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Earn your client's appreciation and affection

By Jennifer Benz

February 1, 2009

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We all know the best way to win over your clients is to make their businesses more successful. But, how to do that is often less clear. Last month, we talked about how essential communication is to your business and the simple things you can do to improve the way you communicate.

This month, the topic has just a slightly different twist: how you can help your clients communicate with their employees - improving their business and winning their long-term support along the way.

A lot of us inherently know that good communication makes sense. But, what does it do from a business perspective? Why is communication so effective? There are countless reasons why communication works, but these are the big four.

Improve retention and attract the best employees. Employers value retention above all else. Yet, they often underestimate how important benefits are to creating and maintaining employee loyalty. Employees actually rate benefits as a much more important factor in remaining loyal to a company than employers themselves rate it.

Loyal employees are not the ones necessarily with the best benefits, they are the ones that understand the value of what's provided because they actually use those benefits. That's where great communication fits into the retention picture.

Higher productivity. Good communication is essential to changing the behaviors that improve health and boost productivity. We tend to forget how important good information is to simply navigate the complex system that makes up benefits programs, especially health care. Without a solid foundation for understanding benefits, employees waste countless hours trying to manage their plans, or - worse - they don't do anything at all.

Managing costs. When you promote health and wellness programs to employees, it can help reduce costs - not only by changing how employees use their plans (generic versus brand-name drugs, for example), but also in which plans they choose to enroll in. In addition, solid communication can increase participation in plans, like EAPs, that typically are under-utilized. This means your clients actually get what they pay for - and their employees get the value out of the plans.

Gaining the trust of their employees. Benefits are not just about company programs or policies, they are about employees' lives.

When you help employees make good decisions about their lives and show how much their company invests in their long-term health and security, you earn their trust. That drives employee engagement, their commitment to the organization and company profits. This may be the most compelling reason to invest in strategic benefits communication.

If your clients are not doing much benefits communication now, it can be intimidating to start. Here are three things you can do immediately to help your clients improve their communication. Start having these conversations right away.

Review and set goals. What worked last year? What didn't? What are you trying to achieve? What do employees need to know and, more importantly, what do they need to do? Document your goals for the year by setting up a simple communication plan. It will do wonders for keeping you and your clients on track and organized. It will also help you align your efforts with the results you are trying to achieve.

Give communication a seat at the table. Work it into your annual client planning and make sure you think about it as you are looking ahead to enrollment in the fall. Helping your clients think strategically about employee communication is one of the most valuable things you can do for them. It's a way to set you apart from the pack and help them achieve their goals. Start planning early so that enrollment communication isn't the thing that gets cut again because your renewal doesn't go as planned. Get out early and start educating

employees in the first quarter of the year. Having a head start will make enrollment so much easier this fall.

Put yourself in the employee's shoes. What do they and their families need? What are they concerned about? What would help them better use their plans and take better care of their health? Use data and employee feedback to figure that out and then start filling that need with simple, easy-to-use information. Checklist and tip sheets are a great way to boil down the overwhelming world of benefits into simple easy-to-use information.

Make it a priority to help your clients get one solid communication piece out to their employees this spring. It's the best way to keep the admiration of your clients.

Benz is founder and chief strategist for Benz Communications, an HR communications strategy boutique that creates integrated communication campaigns for employers committed to nurturing high-performing and satisfied employees. She can be reached at jen@benzcommunications.com.

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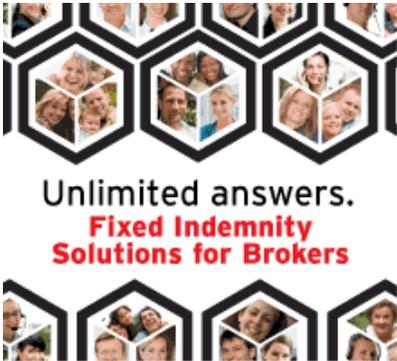
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