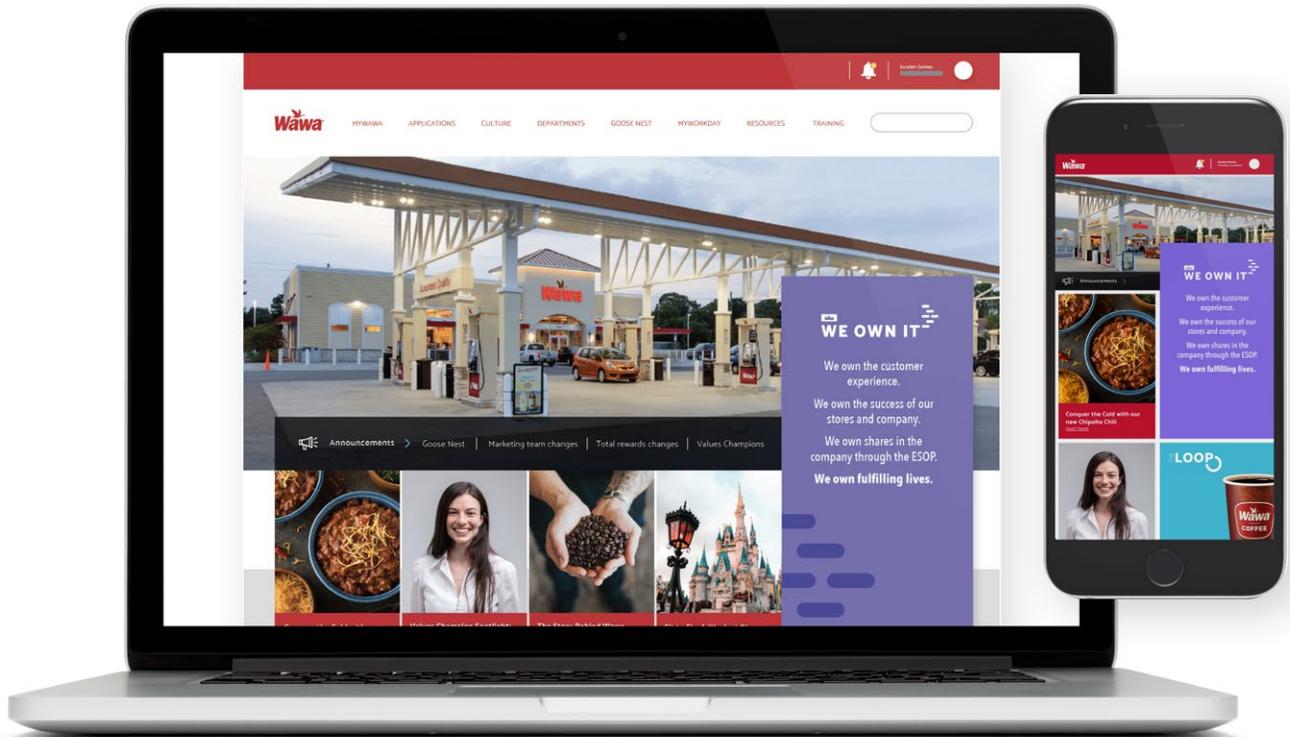
## STEAL THIS INSIGHT:

Staying on brand is just as important for the employer brand as the consumer brand. Consistency with graphic elements, from fonts and colors to photography style and tone of voice, signals professionalism and quality, which we feel are subliminal clues of a company being a best place to work.

# INTRANET

Redesigned intranet with emphasis on employer brand

We suggested revising the website to keep the employer brand top of mind, and also providing a steady stream of relevant content. The new in-store monitors (described in coming pages), provide access to frontline employees.



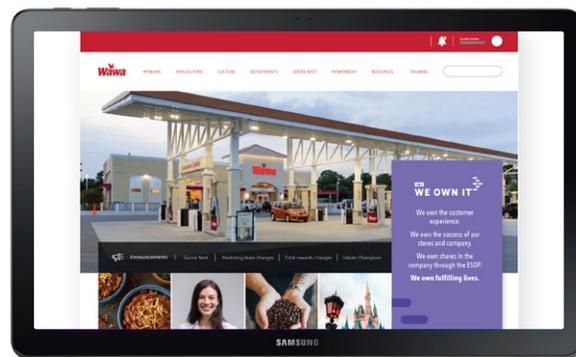
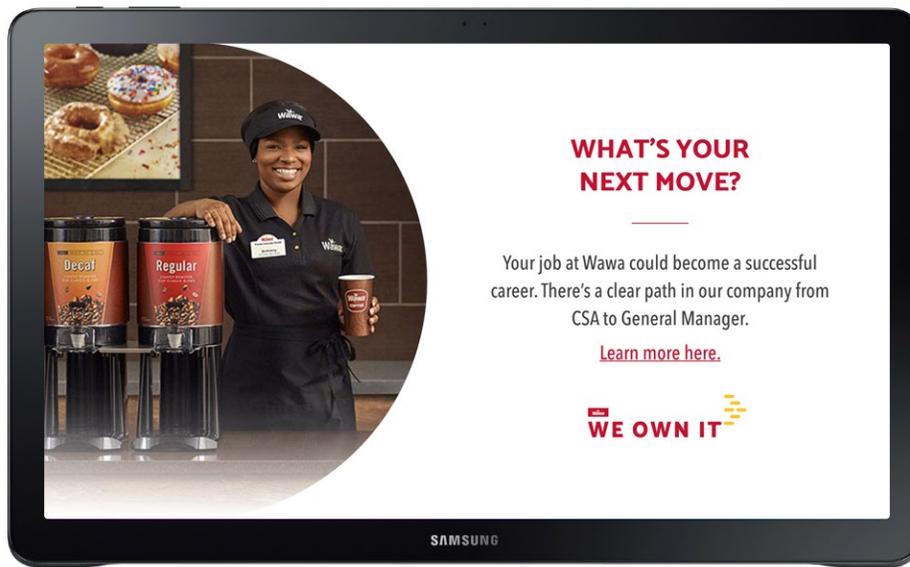
## STEAL THIS INSIGHT:

Your intranet isn't competing with other company's intranets. It's competing with all the other sites your employees use every day, when they're shopping for clothes or selecting their music. If your site isn't appealing and easy to use, employees are less likely to go there.

# DIGITAL MONITORS

Touch screens in stores give employees all-access

These touchscreen monitors mounted on the wall in the employee-only area of the stores are perhaps the most important recommended channel in this plan. When passive, they show a rotating deck of digital signage, frequently updated and able to be customized by store or region. When employees engage with the touchscreens, they can also access the intranet, training modules and the weekly newsletter for stores.



## STEAL THIS INSIGHT:

When you're looking for ways to reach frontline employees, one of the smartest things you can do is to go to the places where they work. You need to walk in their shoes, literally, to see the worksites' physical realities.

## Section 3

# GETTING THE KITCHEN'S ATTENTION

Career development in a casual dining brand



# ● BACKGROUND

Chili's Bar & Grill is a casual dining chain owned by Brinker International. They own, operate or franchise over 1,500 restaurants in 28 countries. More than 1,200 of those locations are in the US.

The restaurant industry, like convenience store chains, suffers from poor retention, which of course impacts customer satisfaction.

To help boost retention and support employees in long-term employment and professional growth, Chili's offers a program called Career Stacks. This includes numerous training and development opportunities, from manager training to ESL support to college tuition. Awareness was low with frontline employees in the restaurants, although Chili's was particularly focused on building retention in that population.

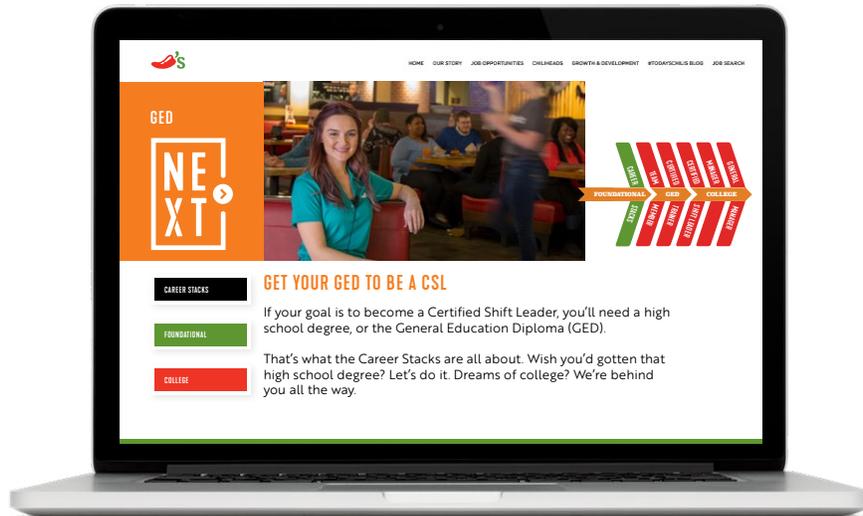
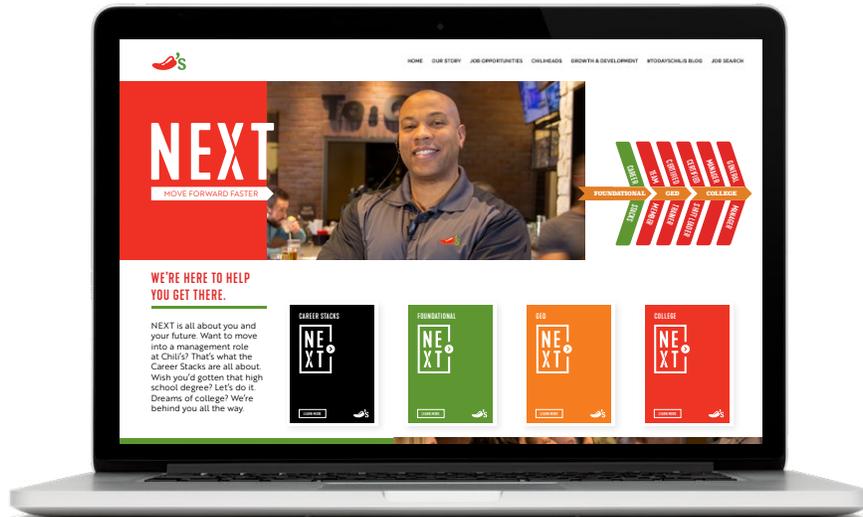
## THE CHALLENGE: Get their attention in a busy kitchen

These training and development opportunities were largely invisible to restaurant employees — even though they're the audience that can benefit the most from them. Our challenge was to find new ways to build awareness of these programs among people serving customers in restaurants or working in the kitchen.

# WEBSITE

Where we want them to go

This is a free-standing site that frontline employees can easily access on their smartphones or personal devices. It gives full details of the many different Career Stack options available. But we often say, If it's digital, it's invisible. The goal of all the other elements of the campaign is to get employees to visit this website.



## STEAL THIS INSIGHT:

If employees don't have access to the intranet, give them a site outside the firewall. There's no disadvantage to development programs like this being public. On the contrary, any exposure is valuable for raising awareness of this benefit.

# OVERSIZED MAGNETS

Unexpected touchpoints in kitchens

When we went to the restaurants, we saw that the kitchens are jam packed with equipment and supplies. There's not much empty wall space or opportunity for any standing pop-up banners or communications that would take up valuable workspace. But we did notice big expanses of metal — on walk-in coolers and sink backsplashes for instance. By printing on giant magnets, we could use this space as a sort of bulletin board to announce the program.



## STEAL THIS INSIGHT:

Look for ways to communicate that take no effort on the part of busy employees. Short messaging can fit in some surprising places — and refer employees to another source where they'll find more information.

# SOCIAL MEDIA ADS

Raising awareness outside the restaurant

Although this population doesn't have computers at work, they do spend a lot of time on smartphones. By placing ads on social media platforms, we can raise awareness of these beneficial benefits — not just for recruiting new employees but also for those already working at Chili's.



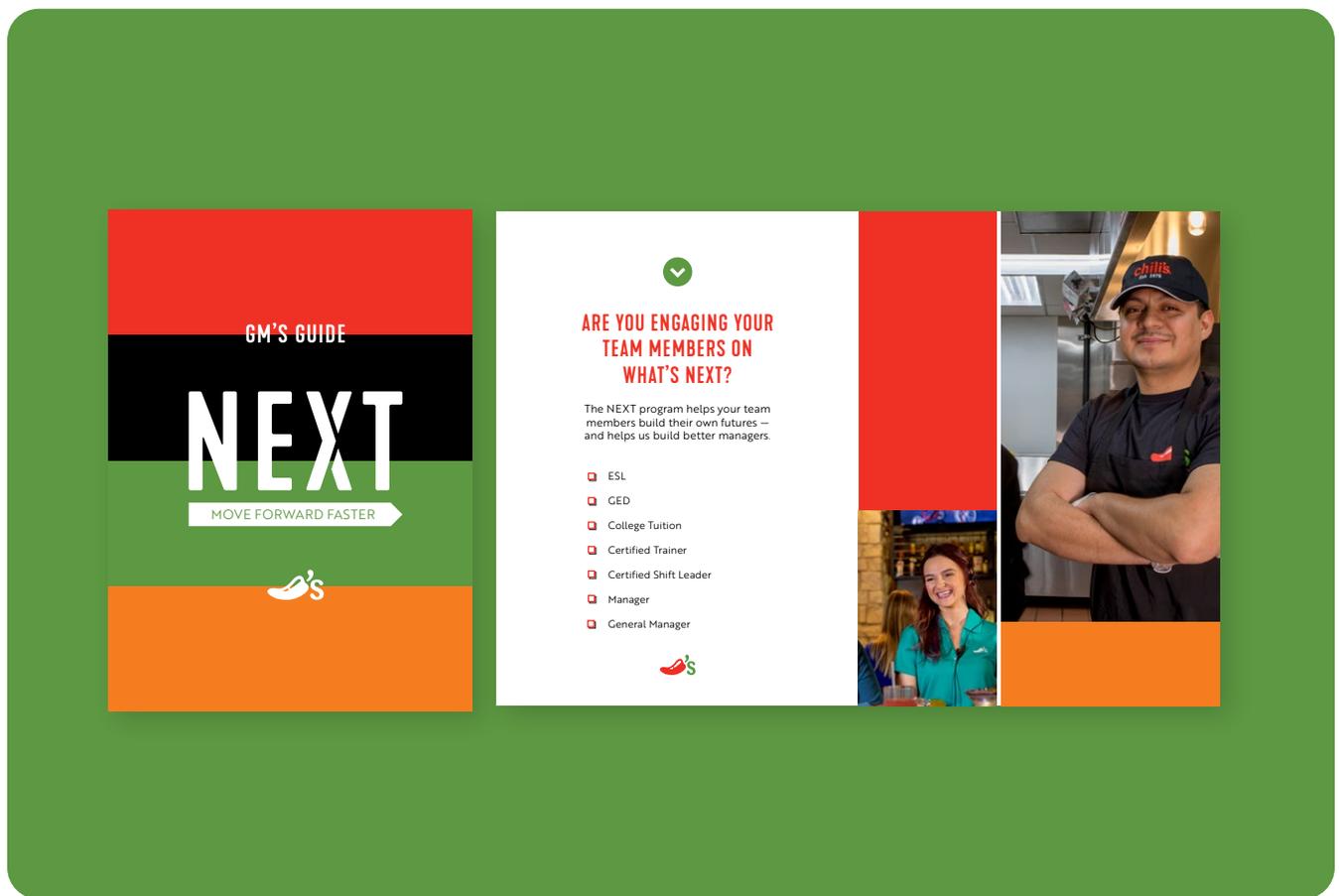
## STEAL THIS INSIGHT:

Use real photography of actual employees. Showing stock photos and implying they're real employees of your brand smacks of inauthenticity. If you have to use stock, choose a people shot that doesn't show faces — or a shot of an object or conceptual image.

# MANAGERS TOOLKIT

Helping them answer questions

Restaurant GMs were charged with engaging employees in the Career Stack program, so we made sure to equip them with the communication tools to make that easier for them. We also directed them — and employees — to the online page for Career Stacks.



## STEAL THIS INSIGHT:

Help managers feel smart. If employees are asking them questions and corporate hasn't provided managers with the appropriate information, they'll feel frustrated and ill-equipped. Give managers the answers they'll need ahead of time.

## Section 4

# A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT SAFETY

When standard signage is getting tuned out



# ● BACKGROUND

Holder is a construction management company with a portfolio of projects ranging from high-rise office complexes to sports stadiums. They're also the nation's leading builder of data centers.

Their culture is built on their people being their most valuable resource. Safety has always been a priority at Holder, but the clients asking them to build data centers wanted to see an innovative approach to keeping worksites safe.

This communications campaign was one part of a larger effort to raise the bar on safety.

## THE CHALLENGE:

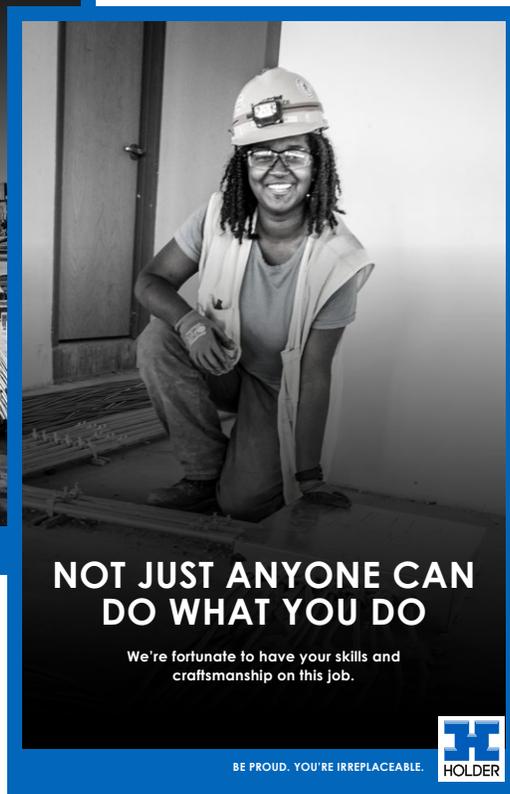
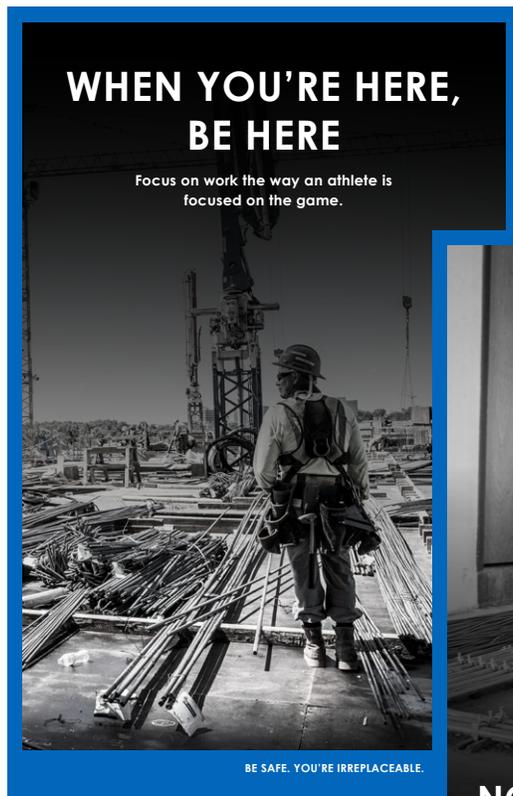
**They've seen it so much they no longer see it**

Construction professionals have seen the standard OSHA safety signage for so long that it might blend into the background. Our challenge was to get their attention in a new way, and to remind them to take safety personally.

# WORKSITE MURALS

Life-sized human reminders

One thing there's plenty of on a construction site is space. For the You're Irreplaceable campaign, we printed large murals to attach to fencing surrounding the site. Black-and-white photography of Holder employees or contractors on site present them as heroic figures that are irreplaceable.



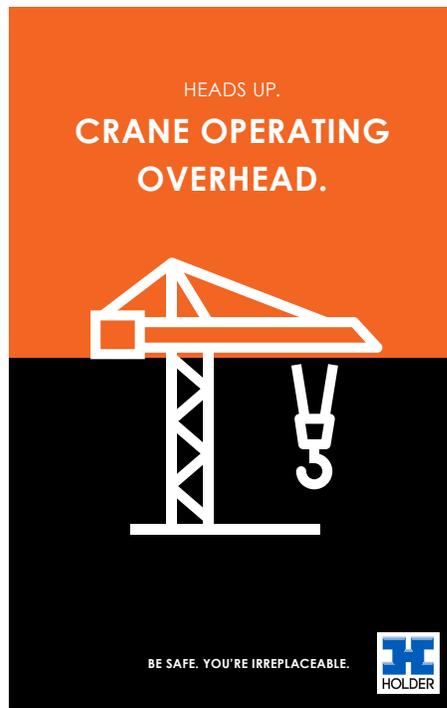
## STEAL THIS INSIGHT:

Look for ways to celebrate and make heroes of the people working on your front line. Employees like seeing photos of others in positions like their own, and particularly like seeing their contributions to the company's success acknowledged.

# SAFETY SIGNAGE

A conversational approach

These safety signs stand out on a worksite, thanks to their graphic appeal. They also speak human to human about safety issues, including many topics that might not be covered by the standard OSHA signage.



## STEAL THIS INSIGHT:

Employees might be accustomed to communications written in dry, impersonal or utilitarian language, but that doesn't mean you need to write that way. Instead of sounding like an official entity speaking to anonymous employees, try a tone of voice that sounds more like you're speaking person to person.

## Section 5

# 5 TAKEAWAYS

Parting thoughts from Tribe's experience

1

## It's difficult, but not impossible

Sure, it's harder to figure out how to reach those employees who aren't sitting in front of computers, but there are plenty of ways to make it happen. Figure it out.

2

## Go see where they work

There's no substitute for walking around the plants, distribution centers, hotels, stores, restaurants, hospitals or wherever your frontline audience is working. You need to understand the physical realities of their workplace to find unexpected touchpoint.

3

## Show them in action

Look for opportunities to shoot photos or video of frontline employees on the job. This doesn't have to be an expensive professional shoot, although that's a great investment. You might experiment with shooting remote video from a smartphone or laptop. You might even be able to use shots or video shot by employees on their phones.

4

## Make it easier for their managers

If you're counting on managers to follow through on communications you start, make sure you've equipped them with the tools and information they'll need to do that. Communications toolkits are helpful, and for larger initiatives or major changes, you might even want to do some communications training.

5

## Give them a direct channel from corporate

Frontline employees rely on their direct managers for information, but regularly occurring town halls, newsletters or podcasts from their executive leadership mean a great deal. These leadership communications can help employees understand how their individual roles support the success of the company — and let them know they're respected and valued.

## Section 6

# WHY TRIBE?

When considering support from an agency

**If you're considering agency support, either for an isolated project or over the long term, we hope you'll consider Tribe.**



We're a tiny global agency that's worked with some of the largest and most well-known brands in the world.



Our practice is entirely focused on internal communications. If it's a communications challenge related to the employee audience, we've probably seen it before.



Our size makes us agile and responsive, so we can respond quickly and work comfortably on tight deadlines.



We're familiar with employee audiences in an expansive range of industries including manufacturing, technology, healthcare, retail, hospitality, construction, finance and energy.

## Section 7

# REFERENCES

What our clients say

## We're happy to connect you with Tribe clients whose communications challenges or industries match yours, but in the meantime, here are a few comments from client partners.



"We've never had a better agency experience. Tribe has been a true pleasure to work with."

**Justin Downs**

Group Vice President, Operations, Wabtec Corporation



"Working with Tribe was like flipping a light switch for us — suddenly, our mission, vision and values weren't just words on a wall, they became something our teams could actually see themselves in. They have a knack for pulling the DNA out of a company and turning it into something meaningful and actionable. The process was thoughtful, collaborative and, honestly, a lot of fun. I'd work with them again in a heartbeat."

**Lauralee Heckman**

Director of Communications, The Lane Construction Corporation



"Tribe has been super easy to work with. They've been a great thought partner, and great at execution, which is clearly important as well. I feel Tribe is a part of Orveon. They know us better than any other organization that's not internal."

**Robert Rigby-Hall,**

Chief People Officer, Orveon



"Tribe's creativity in developing a comprehensive, yearlong, multimedia campaign was instrumental in bringing our vision to life. The collaboration was seamless, and your ability to customize our content and involve our employees made the messaging feel authentic and impactful. It was a pleasure working with such a smart, responsive and talented group of people."

**Jeremy Smith**

VP and Global Information Security Officer, Avery Dennison



"Tribe has been an integral part of building our culture. Their plethora of expertise and knowledge makes working with them so easy. Tribe really gets it and produces great ideas and results."

**Paula Lamoureux**

Global Internal Communications Manager, Ensono



"Tribe has been a trusted and valuable partner to us over the past several years on multiple tough-to-tackle projects. They have always taken the time to truly understand our corporate culture and our brand so that the solutions they provide are authentic to us."

**Chrissy Hughes**

Senior Brand Manager, Holder Construction



**Tribe, Inc.**

2100 Riveredge Pkwy  
Suite 720  
Atlanta, GA 30328  
404-256-5858  
tribeinc.com

**Elizabeth Cogswell Baskin**

CEO, Executive Creative Director  
elizabeth@tribeinc.com

**Steve Baskin**

President, Chief Strategy Officer  
steve@tribeinc.com