Wellness & Benefits Communication System

a proven, practical way to deliver your messages with breakthrough power

Published by IHAC, Inc.
“Dead-on advice for wellness communications! Practical, proven, creative, and effective! An excellent resource for corporate wellness practitioners.”

Larry S. Chapman MPH
President and CEO
Chapman Institute

“Where do I start with the accolades? As a fellow “old timer” in the wellness space, I applaud Hope Health’s practical suggestions. So simple yet so profound (and normally overlooked). This template will surely set the stage for enthusiastic employee engagement. The step-by-step, “back to basics” approach is a breath of fresh air in an industry too often focused on employer benefit and employees’ “disease”. Who knew it should be fun?”

Judi Ulrey
President
Fitness Consulting, Inc.

“If your organization is serious about engaging employees in health improvement programs, this eBook is required reading. The same goes for your consultants and wellness vendors.

“For many managers, promoting wellness services is an afterthought. If you design a great program with good incentives, participants will beat a path to your door, right? Not so. After reading the Five Step System you’ll know why — but more important, you’ll have the tools to do it right.

“Hope Health understands the foundation of your wellness effort is communication; attracting and maintaining interest require timely, relevant, compelling content. You don’t achieve that through a haphazard approach, but with a clear plan... guided by a strategy that looks beyond this program or this month or even this year.

“If you’ve ever struggled with how to get more participants excited about your wellness program, here’s your answer. Read the Five Step System. Highlight it. Share it with everyone who contributes to your wellness communications — then start putting these ideas to work as a roadmap to greater wellness program success.”

Dean Witherspoon
President and Founder
Health Enhancement Systems

“I’m very impressed with this eBook. I think it captures a lot of good information in one place for a benefit practitioner (or even an HR generalist or CFO) on how to communicate wellness and health benefits in general. Well done!”

Gary Kushner, SPHR, CBP, President and CEO
Kushner and Company
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Foreword: Executive Summary

STEP 1: Evaluate your audience and set goals — You must get an accurate snapshot of who your employees are and what they want.
- What personalities and demographics do you need to reach?
- What do employees want to know?
- What do they really want to accomplish?
- How would they prefer to receive (or not receive) the messages you’re sending?

STEP 2: Plan for personalization, personality, and peer-to-peer recognition — “Show” rather than just “tell,” and make peer-to-peer recognition visible and appreciated.
- Include personal anecdotes and success stories in your communications.
- Go beyond generalizations and specify with examples.
- Create a peer-to-peer recognition program with employees’ help.
- Tap into local health and wellness resources and experts.

STEP 3: Organize content concepts and determine media channels — You must reach employees who are “always on.”
- Plot topics in advance.
- Use a forward-thinking approach based on content categories.
- Mix print and electronic media employees use.
- Give employees 24/7 access to wellness and benefits materials.

STEP 4: Develop an editorial calendar — It provides a quick overview of your wellness communication strategy, and outlines exactly what tasks need to be completed by key dates.
- Create a chart with specific tasks and corresponding deadlines.
- Plan for special themes around the “seasons of the year” and “seasons of life” ideas.
- Vary your content types, and establish word-count lengths.
- Build in components for higher frequency of communication.
- Repurpose content in multiple sources, and cross-promote your media for increased engagement.

STEP 5: Adopt sharp editing and design — Edit and design for clarity, brevity, and quality.
- Stick to one message per piece.
- Emphasize headlines.
- Don’t bury the point.
- Use plain language.
- Make design a priority.
- Use bulleted lists when including steps or tips.
- Structure content with sections and subheads.
- Cut unnecessary description.
Introduction

You may have tried to improve your wellness and benefits program engagement with costly incentives. Although these extrinsic motivators can work in the short term, it’s doubtful they’re sustainable over the long term. What is sustainable is a relevant message, delivered via a communication plan, and consistently produced and delivered, resulting in voluntary engagement. You need a program that promotes intrinsic motivation. People participate because they want to, because it’s fun, because it pertains to them.

The Principle to Embrace: An Imperfect Plan Well Communicated Beats a Flawless Plan Poorly Communicated

Hope Health’s 30-plus years of experience has led us to a straightforward principle that’s backed by studies. It’s true for every company and community, no matter its size or goals. And no matter how many of the “signs” in this report pertain to your organization, it’s wise to embrace this key ideal: An imperfect plan well communicated is better than a flawless plan poorly communicated.

The Corporate Executive Council is clear on the connection between effective communication and employee engagement, stating, “A company’s ability to communicate — specifically, to lay out a vision of its strategy and direction that is clearly understood by its employees and linked to their day-to-day lives — is important not because communicators assert that it is, but because employees cite it as the most important driver of their commitment to the firm.”

A flawless plan poorly communicated is like a fantastic sound system that lacks an “On” button. The foundation for behavior change and real progress — the only way to get more employees to tune in and take action — is a forward-thinking, creative, persuasive communication plan.

3 Things Organizations are Realizing

When we talk to our clients about the challenges of improving the health of their employees and dependents, we consistently hear these three key themes repeated:

1. Engagement is key. Getting employees and dependents to sign up for wellness programs requires concentrated effort, with big incentives (typically financial rewards). The lack of engagement is a huge challenge.
2. **Employees don’t read much.** Employees often don’t understand their workplace benefits or the advantages of wellness program participation, leaving opportunities under-utilized and under-appreciated. The employer’s message is not breaking through.

3. **Everyone believes that communication should be a foundation**, but many organizations lack a system to make this happen. Although almost everyone agrees that health communication is as important as the quality of benefits a company offers, no leadership exists to make communication the foundation of wellness and benefits programs.

**It’s Time for Some New Thinking**

The good news is that Hope Health’s experience in workplace communication has been concentrated into a five-step process for producing competitive messages that can break through and touch people where they live.

**We Believe:**

- **Your communication message should entertain and enlighten, not just educate.** You’ve got a lot of competition for your employees’ time, and you’ve got to win that contest. We can show you how to be a great storyteller and draw in people. People can’t resist a good story. And you do have a good story to tell.

- **You should communicate less often, know what to leave out, and focus on key critical points.** The common mistake: Trying to cram in everything people “should” know. We’ll show you how to tighten your message to feature what they “need” to know, and then make resources available for those who find they “want” to know more.

- **You need to think of yourself as a publisher.** Most workplaces and their vendors neglect to follow some basic publishing rules. With a little help and some time, you can get ahead of the schedule and be in control of your message.

- **You have an advantage in winning a small slice of your employees’ time.** We’re going to show you how to exceed their expectations and become a primary source of wellness and benefits information their families need and want.
Why You Should Use This Five-Step System

You want to give employees more than a list of wellness and benefits program features. You want to make them aware of real value and prosper from it. You can deliver a total experience that entertains, informs, and inspires. You’ll practically be able to see the content move from head to heart to action.

This five-step process will create an upbeat air of expectation and anticipation using a proven, practical media methodology within a structured framework without wasting time or money.

Effective communication can also foster a positive workplace culture in which all levels of employees — from top tiers of management down — believe the company is committed to prevention and wellness initiatives. In turn, a healthy workplace culture facilitates a free and open exchange of positive ideas and enthusiasm between employers and employees.

— Boost program engagement and participation
— Make your wellness and benefits programs customized and forward-thinking
— Increase the perceived value of your programs
— Increase productivity as a result of higher engagement

After following the five-step program, you’ll have a communication platform that is flexible, reproducible, and relevant. You’ll have a framework to quickly and effectively communicate and share new ideas, programs, and events.

Let’s get to the work of telling your story, injecting some life into the process, adding a little character to your message, and really start connecting with your employees at their core.

You are in control.

Shawn M. Connors, President
Beginning Thought:
Consider yourself a publisher.

Your employees control when, where, and how they receive communication today. More than ever, people need a good reason to tune in.

And here you are, responsible for reaching this time-strapped audience with effective wellness and benefits communication. How can you break through communication clutter? How can you get employees more active and engaged?

The Best Way to Earn Their Attention is Through Timely, Relevant, Compelling Content

Most organizations have good communication ideas, but lack a system to apply them effectively. When the work plate feels full, it’s easy (and common) to move health communication to the side. In no time, the self-imposed deadline for your next wellness newsletter starts to feel like a suggestion, not a priority.

3 Common Problems

• Most communication is haphazard. Lack of planning creates chaotic schedules. Too much focus is placed on the “next thing” — the email that should have gone out yesterday, the wellness event just around the corner, the upcoming issue of the newsletter, or the website section that needs to be updated.

• Most communication is inconsistent. Organizations rarely define the optimal “voice” of their wellness and benefits communication, so messages lack cohesion and consistency. They tend to sound and look a bit different each time, like a disparate collection of “one-off” projects.

• Most communication is one-sided. Organizations know what they want to say so they create communication that speaks to employees rather than with them. It comes across as jargoned and pitchy, like continual advertisements for a product employees didn’t ask for in the first place.
4 Things a Publisher Cares About

When a wellness or benefits program is slow to take hold, it’s tempting to fault the program’s features or setup. But lack of forward-thinking communication, not program design, is usually the culprit.

According to one survey of employers that offer wellness programs:

Most respondents (87%) said that their companies communicate wellness offerings to employees. Companies where more than 50% of employees participate in wellness programs were more likely to agree that their companies do the following than those with less than 50% participation:

- Communicate effectively
- Have senior management support
- Set specific goals
- Are able to track return on investment (ROI) effectively.

Survey respondents identified communication and enrollment strategies as the greatest area for improvement (28%) in the wellness industry.²

Remember, a Strong Communication Program is Your Foundation

An effective communication system involves five steps, but the mindset of a publisher is a prerequisite for the rest. If you want to earn your employees’ attention, consider content to be your most valuable currency. A publisher cares about:

• **Readers** — Your audience wants to hear about them — their needs, pain points, desires, and successes — not about you *(the organization)*. Step 2 has more.

• **Content organization** — Many wellness and benefits experts feel overwhelmed by the sheer volume of what they could communicate. Step 3 has more.

• **Scheduling** — Building an editorial calendar and production task list will keep your messages in constant motion — employees will receive relevant, consistent communication at the right times. Step 4 has more.

**QUICK TIP:**

Respect the laws of attraction. Acting like a publisher means you’ll start to care less about “pushing” your message, and care more about “pulling” in your readers with copy and images that speak to your audience in unique ways.
• Brevity and integrity — Stick with an eye-friendly, simple design. Same goes for the copy — short, engaging, and easy-to-scan is the right recipe. Also, your content needs to be credible in addition to being noticed. This often requires expert review, as well as people who are experienced in the best practices of writing, editing, and designing communication pieces. Step 5 has more.

Now it’s time to shape an actionable system so your communication is ideal. Let’s start the five steps.

**STEP 1:**
Evaluate your audience and set goals.

**THE REAL CHALLENGE:**
Determining whom you need to reach, and what you expect to achieve

The health communication you put into employees’ hands, ears, and in-boxes can absolutely make a difference. But it’s also challenging: Each employee has his or her own health habits, motivations, frustrations, and goals. The expectant mother in the accounting department wants different information than the soon-to-retire sales manager or the new hire fresh out of grad school.

Now that you have a publisher’s mindset, you realize you can’t collect attention from employees unless you first connect with them. But who is “them,” exactly? What personalities and demographics do you need to reach?

**You must get an accurate snapshot of who your employees are, rather than assuming what they want.**

Once you know the “who,” you can develop the “what.”

What’s your goal? What’s the message? Perhaps your goal is:

- Greater employee engagement
- Increased enrollment in your wellness program
- Helping a percentage of employees become healthier after a specified period
- Improving compliance or saving money
Your challenge is also to “set the bar” — and your expectations — so you can track your program’s success and adjust accordingly.

**THE TYPICAL PRACTICE:**
Lumping employees into a single group, failing to connect with personal concerns, and not aiming for reachable goals

A mass audience doesn’t have a mind; individuals within that audience do. Your wellness and benefits communication — no matter how polished and professional (*we’ll get to that step later*) — will have no measurable effect unless you make the conscious decision to connect with employees.

But most organizations make these mistakes:

- **They visualize their audience as a faceless entity.** Especially when you have many employees, it’s simpler to consider them as a singular group that should get the same communication.

- **They forget that people are motivated in different ways.** Some people are won over with logic and reason; others are influenced by forces of emotion. Most like a healthy mix of both. One problem with conventional health communication: It appeals to the head but not the heart — science over sentiment — all the time.

- **They dwell on the executive vision, not employees’ needs.** Your top-level executives have an agenda — controlling costs for the company’s health-care plan. You launch a wellness program and introduce it by discussing how the company hopes to save money in the long run. Dwelling on organization goals and not even asking about employee goals leads to alienation and disengagement.

- **They don’t make employees feel like they’re part of the communication.** It takes two sides to communicate; otherwise, you’re just lecturing through various formats. Organizations often don’t ask employees for their questions and comments, or invite employees to participate in the process for upcoming wellness content. (*There’s breakthrough power in personalizing your content with familiar faces, stories, and news about co-workers. Step 2 explains how to capitalize on this concept.*)
Let’s go back to the “think like a publisher” mindset. Imagine the turmoil and confusion a magazine staff would experience if it couldn’t articulate its publication’s goal, and how that goal relates to its readers’ needs. The staff would be writing content and designing pages without an overarching mission in mind. Literally, staff members would be working without a purpose.

Some wellness committees operate like that. Here are common goal mistakes:

- **Goals are non-existent.** Health communication is often driven by intuition — what sort of feels right to the wellness committee at the time — instead of being aligned with a fundamental goal. Almost half the companies in one survey had no formal, written wellness program plan. Even if you’ve been producing health communication materials for a long time, reassess your purpose. What do you hope to gain from producing those materials? Know what you want employees to accomplish from reading each deliverable.

- **Goals are vague.** “We want employees to get healthier, feel better, and live more balanced lives” is a gallant, worthwhile hope. However, it’s not a goal. Many hopes in the wellness world are vague and unquantifiable.

- **Goals are dangerously elevated.** Shoot for the universe, find a few stars, and it’s viewed as a loss. Rather than encourage small “wins” and start with the bar low, some organizations set dangerously lofty goals.

- **Goals aren’t set with checkpoints.** Having a realistic goal is important, but not as important as having what psychologists call “implementation intentions.” These are mini-plans, or actions that must occur to meet the main goal. In one study, two-thirds of participants who had formed implementation intentions had carried them out. Participants without implementation intentions, however, mostly failed to complete the projects. Only one-fourth of these participants were successful.

The checkpoints bridge the gap between wanting to get something done and actually getting it done. Once you set your main wellness program goal, mark a few checkpoints along the way.
The Solution: Understanding information that will fuel your communication, and setting realistic objectives that can be tracked and celebrated.

As is the case with most communication, the recipient wants to know one main thing: How does this affect me? You have to go beyond best guesses and first reactions. Effective workplace communication is too central to leave to your gut.

• What do employees want to know?
• What do they really want to accomplish?
• How would they prefer to receive (or not receive) the messages you’re sending?

Savvy wellness and benefits leaders create and present communication in ways that are clearly applicable to employees’ needs. And those needs are known, not guessed, because leaders simply took the time to find out.

• Create a basic demographic profile of your employees and their families. Is your audience diverse in age and experience? What’s the average age? Is it technology savvy? Simply put, whom are you talking with today? Employees pay attention to different wellness and benefits messages at different life stages, so consider basic age profiles when creating (or editing) messages that can resonate with each individual.

• Find out what captures your employees’ attention. Although each audience member differs, an employee communication needs assessment will enable you to collect information on overall characteristics such as interest (often missed in this stage), HRA data, gender, culture, and education. This information can fuel your communication plan, help you establish your program philosophy and mission, and enable you to set expectations and create demand.

• Find out which wellness and benefits topics will resonate with most employees. Through a survey, poll, or quick focus group, discover what topics each demographic group considers most important. Also, find out how each group prefers to receive workplace communication. Despite age differences, you’ll probably uncover some topics that all groups cite as important, and your upcoming communication will include frequent news, tips, and insight about these subjects.
Once you understand what employees want from your wellness and benefits program, marry those goals with your communication effort.

- **Form a wellness committee with employees from all departments to help establish goals.** You can increase the chances your wellness or benefits goals will succeed by involving employees in the decision-making process. If they have a hand in its creation, they may be more likely to participate.

- **Perform a communications audit.** What’s working at your organization, and what’s not? What are your biggest communication triumphs and mistakes? Which recent messages have been effective, and which have been ignored? Spending time analyzing your communication goals, resources, and barriers will help you determine:
  - The current role of workplace communication in your organization
  - The process of your messaging (such as the frequency of your communication and the media you’re using to communicate)
  - The key program messages you’re communicating to employees
  - The effectiveness of your current communication strategy in helping you achieve your desired outcomes
  - The biggest communication challenges you face

- **Devise a plan to reward engaged employees** who "buy in" to your concepts and participate in your programs.

- **Craft a one-page document** about your wellness program and role of workplace communication in your organization. As you write the statement, consider:
  1. What rewards (financial and non-financial) would employees consider powerful motivators for program participation?
  2. What specific health objectives do multiple employees share (smoking cessation, strength training, weight loss, etc.)?
  3. What environmental changes around the office can spark everyday thoughts about better food choices and other healthy decisions?
  4. What supplies will aid your wellness program (bulletin boards, brochure racks, posters, insulated lunch bags, calendars, books)?
5. Are your ideas practical — should you “phase in” a program in a few stages instead of all at once? If so, what resources does the initial effort require?

6. Are the ideas results-oriented — can you measure your eventual success?

7. How can you best recruit other participants without mandatory participation?

EMI Health is a successful nonprofit health insurance organization that aims to keep health benefits at a maximum and health insurance premiums at a minimum. The EMI Health Wellness Program is focused on helping its members create simple, healthy habits to improve well-being. Timely, compelling communication is key to the organization, which empowers employees through a smart media mix that includes newsletters, a Website, downloadable eBooks, one-minute videos, webinars, social media, meetings with personal health coaches, and more.

QUICK TIPS:

• **Before sending questions to employees**, make sure questions are easy to understand, flow logically, and can be answered quickly. Complete all questions about one topic before moving to the next. For example, don’t ask about a person’s perceptions of health savings accounts and then go back to questions on wellness programs.

• **Involve employees early in your message-planning process**. Ask them what they want to know and how they would like to receive messages. Make it easy for them to provide feedback, too.

• **Write down your three best communication moves/ideas** concerning your wellness program, and discuss ways to build upon that momentum.

• **Hold a half-hour roundtable discussion** to learn more about what kind of information (and delivery methods) employees would find most useful.

• **Write down the main wellness program outcomes** you hope to achieve soon.

• **Plan a way to report back to employees** (meeting, posted results online, other media channels), to show that your organization is accountable and responsive.
STEP 2:
Plan for personalization, personality, and peer-to-peer recognition.

THE REAL CHALLENGE:
Customizing your wellness and benefits programs to your culture, and creating ways for employees to encourage one another.

Being impressed (“It’s nice that our company has this program for people”) isn’t the same thing as being engaged (“I want to be part of this!”). Smart organizations want employees to feel like they’re on the inside, on a wellness journey that’s entertaining, not just healthy. There’s comfort and energy in knowing the program is theirs (not the company’s or third-party program consultant’s).

For this step, make sure your publisher hat is still on. You would want your trade magazine’s readers to interact with one another online and offline, and to scan articles and anecdotes about peers so the audience at-large becomes more educated and entertained. You would want them to feel like they’d be missing something important if they didn’t subscribe.

The simple truth: People won’t get interested unless something is interesting.

Your challenge is to plan for personalization — content with familiar faces, stories, and news about co-workers — and to lead an encouraging culture.

This should happen before you plan your content topics and choose media (Step 3).

THE TYPICAL PRACTICE:
Not thinking about branding, and not giving employees a sense of ownership.

How is your wellness program branded? What does your communication say (or more often, not say) about your organization and culture? If your program is already well-branded — maybe with a name that reflects a company core value, or with illustrated characters that depict different internal departments — you’re probably already involving employees in a personal way.
But most wellness programs aren’t branded at all. Here are other mistakes:

- **Overlooking the importance of peer-to-peer recognition** — Many companies view this as nice, not necessary. However, the Gallup Organization has found “employees cherish praise and recognition from peers. Coworkers know intimately the particulars of a job and when they notice excellence, it is a special event. So, the best praise and recognition may not come from the top down — it may come from a peer recognition program.”

Recognition injects a sense of ownership and fun in wellness programs. A culture of appreciation leads people working together to achieve more, and when recognition goes viral (through social media and the community), participation soars.

- **Not including employees and community members in content creation** — When wellness committee members meet to discuss ways to improve program participation and engagement, they often close a conference-room door. Surrounded by walls, they typically don’t consider one luminous idea — walking out of the room and down the hall (or across town) and using the energizing wellness resources in their own companies and communities.

- **Trying to appeal to everyone, and ending up appealing to few** — Their newsletter content, Website, and other wellness communication tools don’t include the experiences of Joan in Accounting, the tips of Greg in Sales, or any other inclusion that would make the program more personal. Instead, content feels like it could have been “cut and pasted” from any health-related resource.

- **Having a stuffy voice, filled with corporate-speak instead of plain language** — How will you engage employees when wellness communication feels like a research paper?

The Solution:
“Show” rather than just “tell,” and make peer-to-peer recognition visible and appreciated.

Envision two one-page fliers, both informing employees about a new, upcoming health and wellness program offering. The first flier begins by describing the offering in detail, replete with statistics and specifics. The second flier begins by showcasing Susan, an employee at a nearby company who is now healthier and happier because she’s participating.
Chances are, the second flier is more likely to be read, and therefore a smart way to present information. It shows, rather than simply tells, how a wellness program feature could benefit employees.

- **Think connect, not describe.** As you know, grabbing employees’ attention isn’t easy. Here are quick ways to create wellness content that “hits home” with your employees:
  
  — **Add personal anecdotes.** People like to read about people. Consider ways to bring them into your content by featuring folks who embody or exemplify your key topics.
  
  — **Specify with examples.** Organizations tend to write or speak in generalizations: “People often relieve stress through breathing exercises.” Think about how you’re going to get personal: “Mary in Accounting says she felt stressed and had high blood pressure until she took yoga classes, offered through our wellness program. She feels happier and healthier now — and encourages others to join her.”
  
  — **Plan to solicit success stories** from employees who feel healthier because of your wellness program. Use their examples in your employee health communications (with their permission), and invite them to be a Q&A source in your newsletter, post updates on your wellness blog, and tweet on your social media sites. Success can inspire success. Other employees like to learn how super achievers, people just like them, have reached their goals. Reading or hearing a success story can provide that “If they can do it, so can I” nudge for others to take action.

LISTEN IN: Baptist Health South Florida share how they drive engagement through personalization and peer-to-peer recognition.

Listen now
Believe in the snowball effect of achievement, and invite employees to help design the recognition component of your program. Peer-to-peer recognition gets employees to actively seek, instead of passively receive, news about your wellness program. They could go to your Intranet and view a congratulations message thread from fellow participants, or meet monthly to share encouragement. Or your wellness newsletter articles could simply suggest acknowledging the participation and accomplishments of friends, families, and co-workers.

As you discuss possible recognition ideas with your team, keep these in mind:

— **Recognition raffle:** Each time an employee receives peer recognition, he or she is entered into a raffle.

— **Kudos board:** Employees fill out a card or form to thank, compliment, or recognize their peers. The cards are then displayed on a central bulletin board to foster ongoing success.

— **Coupons or certificates:** Your wellness newsletter could include a small coupon or certificate (*good for a caregiving chore, babysitting, dog walks, etc.*) that employees could complete and give to a fellow wellness participant.

**Mine your community for diamonds.** Plan on using social media to connect with nearby resources (as well as your own employees). Your community is filled with problem solvers, idea inspirers, and volunteers who can bring more power, perspective, and clarity to your wellness communication. Also, community groups are converting local interest into grassroots-oriented events. Perhaps your organization can sponsor health-related events, or vice versa. Discuss ways to share resources, reduce costs, and leverage your messages. Bring their expertise to your wellness program by inviting a group member to write a guest column in your next wellness newsletter, or to join you for your next wellness meeting.

**QUICK TIPS:**

- **Find an employee whose experiences show a point you’d like to make in an upcoming communications piece.** Chat with him or her about it and make the piece more personal.

- **When recognizing accomplishments, remember that specific feedback is more effective than general praise.** Encourage employees to be precise when complimenting their peers. It’s also important that everyone has equal opportunities to give and receive feedback. Set up a level playing field, and make it easy to give recognition.

- **Create an easy way for employees to post comments (even anonymous ones are valuable), and ask questions about wellness and benefits.** Turn that feedback into future content.
STEP 3: Organize content concepts and determine media channels.

THE REAL CHALLENGE:
Delivering wellness communication that is well-planned, timely, and on target; and reaching employees who consume information however and whenever they choose.

Think about the volume of what you could communicate about wellness and benefits. Figuring out what to say, write, email, post, embed, film, upload, text, and tweet can make your head spin. But thinking ahead enables you to consider interesting, fresh ways to communicate, and then to produce those messages strategically.

You Need to Develop a System for Content Planning

As information consumers, employees are empowered and ultra-connected. Smartphones, social media, text messaging, and other technologies have shifted the communication power balance to receivers, not senders.

You have good wellness and benefits communication for them. When they feel like it, they’ll check. When they do, will they find it?

To be spotted, let alone anticipated or actually used, you must deliver messages in multiple formats, including ones that are interactive, portable, and immediate. The danger of not doing so is severe — employees who don’t even realize you sent something.

Your challenge is also to reach employees who are “always on,” through a mix of print and electronic media they use.

THE TYPICAL PRACTICE:
Working in a frenzy, focusing only on the next deliverable, sticking with the tried-and-true, and overestimating your control.

Most organizations don’t plan ahead in their employee communication efforts. They send out wellness newsletters and upcoming-event emails more haphazardly, often at the last minute.
These organizations wish they had control over the chaos. Their workdays often feel scattered and slapdash. They would benefit from having a standard — a framework to plan and send wellness information that more employees actually notice and act upon.

Instead, most organizations make these common mistakes:

- **Not eliciting the power of expectation and anticipation.** Workplace communication does one of two things: It either informs employees about what’s going on, or it engages them in the process of change — the latter is always the desired outcome. Effective communication elicits change, and employees are more likely to listen and respond to repeated, positive messages. That’s why the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) encourages organizations to communicate early and often, but with a long-term communication strategy.¹

- **Not planning content topics in advance.** When determining what to communicate when, most organizations grasp at straws instead of grabbing a calendar and planning in advance. They miss key opportunities to use national health news and local events, and messages rarely seem timely or compelling.

- **Reacting instead of anticipating.** Lacking a sustainable process for content planning and creation, they attempt to address the story of the day — a continually exhausting pursuit — rather than thematic ideas and concepts that resonate with — and empower — employees.

- **Not getting ideas from eager resources in their communities.** Potential sources for wellness newsletter articles, short videos, guest blog posts, and more include chefs, artists, college professors, shop owners, retirees, and others. This free treasure trove of knowledge, perspective, and content possibilities goes untapped.

One reason for employee disengagement and low wellness program participation: Employees assume communication doesn’t apply to them. If it feels impersonal, bland, and in the same old format, it’s probably for someone else, they think. On the flip side, studies show personalizing messages is “psychologically significant” and “has the potential to impact not only attitudes but also behaviors.”⁶
Here are more common mistakes organizations make:

• Having a “go to” way to deliver wellness and benefits messages. Perhaps it’s a quarterly newsletter, an email sent on the first business day of each month, or a regularly held conference-room meeting. Whatever feels comfortable tends to feel right. After a while, any go-to method can feel routine, bland, and passé.

• Setting up one-way communication instead of using media that encourages dialogue. Many organizations still communicate at employees (here is an HR meeting you need to listen to, here is a wellness program brochure, and so forth). These vehicles are more like direction than communication, which by definition requires two sides.

• Having an illusion of control, and assuming employees will pay attention. Employees are supposed to respond to an important wellness email from the CEO, right? Most will when they feel it’s an organizational message (about the firm’s strategy and their role in it), but won’t when they feel it’s a personal choice (about health). Organizations often don’t explore new communication avenues because these organizations blindly assume their current ones are working.

• Not coordinating multimedia for scheduled, repeated effect. When an employer intelligently combines print, electronic, audio, and video delivery channels, the message is more likely to get through because it’s presented synergistically and repeated regularly. People often do not give much attention to something they hear, read, or see — particularly if it’s a low priority for them — at any one time, but if it is seen again and again, the growing impact the message eventually has will be greater.

The Solution:
Plot topics in advance, use a forward-thinking approach based on content categories, mix print and electronic media, and give employees 24/7 access to wellness and benefits materials.

The best wellness and benefits communication isn’t a smattering of “one-off” projects. It’s a year-round effort that looks and feels cohesive, thanks to an easy and energizing, forward-thinking, calendar-driven approach:
• **Categorize your thinking into sections that match your mission and employees’ needs.** Think about USA Today. World events are ever-changing, and the supply of human-interest stories is endless, yet each issue is segmented and presented in four easy-to-find, color-coded sections: Main News (blue), Life (purple), Sports (red), and Money (green). This structure enables readers to form expectations — people know where to turn for information that matters most to them. It gives them a sense of comfort and trust.

  — What regular wellness sections can you create?
  — Will you segment your content by topic (Movement, Food, Trends) or by theme (Inspiration, Tips, Humor)?
  — What special issues might you plan?
  — What could your next five “cover stories” be?

• **Determine annual educational campaigns.** What wellness topics important to your audience pop up each year? Earmark time and space in advance to “cover” these areas comprehensively (for example, previewing the issue in advance to heighten awareness, featuring the issue at the right time and providing education, recapping the issue later with a personal anecdote). Here are possible annual educational campaigns:

  — Flu shots
  — Health screenings
  — A walking program
  — Benefit enrollment decisions
  — Smoking cessation classes

• **Leverage National Health Observances (NHOs).** Media outlets peg health-related editorial schedules and marketing messages to NHOs, and you can leverage these health observances to stimulate awareness of your wellness program. The National Health Information Center lists all NHOs, along with sponsoring organizations and information about supporting materials available online. These health observances are tied to nearly every aspect of wellness and health. By using this resource, you can plan specific messages in advance, building monthly (or weekly) components into your forward-thinking approach.

Remember, you need repeated messages to breakthrough. When employees receive the same message presented in multiple media outlets, they’re more likely to pay attention and be positively influenced to change and sustain change.
• **Think about seasons of the year.** There’s an ebb and flow of activities and priorities as we move from spring to summer to fall to winter. This comes as no surprise to retailers, who develop coupon programs, special rates, and more based upon seasonality. They’re excellent at taking advantage of predictable behavioral patterns, leading consumers to tune in to what’s happening now.

Now think of a typical family with school-age kids as they transition from summer to fall. You could produce wellness topics to match what’s on their minds — healthy school lunches, sports participation, freed-up time at home, clothing, outdoor activities, and so on. That’s a smart way to plan health communications.

• **Think about seasons of life.** Segments of the audience you analyzed in Step 2 have different needs, and many of those needs are based upon their “season of life” — young and old, fit and unfit, caregivers, new parents, dependent kids, and so on. If your audience is composed of a relatively high number of young adults, your wellness content should be different than an organization of mostly seniors.

Baptist Health South Florida’s Website includes more than mere mainstays, such as mission statements and answers to frequently-asked questions. Instead, it infuses an online element other industry sites lack — interactivity. The site serves as a central nervous system, pumping out information to help workers stay informed about wellness and benefits issues.

When choosing media, follow these tips:

• **Answer “print or electronic?” with “yes.”** You don’t have to choose one or the other, because the right answer is both. Putting multiple media to work embodies a key truth of communication: Each person retains information in preferred styles (some by hearing, some by reading and studying, etc.), but a sensory blend is always most effective.

• **Think of your seasonal communication campaign as a movie or new book.** Consider how your messaging is a narrative: The main story is the focus and can reside online or in print. The story can be consumed in parts or segments over time. Newsletters, posters, and brochures can excerpt and promote the story. Social media can allow employees to tweet or text their parts in the story.

• **Launch a social media component if you haven’t already.** Social media tools such as Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, and YouTube each have distinct benefits, but they share a common one: They enable immediate and ongoing interaction with your employees and community.
Communication has changed from the wisdom of the oracle to the wisdom of the crowd. You’ll gain better, more frequent employee perspectives and feedback by fostering dialogue and discussion that spreads quickly and easily.

- **Extend the wellness conversation and make resources available online.** Smart organizations like EMI Health create specific pages on Websites and Intranets where employees can access answers to common workplace questions and share ideas.

These vehicles deserve your attention (*and content*)

- **Blog:** HR departments often face three challenges when communicating health-related information to their workforces: The content is stuffy, infrequent, and one-sided. A blog solves these issues — it’s conversational, recurrent, and dynamic.

- **Podcasts:** A podcast is simply an audio file you can listen to on a computer or MP3-type player, often distributed via iTunes. Podcasts far outpaced radio, as a medium that’s non-confrontational, informative, casual, and often downright fun.

- **Video:** Video is ideal for wellness communication because it creates the sense of approachability, and lets employees view, see, and hear things not possible with other formats. Sites such as YouTube and Vimeo provide social media options for conversing and sharing that can help your content go viral. According to data collected through the Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, 71% of adult respondents said they use video-sharing sites, with 28% of respondents watching a short, online video daily. Inexpensive editing tools such as Apple’s iMovie or Final Cut Express make it easy to assemble professional-looking video content.
• **Microsite:** Sometimes called content web portals, microsites are Internet sites for highly specific purposes, like a wellness program targeted at participants. Yours could concisely explain the benefits participants receive, a blog they can access and respond to, a points tracker for them to update on their way to earning an incentive, videos and tips to download, a link to your wellness program Twitter page, and more. Check out this example from EMI Health.

• **Don’t discount the power of print.** The print medium isn’t dead, it’s just changing. To maximize its effectiveness, make print more timely and customized. People trust print. It’s credible. They feel comfortable using it. They can’t fast-forward past it. Print doesn’t delete. You don’t need to charge it. Print is beautiful. It can draw the eye to content and photos with effects and papers that make readers want to touch and feel your message.

Print also enhances the impact of other media. Direct mail, poster campaigns, and brochures can lead people to Websites, videos, and social media sites — and vice versa. Print can also even co-exist with new digital technologies such as Quick Response codes (“QR codes”) — two-dimensional bar codes appearing on printed pages or packaging that people scan with mobile phones so they can quickly access corresponding Websites, videos, coupon offers, and more.

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**FILLING YOUR ToolKit:**

The Five Step Wellness & Benefits Communication System ToolKit will save you time, money, and frustration. Find ready-to-go employee communication needs assessment, employee surveys, and other valuable tools, templates, and tips inside this handy kit. All ToolKit resources come standard with our Workplace Communication Consulting Service or may be purchased as a separate package for just $49.95.
STEP 4: Develop an editorial calendar.

THE REAL CHALLENGE:
Turning your publishing mentality and content ideas into action

The key to staying on track (and always moving forward) is an editorial calendar. It provides you with a quick overview of your wellness communication strategy, and outlines exactly what tasks need to be completed by key dates. Establishing an editorial calendar will keep your content consistent and relevant.

When done right, your communication plan becomes your calendar — it takes the form of your fleshed-out schedule. And when that happens, workplace messaging becomes controlled instead of chaotic.

Any organization can develop an editorial to-do list that’s powerful, manageable, and flexible. Start by answering three basic questions:

— What will you publish, and how much content do you plan to publish for each effort?
— How often will you publish?
— Who will research, write, design, approve, publish, and share the content?

Your challenge: To develop an actionable schedule, setting the framework for forward-thinking communication.

THE TYPICAL PRACTICE:
Dwelling only on the end date, and failing to plan far enough in advance

Avoid these mistakes when creating your editorial calendar:

• Not working backward from the end date, with intermittent checkpoints. It’s best to start at the end and plan backward from your final publishing dates. Focusing only on the deadline tends to create a lack of urgency, pushing everything to the last minute.

• Not incorporating multimedia into the plan. Just thinking about your media options isn’t enough. For example, one topic — the value of having a healthy heart — could warrant a newsletter article, a downloadable PDF, an entertaining poster for your wellness wall, a map pointing to nearby gyms and fitness centers, and a series of social media updates with quick exercise tips.
• Not moving beyond static communication to add dynamic, changing elements. Your workplace communication vehicles — Intranets, emails, podcasts, etc. — should be updated often. Even print newsletters, archived online, can be updated or categorized by story topic for easier access and fresh information. Dynamic communication can establish credibility and influence action.

• Not building in time for review and design. A first-draft deadline shouldn’t be the same as the final deadline. As a publisher, you’re concerned with editorial and visual quality, and sometimes the essence of effective writing is rewriting. *(We’ll cover this more in Step 5.)*

**The Solution:**
Create a detailed content production plan that you can control, update, and track.

Organizations that stay on course set firm deadlines for brainstorming article ideas, turning those ideas into article drafts, dropping the copy into design templates, fact checking and editing, and more.

• Create a chart with specific tasks and corresponding deadlines. Set target dates for at least the following responsibilities:
  - Choosing story ideas and assigning them
  - Completing first drafts
  - Editing for length, grammar, and clarity
  - Dropping copy into a template *(if it will be emailed)* or into graphic design software for layout *(if it will be printed)*
  - Revising and finalizing content
  - Checking links to make sure they’re active and correct *(if emailed)*
  - Sending to employees

Some organizations find it’s helpful to have multiple editorial calendars: a master calendar to see everything at a glance, and separate calendars for specific activities. In that case, you could create separate spreadsheets or tabs for each content type you deliver. For instance, you may have one tab for your blog, another for your newsletter, and another for Intranet announcements. How you break this up will depend on how you manage each content type.
Plan for special themes around the “seasons of the year” and “seasons of life” ideas from Step 3. Many magazines highlight different themes each month. You can apply a similar approach to your wellness editorial calendar. For example, you can pick the 12 biggest concerns your target audience has and address a different concern each month. You can also make predictions for the upcoming year or tie some of your content into holidays or seasonal concerns.

Take the seasons of the year and seasons of life concepts and plug them into your calendar. For example, if you want to include content about open enrollment of your health-care benefits plan, your calendar could include a series of messages well in advance of the enrollment date. You could write and design communication about holiday binge eating in October instead of right before Thanksgiving.

Vary your content types, and establish word-count lengths. Just as a magazine produces feature stories and smaller departments, your communication schedule should specify different content styles and lengths.

Here are some examples to include:
- Stand-alone articles, Q&A interviews, list of numbered tips
- Anecdotes from employees
- Statistics presented only in chart/graph form
- 140-character tweet

Build in components for higher frequency of communication. Your wellness promotion material doesn't have to be weighty — instead, you can send employees bite-sized informational nuggets more frequently. Delivering fresh, frequent content that consistently communicates the value of wellness can keep employees involved and motivated. Offer them reasons to keep logging into your wellness Web page and checking their email in-boxes.

Consider adding these content ideas to the calendar. Your team or wellness program participants can generate the content themselves:
- Recipe, health tips, office joke or Website link of the day/week
- Employee quote of the week
- Health/wellness topic of the month

Repurpose content in multiple sources, and cross-promote your media for increased engagement. Refer to your Intranet in your newsletter. Include links to your social media sites in your emails. Include a blog post about your new video. Develop an eBook based on the top 10 takeaways from a wellness event. Seeing the calendar at a glance makes these connections jump out more easily.

QUICK TIPS:
- Include a separate tab or space on your editorial calendar for new content ideas.
- When making your calendar, identify gaps in content. For example, if you're planning a new wellness program offering soon, you'll need content to explain and promote it. It's better to plan for these gaps early.
- Don't make the calendar complicated. You can keep it in an Excel file and use different tabs for each project. You can also try Google Calendar or another team collaboration tool to automatically send reminders when deadlines are approaching.
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Listen as Ben Slaugh and Janelle Connell of EMI Health discuss the company’s strategy for weekly wellness communication, and the importance of reaching employees “where they are.”

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**STEP 5:**
Adopt sharp editing and design.

**THE REAL CHALLENGE:**
Breaking through the communication clutter, especially when people don’t want to pay attention to one more message

As a workplace communicator, your task is to reach a large variety of workers, including people who struggle to read, and those who can read but either don’t take the time or simply tune out health information.

It’s an important challenge. In fact, only 12% of adults have adept health literacy, according to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy. Nearly nine out of 10 adults may lack skills needed to manage their health and prevent disease. Fourteen percent of adults (30 million people) have below basic health literacy. These individuals were more likely to report their health as poor (42%).

One-third of U.S. adults have trouble reading and acting on health-related information.

*Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy*

So as you prepare to deliver the material charted on your editorial calendar, you’re responsible for more than just ensuring it is readable. As a publisher, you need to edit, package, and present content that captivates on first glance, and educates upon closer inspection.
Human eyes perceive the written word in amazingly quick and consistent ways. Depending on how you arrange text and graphics on the page or screen, your reader’s brain will make a millisecond decision about whether to keep reading. For your wellness and benefits communication, this places a premium on knowing what to cut and keep, how to copy-edit for clarity, what to consider when choosing between photography and illustration, how to write headlines and email subject lines, and more.

Your challenge: to shape content by following the best practices of information design layout.

**THE TYPICAL PRACTICE:**
Assuming employees will absorb and retain messages, trying to cover too much and not applying the “scan test”

Most organizations incorrectly assume:

- The value of health messages is a given and tend to communicate the **what** *(features)* instead of the **why** *(benefits)*.
- Employees will read, instead of simply scan, content.
- It’s not worthwhile to encourage employees to make seemingly minor health changes and choices.
- They should say as much as possible in a single article or email.
- A corporate voice is more effective than a conversational one.

Here are other common mistakes:

- **Communication is confusing.** If your messages aren’t obvious, they can’t be understood. But wellness and benefits messages tend to be riddled with corporate-speak and jargon instead of clear, concise language aimed at a busy, short-attention-span workforce.

- **Each piece of content has more than one purpose.** Organizations hope to inform, inspire, entertain, persuade, express opinions, and share resources — but they shouldn’t try to do all those things at once. Each piece of content should have a single, clear purpose.

- **Important copy isn’t highlighted** or included as a call-out, and information isn’t presented in graphs or charts. Don’t make readers scroll down several screens to read an email, and don’t pass out an important internal brochure that lacks subheads, sidebars, pull quotes, boxes, and the like whenever possible, especially when presenting an idea better understood visually on first glance.
• **Headlines are afterthoughts.** Scannable elements should represent at least half of the effort put into a communication piece. Organizations typically don’t apply a quick scan test — can the average employee scan the material in seconds and understand the topic and main point?

• **Assignments are vague.** The people producing your wellness and benefits communication usually know how long to write *(word count)*, but they’re not given clear instruction and guidance about voice, visual elements, sidebars, pull quotes, and the need for plain language.

• **Copyrights are ignored.** Content must do more than hold a person’s attention — it must be accurate and legal to use. The Internet isn’t a free-for-all, but some organizations find what looks good and simply grab it for their wellness and benefits communication. Doing so affects quality, and publishers take copyright infringement and fair use laws seriously.

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**The Solution:**

**Edit and design for clarity, brevity, and quality.**

• **Be clear.** When workers receive wellness communication, it shouldn’t feel like more work.

  — **Stick to one message per piece.** Decide on your main concept and focus on getting that message across. Then stop. Future messages should discuss related concepts.

  — **Emphasize headlines.** Spend time on them so they: (1) pique interest and (2) accurately reflect the main point, in that order.

  — **Don’t bury the point.** Cut down your message to an “elevator speech” you can describe in a sentence or two. Make those words the first ones readers see.

  — **Use plain language.** Make your communication more approachable by embracing the first person. Using *I, me,* and *we* gives your employees something *(or someone)* to attach the ideas to, making those ideas more concrete. Also, use shorter words when possible. For example, use *so* instead of *therefore*.

  — **Start with the second or third paragraph.** When editing, nix the first paragraph or two, and see if the piece begins more clearly and powerfully — it usually does.

  — **Read the copy aloud.** This gives you a different perspective on writing, and enables you to hear your voice in your reader’s head. Ask yourself, “Would I want to read this?” If not, the best first move is to cut some copy.
— Make design a priority. Collect as many newsletters as you can, and lay them out on a conference table. Separate them into piles (Great, Good, Ugh, etc.), and gather a mixed group of people to examine what they like and don’t like about the designs. Make a list of the graphic treatments that work well, and the font styles the group finds most easy to read. (If your organization has existing brand colors, using these throughout your piece will reinforce your look.) Also, the newsletter’s layout is best when consistent from one issue to the next, with only minor modifications moving forward.

• Be brief. Based on several studies, press associations in the USA have laid down a readability table. Their survey shows readers find sentences of 8 words or less very easy to read, while sentences of 29 words or more, very difficult.

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**Readability based on words per sentence**

“You only have a minute to gain their attention” is an incorrect maxim. You have seconds. So do these things:

— **Set maximum word counts for each media.** When you create blocks of text, you create blockades to your readers’ feeling comfortable with plowing ahead. Cut your articles to a couple hundred words. Get your videos down to one minute, max. Stick to the main concept.

— **Use bulleted lists when including steps or tips.** Organizing information into bulleted lists makes it easier to read and process. This page (and entire eBook) is an example.

— **Find your “true north.”** Think of your main idea as the focal point on your compass. Put the idea front-and-center by getting to it immediately. For example, this eBook’s true north is five steps you can follow for effective, forward-thinking wellness and benefits communication.

— **Structure content with sections and subheads.** Breaking up copy into digestible parts is generally smart. For example, when structuring this eBook, we wanted to present reasons for each tip, spotlight current problems and mistakes, and list solutions.
To cut unnecessary description. Too often people attempt to give their ideas a little extra “oomph” by adding needless adjectives and adverbs around it, burying the idea itself beneath a mass of irrelevant detail. Instead of saying, “Our new, value-based, patient-focused health-care options are ideal for families seeking prudent, money-saving plans,” cut to the chase: “Our new health-care plans can help you save money.”

• Be right. Publishers pursue credibility. In the health world, fads are often mistaken for facts, and incorrect information abounds.

— Seek guidance from medical experts. If possible, an individual or group of medical experts should review content to ensure it’s medically sound and suitable for a consumer audience.

— Consider outsourcing the project for professional results. Pick a partner who has experience in writing and designing workplace communications, ensure they have an advisory board to review all content and ensure that you have an agreement on deadlines and commitments.

Ending Thought:
Promote the system and stay energized.

A total communication experience inspires, informs, shares, and celebrates the potential of the human spirit. It connects the employee, employer, and other team members with valuable, customized content that engages and motivates without preaching, criticizing, or fear-mongering. It creates an upbeat air of expectation. And it’s laced with humor and fun.

Engage Through Promotion, Reinforcement, and Feedback

Your program’s success boils down to how employees respond to the way you communicate the program, so follow these tips:

• Introduce (or reintroduce) the program with fun and energy. You can do this in many ways and through different media. One way to generate more interest in the wellness program is to send an introductory email that arms employees with a summary of what you’re doing and invites their participation. When you market the program, concentrate on quick clarity (think of billboards) rather than expounding on the wellness virtues. Before sending the email, hang a poster that entices employees to expect the message at a certain time, or include a brief message about the importance of participating during a staff meeting.
• **Continually promote and reinforce benefits.** Before crafting each workplace message, answer the question, “Why should employees notice or care?” Explicitly tell workers why a program matters and what it can do for them.

Keep in mind the “rule of seven” — a tactic that many marketers like to use. Information begins to sink in when you communicate a message seven times in seven different ways. This constant promotion/reinforcement concept will build a sense of urgency for your health promotion initiatives among employees.

• **In addition to informing, involving, and inviting, try IGNITING.** Most health communication aims to inform (*present facts, provide background, etc.*), involve (*clarify possibilities, present benefits, etc.*), or invite (*ask for participation*).

In addition, ignite! Try to take individuals’ commitment and transform it into a collective willingness to work toward a great cause. Excite their imaginations by talking about what will happen when their missions turn into milestones.

• **Realize that self-actualization motivates more effectively than incentives.** Wellness managers aiming to increase program participation often use “carrots” — incentives such as money, prizes, or time off — to entice employees to participate. Incentives can only do so much. These three intrinsic motivators are powerful, and should be part of your promotion and engagement strategy:
  
  — **Autonomy,** the urge to direct our own lives
  — **Mastery,** the desire to get better at something that matters
  — **Purpose,** the yearning to act in service of something larger than ourselves

• **Include calls-to-action whenever possible.** Push your initiatives forward by including calls-to-action.

The way you position your information, and how you motivate employees to respond, will have a strong impact on your goals’ success.

Ask employees to *do this now, sign up today,* and *click here.* You can do this more than once in the same piece. Use urgent words, compelling employees not to wait until tomorrow or next week to act.

• **Change the workplace environment to support health promotion and the program’s credibility.** Promote activity with walking paths, use signs to point to stairways, and offer healthier choices in vending machines and break rooms.
• **Create an easy feedback loop.** Employees often don’t feel engaged because their ideas and questions aren’t addressed. An effective suggestion system gives employees direct input and makes them feel empowered.

  — **Reward good ideas.** Your wellness program should satisfy employees’ health goals, and employees likely have great ideas for improvements and new possibilities. If a suggestion is valid, implement it.

  — **Make the process simple and accessible.** Employees should be able to send ideas and feedback in various ways, including a dedicated email address (*for example, wellnesssuggestions@abccompany.com*), a suggestion box placed in a convenient, prominent office location, and face-to-face.

  — **Encourage feedback from all workers.** Don’t restrict certain levels of employees from adding input. Equally weigh suggestions from all workers.

  — **Allow anonymity.** Health is a sensitive topic for many people, and some won’t want their names associated with suggestions. Provide employees the option to be nameless.

  — **Thank employees.** It’s simple but effective — a pat on the back or small gift encourages further suggestions and lets employees know you value their ideas and feedback. Build upon the peer-to-peer recognition concept developed in Step 2.

• **After the first year, perform a communications audit.** It will produce a clear understanding of how effective your wellness and benefits communication is, which of the five steps you should revisit, and how to better use existing and future resources to keep improving.

Quick questions to consider:

  — Is information readily accessible and easy to understand?
  — Are communications consistent, recognizable, and well-organized?
  — To what extent do your messages support your company’s overall objectives?
  — Are the messages targeted by employee life stage, disease stage, and other parameters?

Once you take stock of your results, poll employees (*through surveys or focus groups*) to learn how they get information about available programs, what programs are most valuable to them, and what they want to know more about. Doing this will lead you naturally back into Step 1.
Just how important is communication? When it comes to wellness programs, effective communication is not just a good idea, it’s a critical component if you want to engage employees so your health initiatives succeed. The process of creating communications doesn’t have to be difficult, it just needs to follow key steps — The Five Steps.

Turn to the Professionals and Our Workplace Communication Consulting Service

If you don’t have much publishing know-how, and the process seems intimidating, we can help you get started.

We offer a Workplace Communication Consulting Service. Our executive-level professionals are available to talk with you about your unique wellness and benefit communication challenges and offer a specific plan to help you establish an effective and sustainable communication program.

If you’d like to have a conversation with one of our top-level Workplace Communication Consultants call us at (269) 343-0770 or send an email to info@HopeHealth.com. We’ll set up a call right away to talk about your workplace communication needs.

QUICK CLICKS:

Check out these articles for even more clever tips and ideas on motivating your audience (© Health Enhancement Systems, hesonline.com):

• Making Wellness Rewarding... Without Rewards
• Is Your Incentive a Carrot or a Stick?

FILLING YOUR ToolKit:

The Five Step Wellness & Benefits Communication System ToolKit will save you time, money, and frustration. Find ready-to-go employee communication needs assessment, employee surveys, and other valuable tools, templates, and tips inside this handy kit. All ToolKit resources come standard with our Workplace Communication Consulting Service or may be purchased as a separate package for just $49.95.

QUICK TIPS:

• Build a consistent wellness brand. This may include a name, logo, color scheme, and/or an eye-catching message. The goal is to grab employees’ attention with something that is action-oriented.

• Organize a focus group to gather opinions that otherwise would have no outlet for expression, empowering employees to provide honest opinions and elaborate on others’ thoughts.

• Include actions to take or where to go for more information. Don’t leave readers hanging. If you’re including a story, determine what you want your readers to do with the information. If you want them to sign up for a new weight-management program, tell them so and provide them with a link, email, or location of where to sign up.
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