



An unfiltered look at what's percolating now

Below are key themes that dominated corporate communications news in May 2025.

LEADERS NEED TO BUILD THEIR SOCIAL FITNESS — AND LEARN WHEN TO FLEX IT.

In a world of constant transformation, the most effective leaders are not just visible — they are socially fit. “Social fitness” refers to an executive’s ability to build and maintain strong, authentic connections, especially during times of uncertainty. According to [Forbes](#), this skill is becoming as critical as physical or mental fitness in shaping how leaders show up and communicate. Whether navigating change, rallying teams or championing bold moves, leaders who engage consistently and meaningfully foster trust, build resilience and model adaptability. A [SXSW](#) panel on executive visibility emphasized this shift: it’s not about having all the answers, but about showing up with curiosity, humility and emotional intelligence. And that last trait matters most. As [Inc.](#) pointed out, one of the defining behaviors of emotionally intelligent leaders is empathy — the ability to understand what others feel and need. That kind of leadership presence doesn’t just strengthen social connections; it drives loyalty and performance.

Bottom line: Executives don’t need to post constantly — but they do need to show up intentionally. Communicators can help them understand where their voice matters most, build habits around engagement and use moments of change as opportunities to lead with empathy, presence and purpose.

THE WORKPLACE IS BEING RESHAPED IN REAL TIME AND CULTURE MUST ADAPT WITH IT.

From ghostworking and quiet cracking to loud living, gracious professionalism and the so-called great flattening, today’s workforce is responding to mounting pressures with new behaviors and boundary-setting trends that reflect a deeper recalibration of what employees need to stay engaged, respected and well. The implications for culture are clear: empathy, adaptability and inclusion are no longer optional. [Fast Company](#)’s coverage highlighted how employees are increasingly performing for perception, as a response to presenteeism and burnout. A [related article](#) explored the tension between quiet quitting and loud living — showing how more workers are pushing back on hustle culture by reclaiming their time and boundaries. And in a call for more gracious professionalism, a [third piece](#) also urged leaders to foster cultures rooted in humility, generosity and shared success — especially amid pressure and ambiguity. Meanwhile [Business Insider](#) pointed to a flattening of middle management that’s altering workplace dynamics and power structures, while [HR Executive](#) argued that respect — not perks — may be the key to reversing disengagement and engaging employees meaningfully.

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Bottom line: The rise of these micro-movements calls for more human-centered communication that is attuned to lived experiences, emotionally intelligent and flexible enough to evolve with the moment. Communicators and people managers need to rethink not just what they say, but how and when they say it to support trust, agency and belonging.

PURPOSE STILL MATTERS — BUT HOW BRANDS TALK ABOUT IT IS EVOLVING.

Benevity's newly released [2025 State of Corporate Purpose](#) report reinforced what many in-house communicators already know: purpose continues to drive business value, even amid polarization, scrutiny and shifting expectations. But the way companies activate and communicate purpose is changing. The report highlights that volunteerism and employee resource groups (ERGs) are now among the most effective levers for connecting purpose to performance. Still, the pressure is on to close the "say-do gap." As [Marketing Daily](#) pointed out, consumers expect more than purpose statements — they want clear action and follow-through. [PR Daily](#) called this a "great realignment," with brands reassessing how they approach risk in their social impact storytelling to avoid backlash while remaining authentic. And [SmartBrief](#) noted that trust and transparency — along with brand intimacy — are what truly move the needle when it comes to building lasting relationships with stakeholders. Despite the headwinds, purpose-led companies are seeing reputational gains. As [Axios](#) reported, organizations like Patagonia, Microsoft and Costco that have stayed the course on values-driven strategies are seeing their reputations rise, not fall. And as [Inc.](#) emphasized, when purpose is embedded into culture, it becomes a lasting source of differentiation and resilience.

Bottom line: Purpose is not going away — but performative messaging is. Communicators and marketers must help brands back up bold values with clear action, elevate employee-led impact and earn trust by telling stories that are consistent, credible and deeply human.

CEOS ARE STEPPING BACK FROM POLITICS AND LEANING INTO CONNECTION.

CEOs are navigating a delicate dance in today's polarized environment: stepping back from overt political commentary, while aiming to show up more directly with employees, investors and customers. In fact, as [Semafor](#) noted, open criticism of political figures like President Trump has become noticeably rare among major CEOs. At the same time, [Financial Times](#) showed executives are increasingly using social video to connect directly with stakeholders, leaning into the simplicity, informality and perceived honesty of short, often unscripted video posts. This shift reflects the rising importance of trust and brand intimacy, as [SmartBrief](#) pointed out, and a growing expectation that leaders be present, not performative. But as another [Financial Times](#) article wryly noted in its satirical take on LinkedIn, authenticity is often carefully manufactured, underscoring the risks of trying too hard to appear real in a space that rewards polish over substance. In a related piece, [Fast Company](#) described true authenticity as the new leadership currency, while [The Drum](#) underscored the tightrope CEOs must walk: being honest without being political. According to [IR Impact](#), the stakes are high — veering too far into politics can damage stock performance, while appearing out of touch can hurt internal culture.

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Bottom line: Today's environment demands strategic vulnerability. Communicators and business leaders must help their CEOs find the balance: speak with clarity, act with authenticity and use internal and social channels to build trust — not just visibility.

PULLING BACK ON DEI IS PULLING DOWN PERFORMANCE.

This month delivered fresh evidence that corporate DEI retreat isn't just a reputational issue but increasingly a financial one. As [USA Today](#) reported, U.S. consumer activism is rising on both sides of the ideological spectrum, with boycotts and counter-boycotts now hitting big-box brands like Dollar General, Walmart and Target. But perhaps most revealing is that Target, after quietly scaling back its DEI-related displays and commitments, has now missed sales expectations — a shift [Fortune](#) and [HR Grapevine](#) both linked directly to a breakdown in trust with previously loyal customer segments. The implications are clear: DEI is no longer just about compliance or values — it's tied to brand equity and consumer loyalty. And the stakes are about to get higher. As another [Fortune](#) article reported, a newly proposed civil rights initiative by the Trump administration would target DEI programs across the private sector, starting with federal contractors but likely rippling across industries.

Bottom line: As political pressures mount and scrutiny intensifies, companies must be crystal clear about what they stand for, how their commitments show up in practice and why it matters. Communicators play a critical role in helping brands stay grounded in purpose, navigate risk without retreating and frame inclusion — not as a political stance but as a business imperative watched closely by employees, customers and communities alike.