Fostering Positive Employee Relations, During Good Times and Crisis

Developed for FordHarrison's 2025 Airline Labor & Employment Law Symposium

March 2025

Jackson P. Hayes
Associate Partner
West Palm Beach

Jared Nelson
Associate Partner
Chicago

We help clients protect – and grow – what they have built

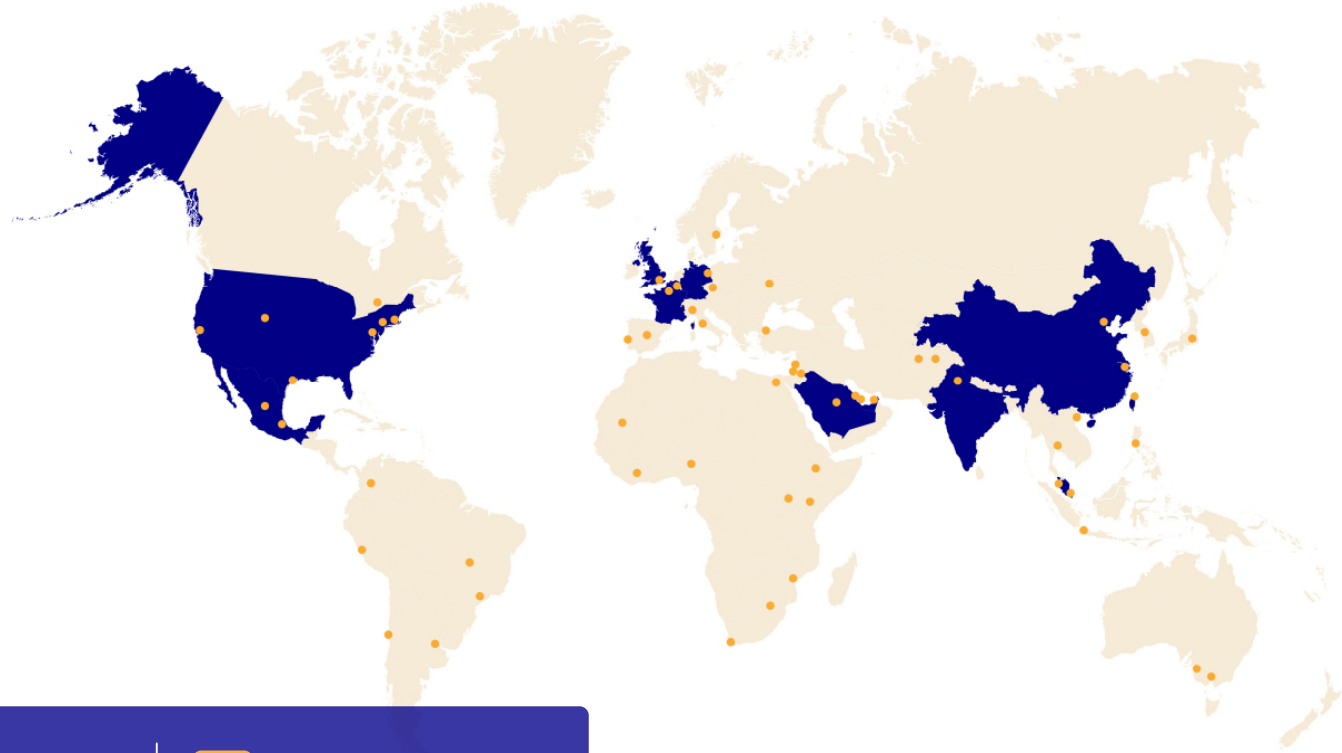
Our firm.

We specialize in helping clients navigate and shape policy, reputational and financial issues in complex environments around the world.

12
Offices

300+
Experts

45+
Countries with on-the-ground coverage



Navigate Public Policy
- Public Affairs and Government Relations
- Commercial Diplomacy

Deliver Insights and Intelligence
- Business Intelligence

Engage with Stakeholders
- Complex Communications Advisory

Prepare for High-stakes Moments
- Capital Markets Advisory

01

“Always-On” Employee Relations

Jackson Hayes

Always-On Employee Relations

1.
Building a listening program

2.
Creating coordination and collaboration

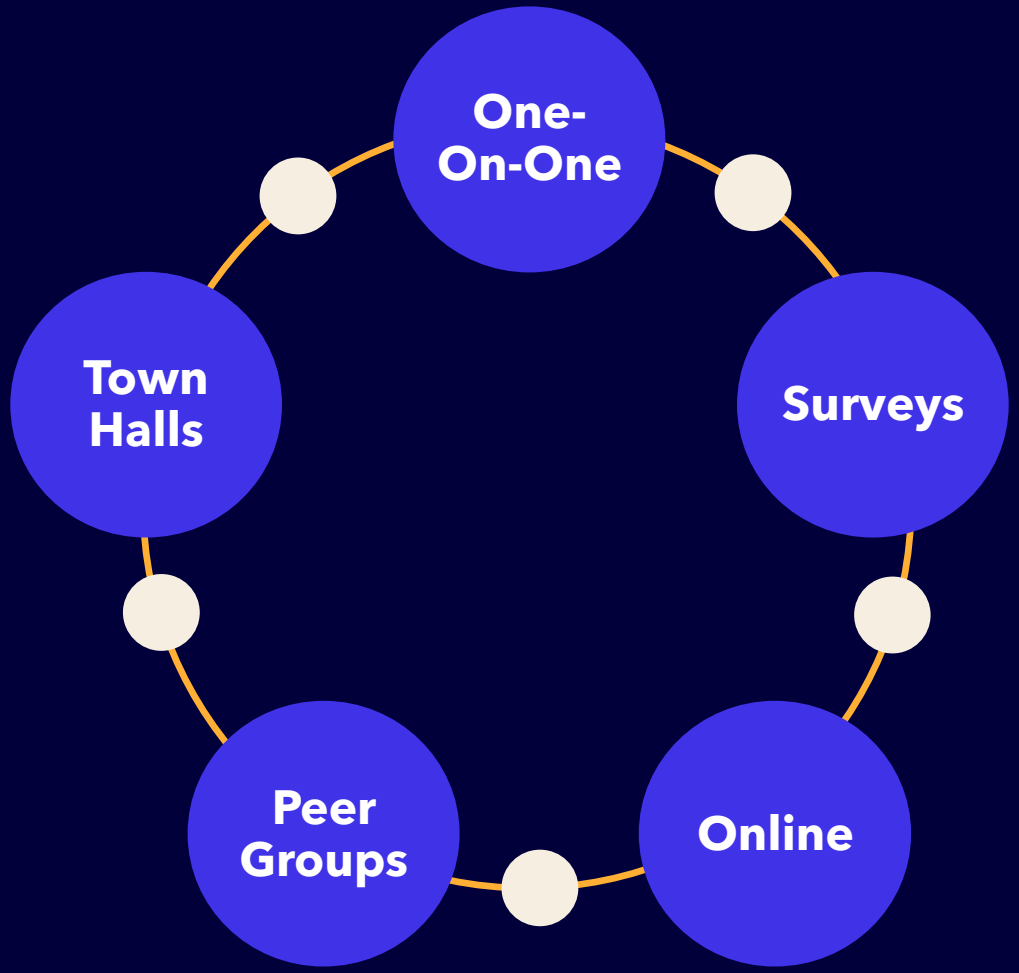
3.
Employee's information ecosystem

“

There are **known knowns** – the things we know we know.

We also know there are **known unknowns** – that is to say we know there are some things we do not know.

But there are also **unknown unknowns** – the ones we don't know we don't know.



Effective listening programs

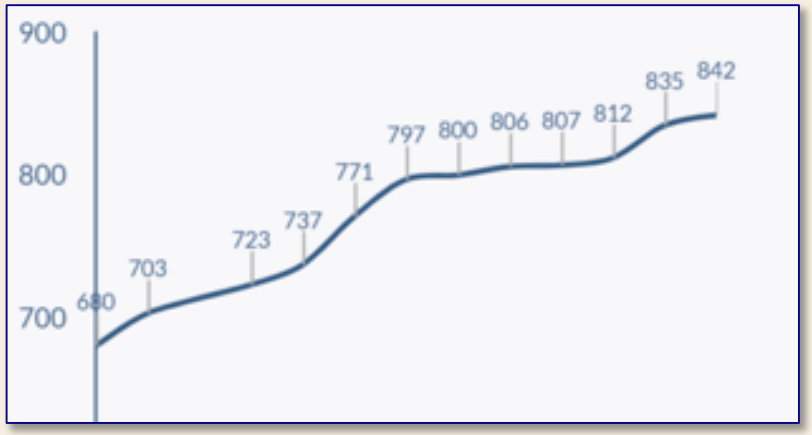
- Shine a light on blind spots
- Decipher noise from impact
- Provide data to drive planning
- Build trust and connectivity between leaders and frontline

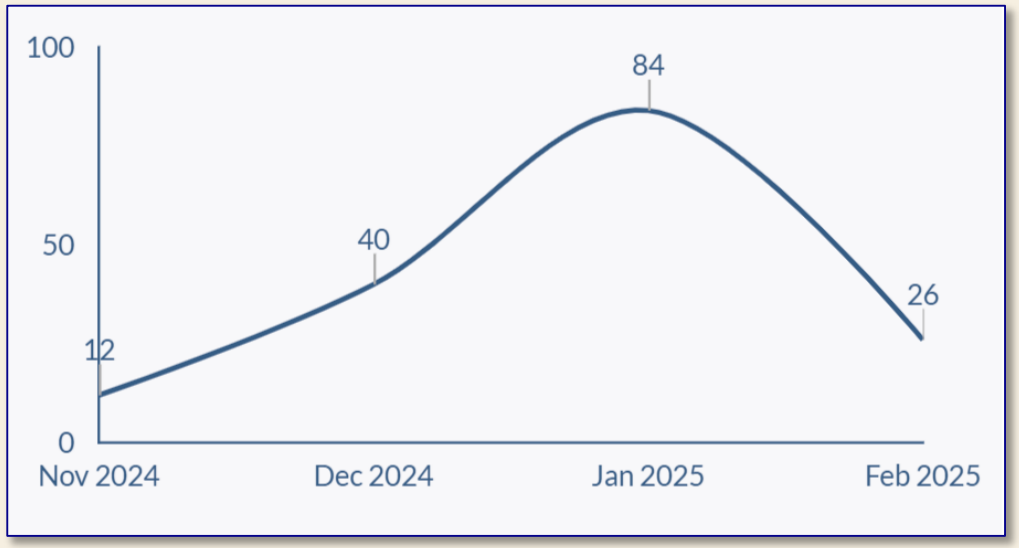
In-person touchpoints

- Frontline leaders
- Concourse walks
- Employee representatives
- Employee conferences
- Employee Resource Groups
- Leader Connection Groups

Publicly available online touch points

- Social following statistics
- Engagement statistics
- Trade and special interest podcasts
- Glassdoor
- Public Facebook groups
- Industry blogs and forums
- Traditional media

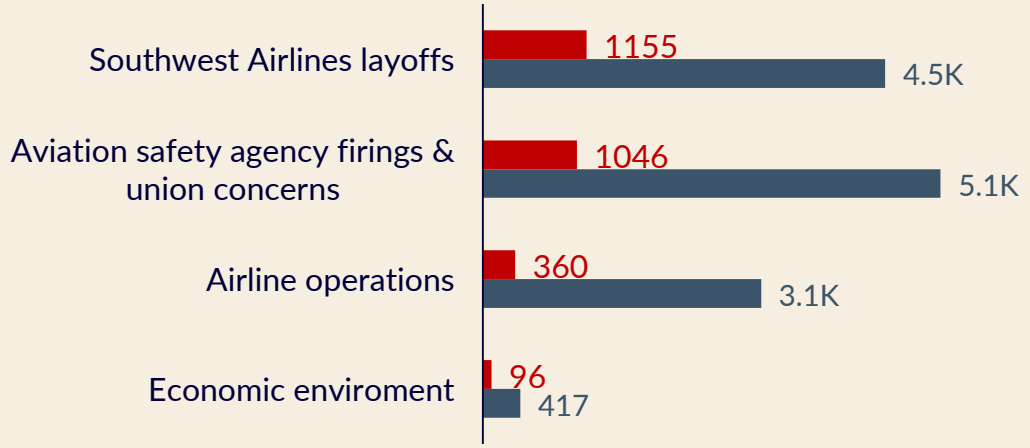


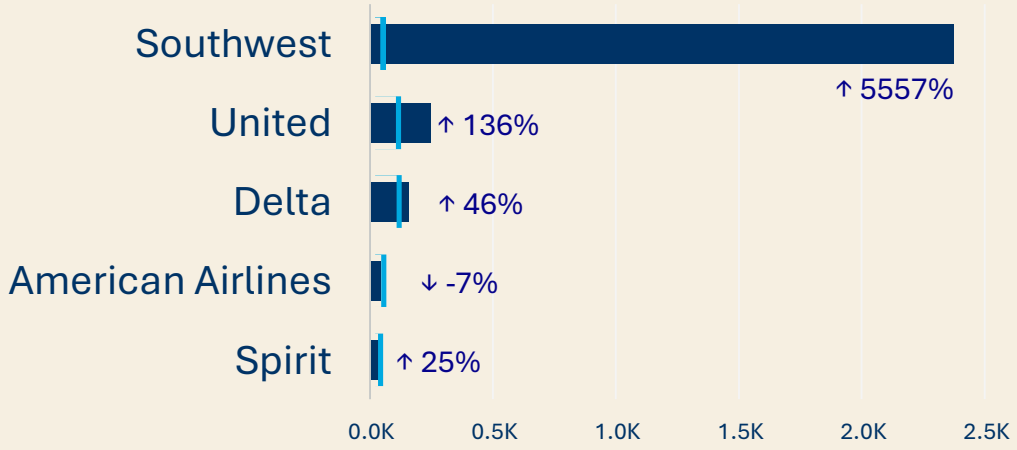


Posts	19 (↓22)
E total	26 (↓58)
E %	0.11% (↓66%)

DGA February 2025 Social Analysis

One-
On-
One
Surveys
Online
Advisory
Groups
Town
Halls


Southwest Airlines layoffs
1155
4.5K
Aviation safety agency firings & union concerns
1046
5.1K
Airline operations
360
3.1K
Economic enviroment
96
417
Mentions
Engagements


Southwest
↑ 5557%
United
↑ 136%
Delta
↑ 46%
American Airlines
↓ -7%
Spirit
↑ 25%
0.0K
0.5K
1.0K
1.5K
2.0K
2.5K

Data Points
Employee Relations War Room
Informed Decisions

Employee relations

"War Room"

	LEAD: Employee Comms Strategist				
Division	Ramp	Flight Ops	Flight Attendants	Customer Service	Etc
Legal	Labor	Litigation	External	State + Federal	Etc
Comms	Divisional	Corporate	Base	Ops	Etc
Function	Investor Relations	Media Relations	Government Affairs	Network Planning	Etc

Work-streams

Uniform

Events

Partner-ships

Service Planning

Etc.

What to keep in mind

Legal

- Easy-to-misunderstand lawsuits
- Lawsuits from unions or union organizers
- Lawsuits re: employee treatment
- Industry policy changes

Divisional

- EE demographics
- Staffing and scheduling
- Operational data
- Contract and negotiation milestones
- Engagement reports and data
- Leader calendars

Media and Gov't Affairs

- Hearing dates
- Potential and/or positive news
- Hill and State perspectives
- Touch points with staff, MOCs
- Inquiries on employment practices, labor disputes, etc.

IR and Finance

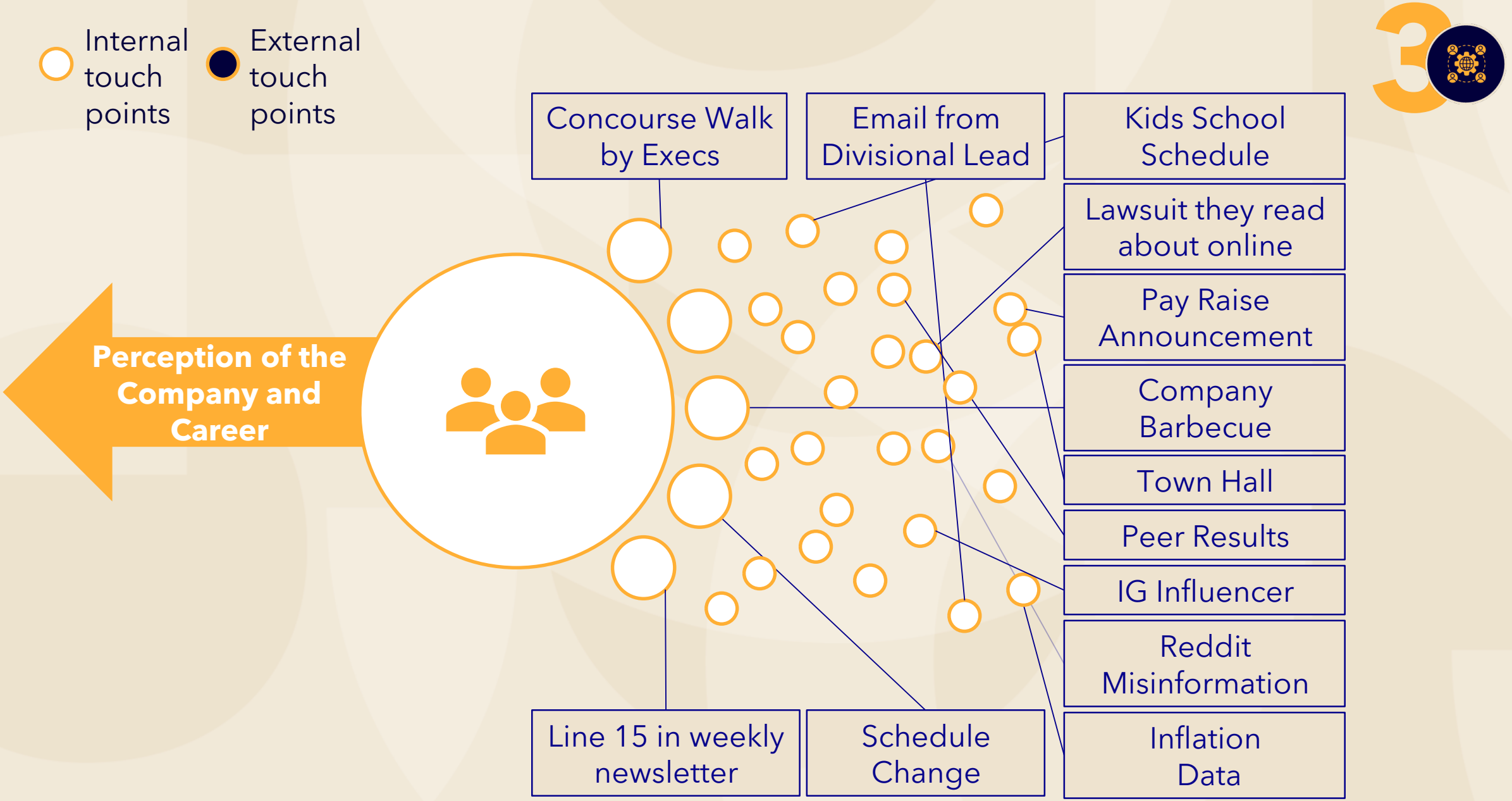
- Earnings + investor material previews
- Key messaging and hot topic Q&A
- Preview public investments and partnerships (e.g., international expansions)

Comms

- Connect dots for other functions
- Major event timelines
- Comm channel options
- Editorial calendars and potential touchpoints
- "Say-ability"

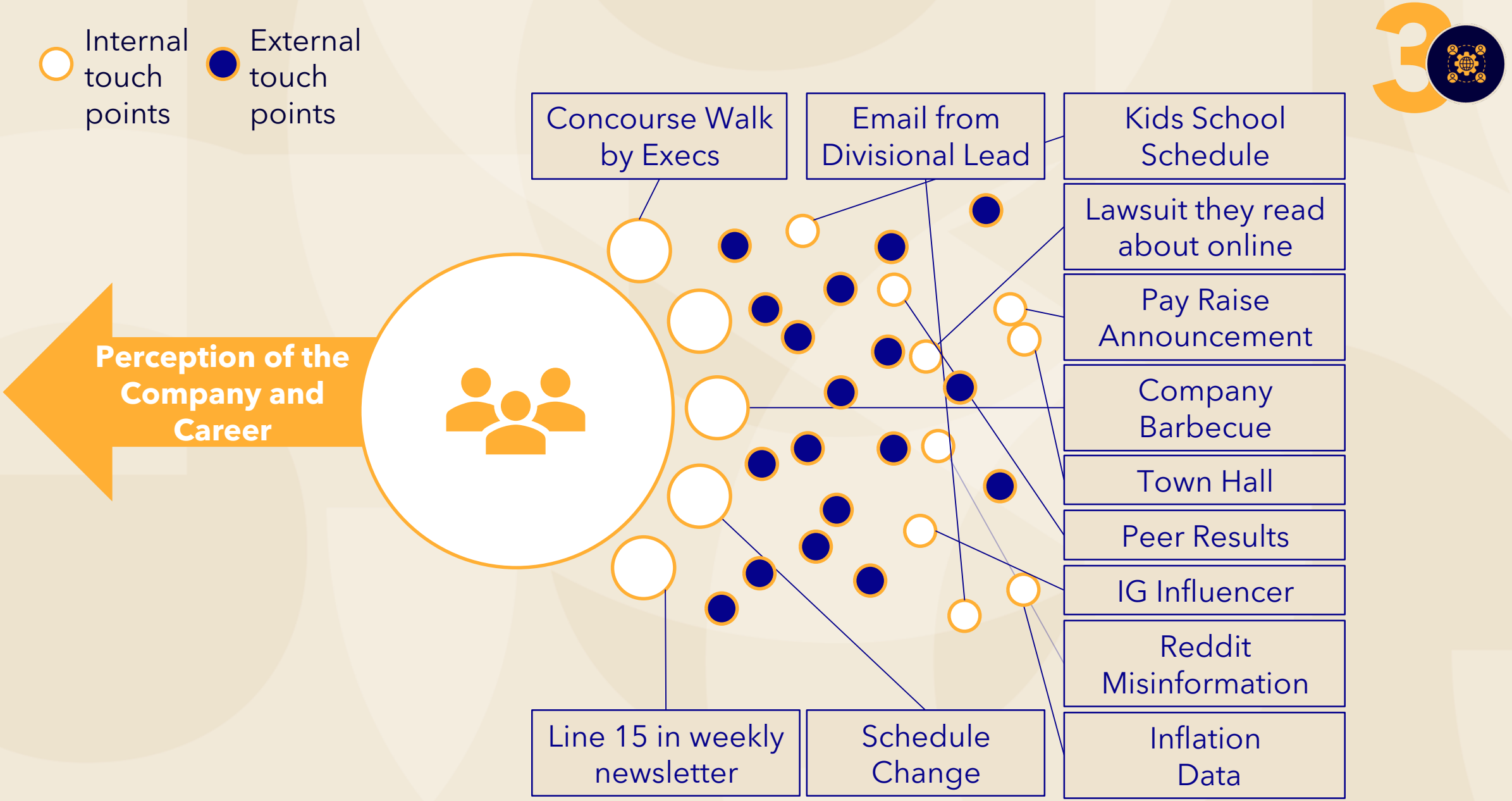
Internal touch points

External touch points

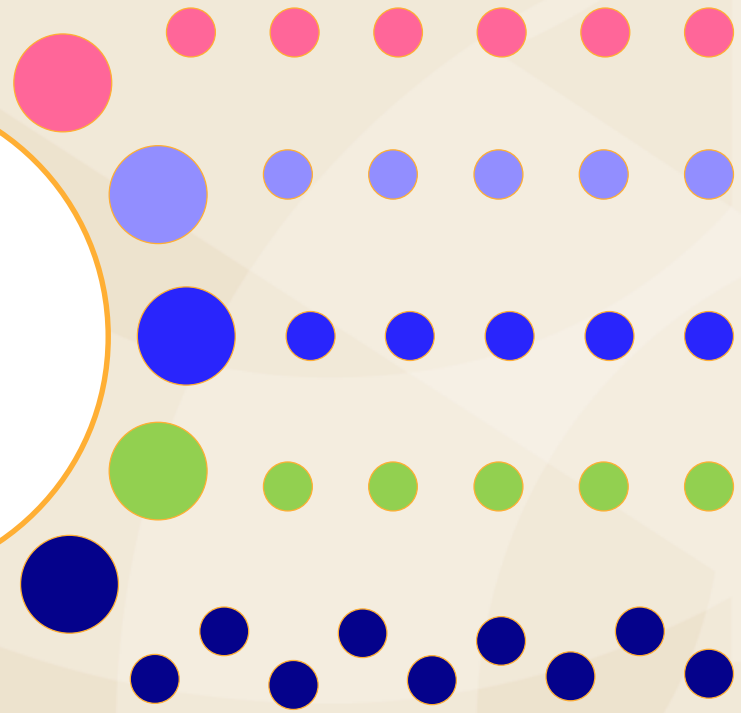


Internal touch points

External touch points



Perception of the Company and Career



- Positive Company Stories and News
- Relationships + Personal Connection
- Context on Business Decisions
- Context on Peer and External Dynamics
- External Noise

02

Part II: Communicating Internally During a Crisis

Jared Nelson

What SHOULDN'T change during a crisis

Two-way dialogue

Don't stop listening, addressing concerns

Put yourself in employees' shoes

Think about what will resonate

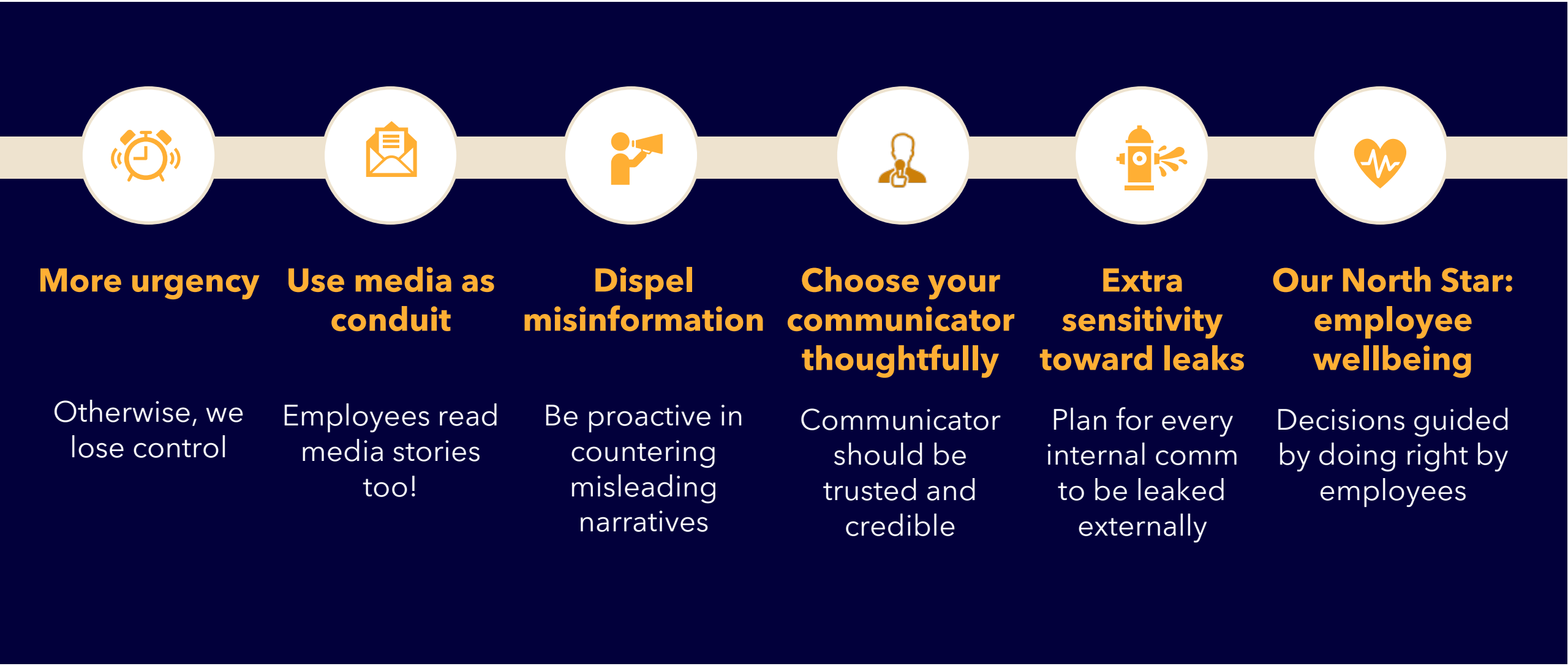
Authentic, human voice

Tone shouldn't change

Always-on monitoring and intel-gathering

Recalibrate strategy based on what we're hearing from employees on the ground

How does our modus operandi change during a crisis?



More urgency

Otherwise, we lose control

Use media as conduit

Employees read media stories too!

Dispel misinformation

Be proactive in countering misleading narratives

Choose your communicator thoughtfully

Communicator should be trusted and credible

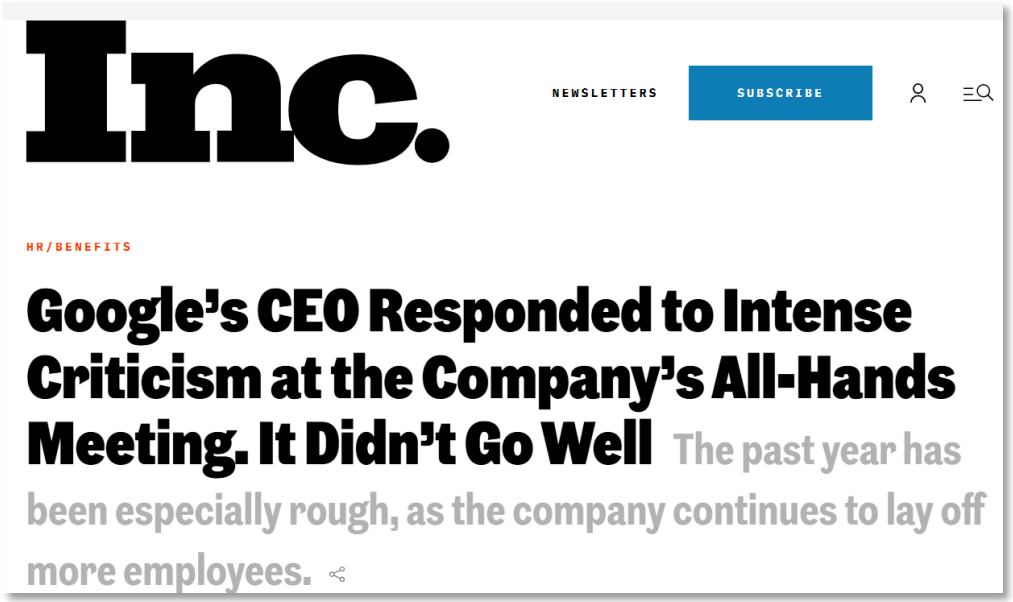
Extra sensitivity toward leaks

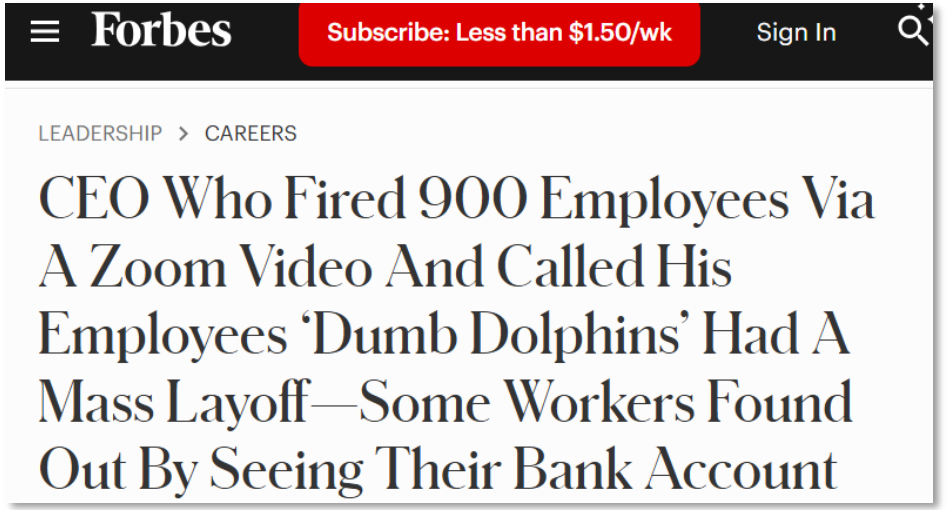
Plan for every internal comm to be leaked externally

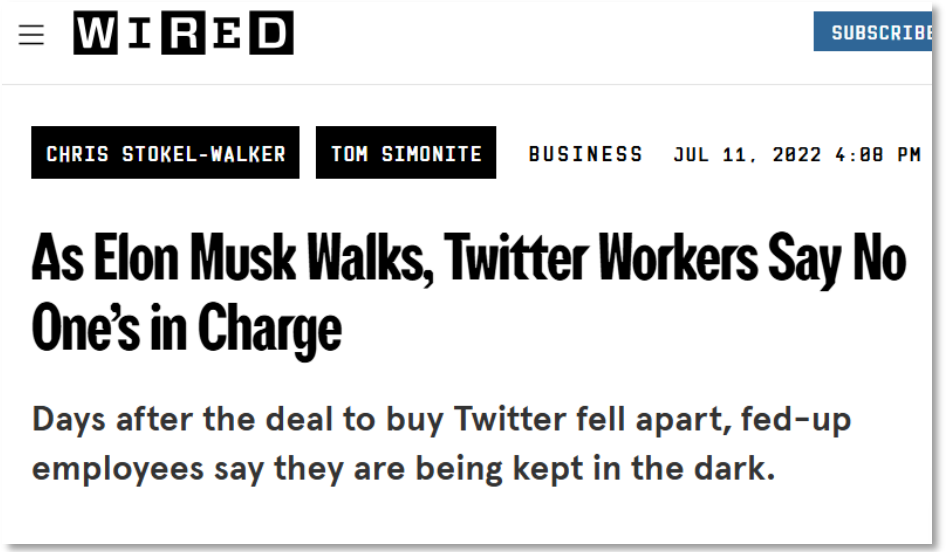
Our North Star: employee wellbeing

Decisions guided by doing right by employees

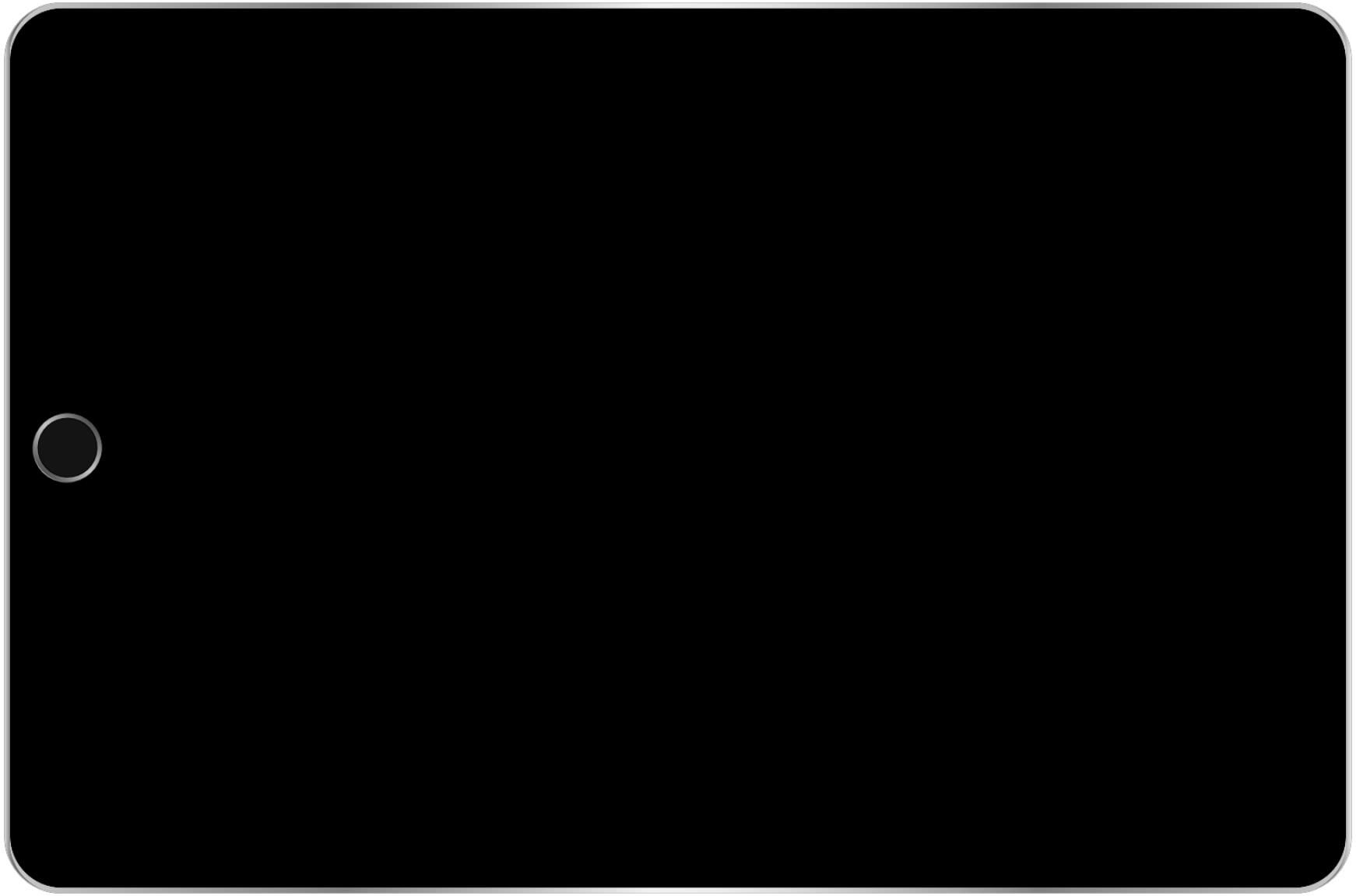
Poor internal communications → media scrutiny





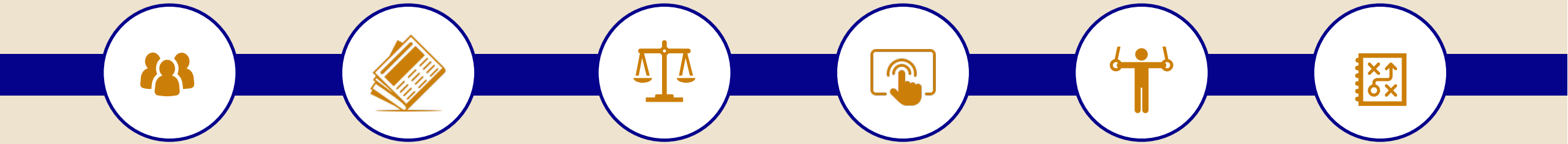


Poor internal communications → media scrutiny



Poor internal communications → media scrutiny pt. 2

Guiding principles for ALL scenarios



Inside-out philosophy

Employees should never hear company news from media

Own the narrative

Address concerns head on

Balance transparency with reality

When dealing in incomplete information, don't speculate

Use multitude of channels

Reach employees online and offline; digital / visual content is key

Stay agile

Continually recalibrate strategy based on intel + feedback

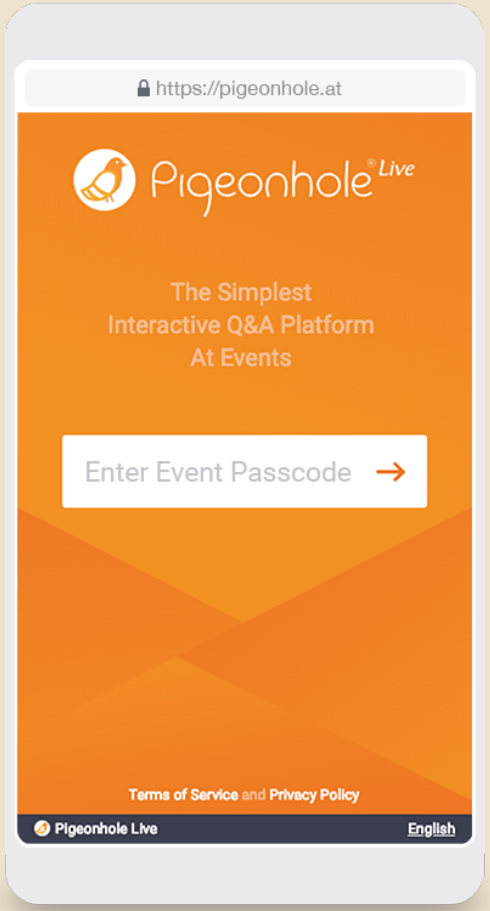
Look around corners

Prepare for high-impact escalations

03

Part III: Maintaining Trust and Dialogue During a Labor Issue

Join live polling!



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Scenario introduction

Background

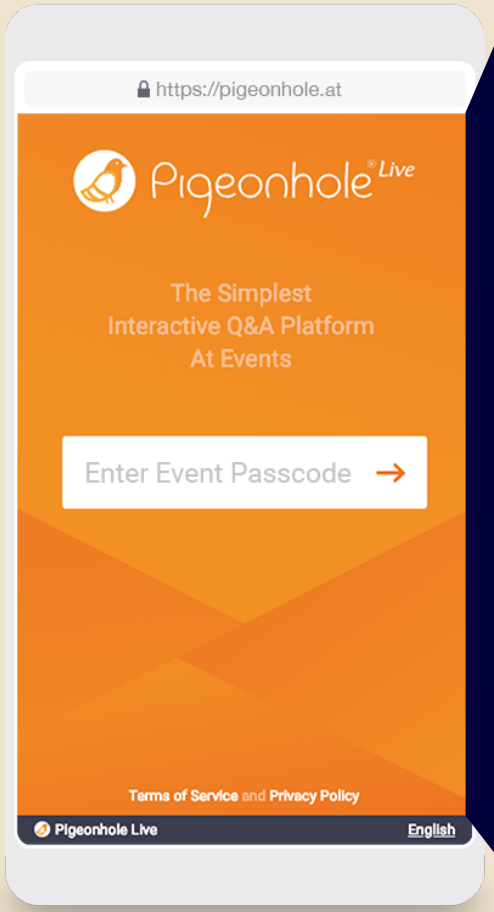
- You represent a global airline based in Nashville.
- Flight attendants and flight ops employees are unionized. Tower and ground crew are not.
- You have a strong track record and reputation on safety but recent industry events continue to raise public awareness and scrutiny on airlines.

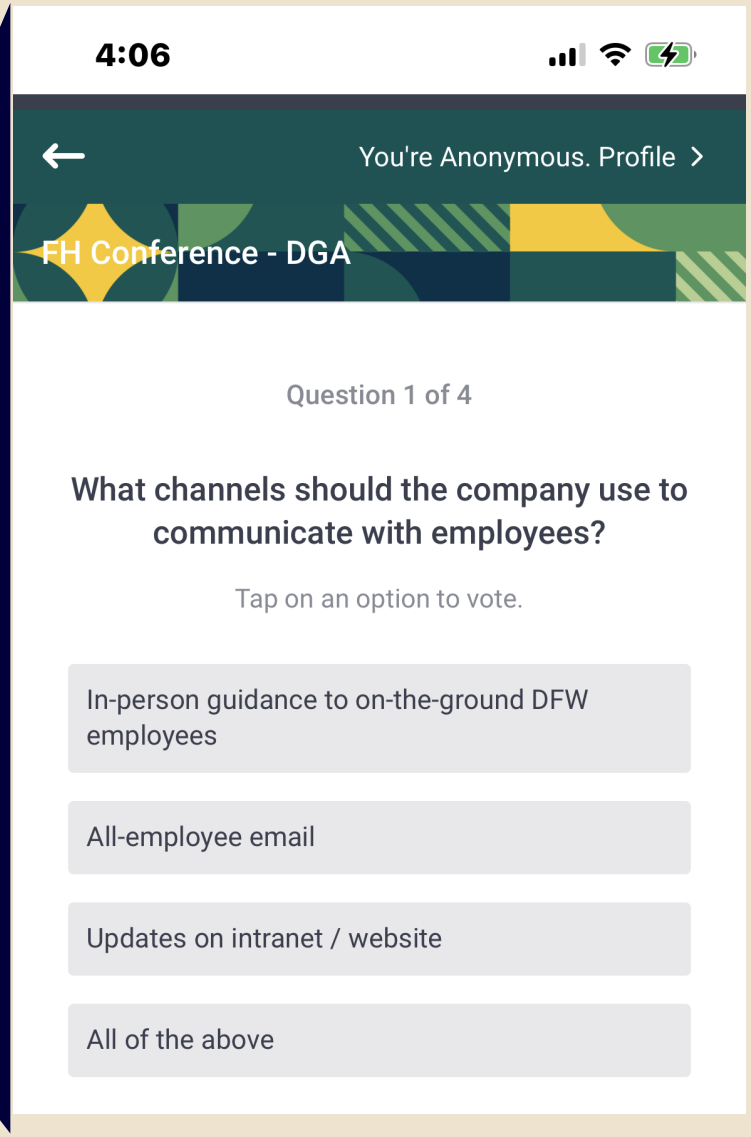
Scenario Introduction

Day 1, 8 a.m.

- Two of your airlines' planes collide on the tarmac at DFW.
- Initial reports are that more than a dozen passengers and three crew members are injured and taken to the hospital.
- Both planes are heavily damaged.

Poll question 1





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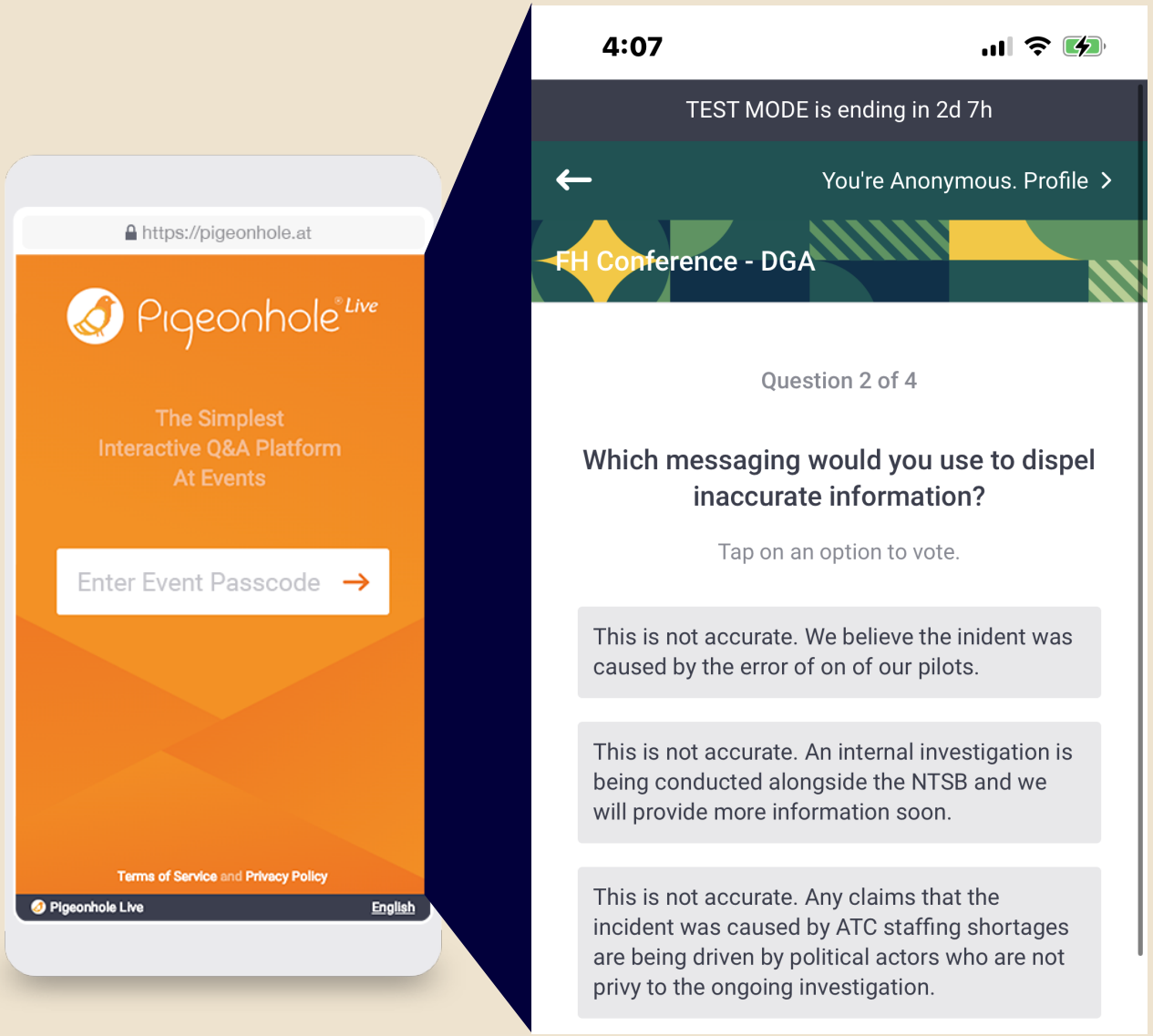
Escalation 1

Day 2, 1 p.m.

- An initial internal investigation has determined that the crash occurred due to an error by one of the plane's pilots, who failed to follow instructions from the tower / ground crew.
- The NTSB investigation is ongoing, however, and results may not be made public for several days.
- Misinformation begins spreading quickly online that the pilot of one of the planes, who is a female pilot with a relatively large following on social media.
- President Trump's post on Truth Social that the crash was a result of another DEI hire by our airline, leading others to pile on online and harass our flight crew in-person.

Poll question 2



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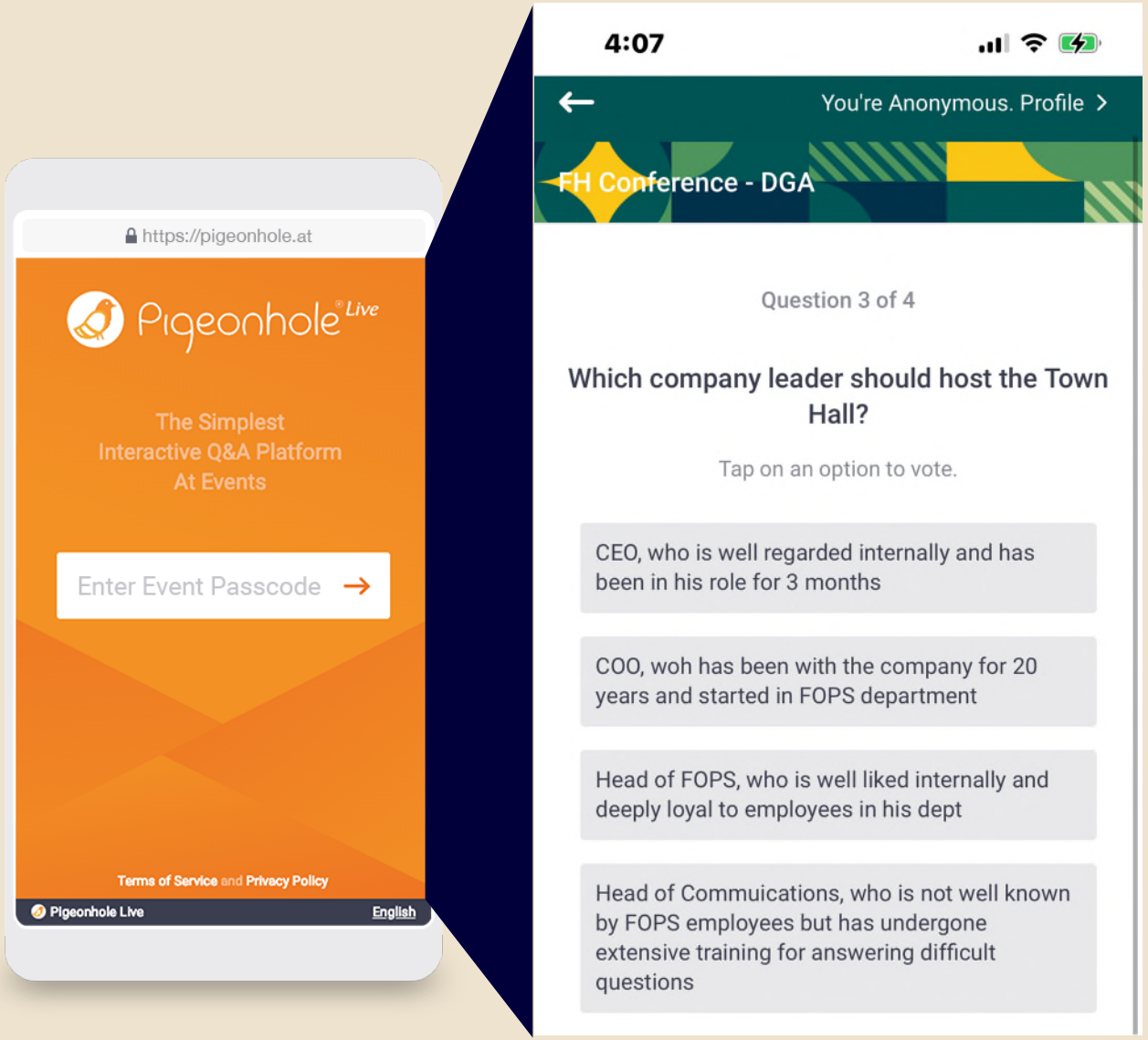
Escalation 2

Day 3, 12 p.m.

- We are seeing lots of chatter about the accident on an internal forum for employees.
- One FOPS leader claims that they have complained for years that FOPS employees are overworked and underpaid, leading to higher-than-usual turnover in recent months.
- Other employees complained that management has spent more time addressing the incident with media than with employees.
- Company leadership has decided to host a Town Hall to address employee concerns.

Poll question 3



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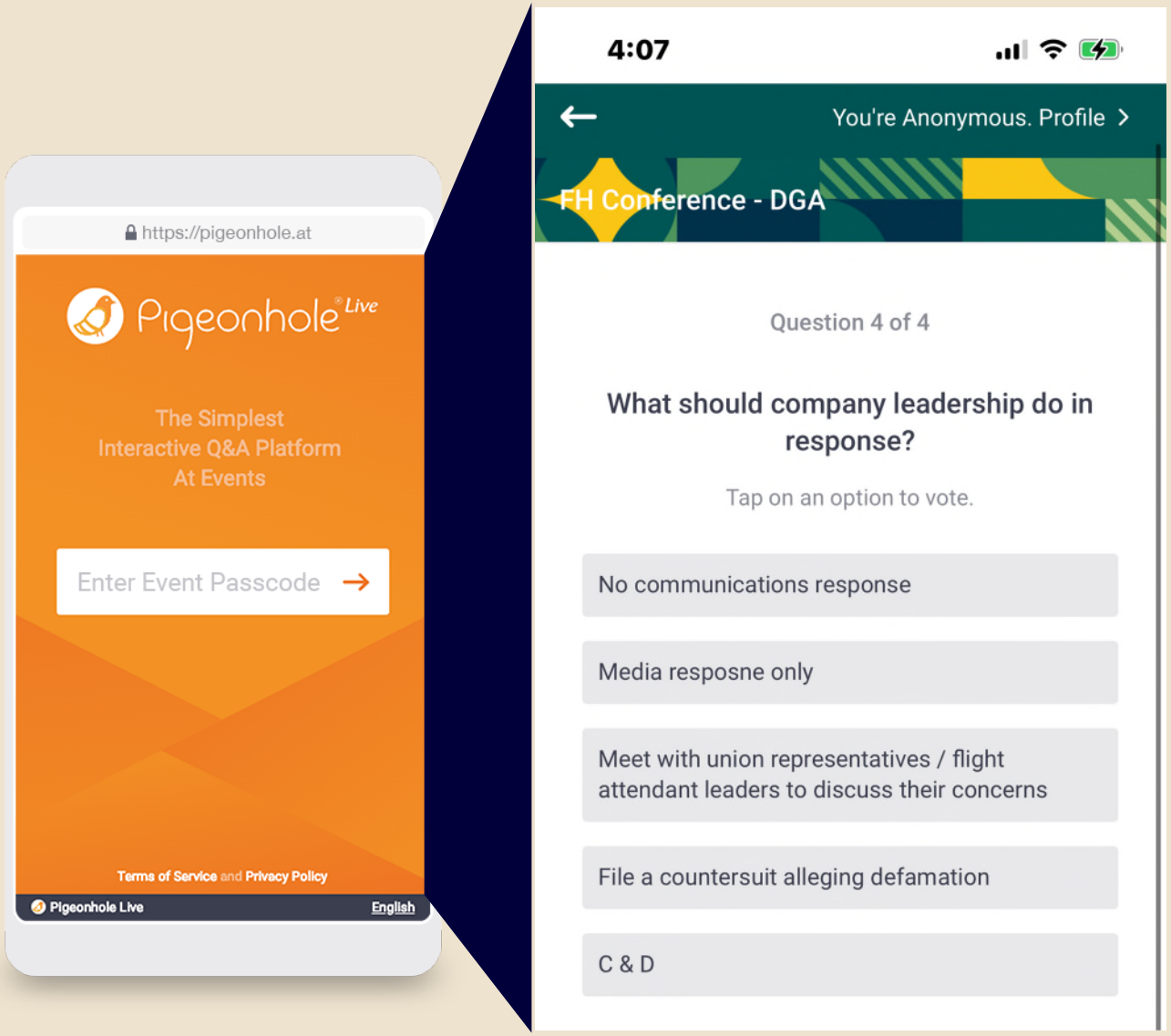
Escalation 3

Day 4, 9 a.m.

- A flight attendant was reportedly injured when the plane collided with the rear of the aircraft.
- The union representing flight attendants files a lawsuit against the company alleging that inadequate staffing levels and poor training have led to safety issues, putting flight attendants (and passengers) at risk.
- While the lawsuit stops short of criticizing the individual pilot previously discussed, the complaint clearly points some attention at FOPS employees' errors.

Poll question 4



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Thank you.

Jared Nelson
Jared.Nelson@dgagroup.com

Jackson Hayes
Jackson.Hayes@dgagroup.com