The “EASY” Way to Communicate Effectively and Increase Employee Engagement
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Employee engagement is intrinsically linked to organizational effectiveness, productivity and profitability, and organizations are looking for ways to improve it. Consider this data:

• Organizations with engaged employees outperform those without them by up to 202%
• 71% of employees are not fully engaged
• $11 billion is lost annually due to employee turnover

A key component of engagement is rewards. Benefits are consistently ranked among the top contributors to employees’ overall job satisfaction and engagement with their employer. The challenge organizations face now is education; employees need help to understand their benefits so they can make better-informed decisions.

Communicating benefits value
Once employees understand what their benefits mean, they need to maximize the value. On average, 25% of an employee’s total compensation package is made up of benefits. Yet most employees believe it to be less than 10%. And 56% of U.S. employees estimate they waste up to $750 annually because of mistakes made with benefit elections. This indicates a dramatic communication disconnect between employers and employees.

Employers that want to make their benefit communications more successful must put a clear strategy in place. Their approach should define what messages need to be communicated and how the information will be shared. It should also consider any obstacles to overcome, and identify the desired objectives and employee actions.

Using the “EASY” communication model
Successful communications have to make an impact. People are exposed to hundreds of marketing messages every day, and they make snap decisions on what to review, ignore or delete. The “EASY” communication model can help guide the content creation process to produce more meaningful and accessible messaging.

Emotional – Employees make decisions about benefits with their hearts as much as their heads, so messages should have appeal on both the emotional and intellectual levels. Communications can help employees understand the basics of their benefits, but only when it feels right will they start to actively engage in the process, take ownership of their decisions, and value what is being provided.

Appealing – If a communication doesn’t stand out and demand attention, and if it’s not obviously worth reading or easy to understand, it will be ignored. That lengthy benefits guide, bland email about open enrollment or detailed factsheet has to compete for an employee’s attention.

Simple – Benefits communication is often focused solely on being compliant, with less thought about the person at the other end. Avoid jargon. Keep sentences short. And always make clear what employees need to do with the communication. If it’s just for their information – say that. If it’s asking for a decision – say that too, but communicate clearly what they should do to fulfill the request.
You-focused – Employees experience many events throughout their careers, for example, entering the workforce, getting married, having a child or getting ready for retirement. They require education and tools at each major life stage to ensure they’re prepared for what is ahead of them. Employers can learn from the techniques used by consumer-focused marketing and advertising experts to engage customers. Benefits communication must embrace a more sophisticated and personalized approach, and HR and benefit specialists must rethink how to communicate internally to reflect the preferences of the very different audiences that now occupy the workplace.

Effective communications will help employees understand their benefits and make sound, informed choices. With greater transparency about the total compensation package, employee appreciation and engagement rises, boosting organizational performance. In a significant way, employee communications can have a positive impact on the bottom line.

Five Ways to Improve Benefits Communication

1. Develop a strategy that defines what, why and how to communicate
2. Define clear objectives that align with the company’s strategy and value
3. Regularly and proactively seek feedback from employees
4. Keep communication EASY
5. Measure the impact of communication, and be prepared to evolve

1 Dale Carnegie Training, “The Importance of Employee Engagement” infographic, 2012
3 The Hay Group Management Limited, “Total Rewards Statements: Maximising your investment in reward,” 2005

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