

Top Four Challenges HR is Facing in 2012... and How Communications Can Help

Challenge #1: Multiple Generations = Multiple Challenges

Today's workforce has four generations working. We once worried about the mass exodus that would occur when the Baby Boomers hit retirement age. But then we discovered that the Baby Boomers haven't saved enough money to retire yet. (Or maybe they just thoroughly enjoy working with their kids and grandkids.) We now have a workforce full of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Millennials. Each generation with their own set of needs, their own ways of communicating, and their own special way of driving us crazy.

Tips:

- Target communications — since each generation has their own set of needs, the communications should address their particular needs in order to have full impact and drive action.
- Use all communication vehicles — some grew up reading the newspaper; others grew up learning through the Internet; now kids are learning through text messages or alerts on their iPods. Our preferences for receiving information are different. You can have one communication piece but repurpose it through various communication tools.



Example for multiple generations:

Break down retirement communications to focus on each generation:

- **Baby Boomers:** Focus on saving to take that next step toward retirement.
- **Generation X and Y:** Discuss saving as much as possible but acknowledge they have other expenses, such as college tuition, hitting their wallets.
- **Millennials:** Illustrate the value of saving early for their future... even if that future is decades away.

Don't have the capability to target your communications? Make sure you at least use all the communication vehicles available to reach your various generations. You can send a printed piece to the home which appeases the Baby Boomers, include a link to a website for more information for the computer-savvy Generation X and Y, and include a QR code on your brochure for those Millennials with their smartphones. It's still one piece that you mail to homes (just as you may do today), but you've provided various channels for them to receive additional information.



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Challenge #2: Retaining Talent

You've found your superstars and they rock. They're the right fit for their job; the right fit for your organization; and you secretly hate them because they're so perfect. But then you read the studies that state "21 million Americans will change jobs in 2012."* You want to believe that your superstars don't fall into that category... but do you know that? Aside from handcuffing them to their chairs, what can you do to keep your valued employees?

Tips:

- Show appreciation — employees want to feel appreciated. People make decisions based on emotions and then justify their decision with facts**. Feeling appreciated will help your employees feel valuable to the organization.
- Connect with top performers — working with your top performers to map out their career path shows that you see them in the future of the organization. Simple informal communications, such as one-on-one conversations, touch-base emails or a simple phone call, can help your employees feel more connected with the organization.



Example of retaining talent:

We've seen companies print thank you cards with their HR branding on the front and then HR or the manager can write a note or stick a gift card into the thank you as a way of sharing appreciation. It serves multiple purposes:

1. Shares the appreciation with the employee.
2. Reminds the employee that the company cares for them (this should also be reinforced through the HR branding).
3. Provides an opportunity to informally communicate with the employee.
4. Increases the employee's perceived value to the organization.

Sources:

*2011 Harris Interactive and Cornerstone OnDemand Research Study

***Influence, the Psychology of Persuasion* by Dr. Robert Cialdini and *Switch* by Chip and Dan Heath



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Challenge #3: Being A Strategic Business Partner

A recent study conducted by the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California states “HR functions often collect data on their efficiency. However, they often do not collect data on the business impacts of their programs and practices. This is a crucial point because the results show that those HR organizations that collect effectiveness data are more likely to be strategic partners. This finding suggests that if HR wants to play a strategic role in organizations it needs to develop its ability to measure how human capital decisions affect the business and how business decisions affect human capital.”

Being a strategic business partner takes different forms for different organizations. However, when it comes to communication, three steps are important:

1. Plan
2. Tie everything back to the business plan
3. Measure results

We’ve seen leadership get involved, budget dollars come in and initiatives rolled out smoothly when there has been a clear plan that is tied back to the company’s overall strategy.

Tips:

- Create a plan — write a plan for the whole year — timing, messages and impacted staff/employees. In the end, you should have a complete plan of how the entire year will look from your end (workload, deadlines, etc.) and the employees’ perspectives (how many times you’ll be communicating with them, what actions they need to take, etc.) Be sure to include measurable goals for each campaign.
- Get approval and buy-in — not only from senior leadership, but also your team and managers. If everyone’s working off the same plan, then it’ll seem smooth and seamless to employees.
- Measure results — results can be measured in many ways. Did you increase participation in the 401(k) plan (numbers of participants or dollars invested)? What percentage of the population did you move to the lower-cost health plan and what were the cost savings? How many completed the biometric screening? Whatever goals you set for each campaign, they should be measurable and meaningful.



Example for strategic business partner:

Several strategic HR staffs are making sure their annual communications plan ties back to the company’s mission, vision and strategic goals.

ABC Company strategic goal: Attract and retain talent.

ABC Company HR communications objective: Raise awareness around the value of our benefit plans and programs so that they are accepted as an attractive, valuable reward for working for ABC Company.



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Challenge #4: Is it Time to Reboot Your Approach to Technology?

Today, information is at our fingertips... literally. Employees are receiving messages on their work phones, home phones, personal cell phones, computers, mailboxes, etc. It's fair to say we are in a stage of information overload. But is it confusing your employees? Do they know where to go for information?

Tips:

- Know what your employees are using — before you start tweeting all of your messages out to your employees, make sure Twitter is really on their radar. Perhaps your employees prefer email and haven't quite ventured out into the social media world. You can still use social media, but make sure you've also used the main vehicles that your employees use.
- Make sure you understand the restrictions in place within your company — what do your policies say? Maybe your policies need to be updated to allow for more communication through different technology vehicles. Do you have a firewall? If you want your message heard, employees should be able to access it from work and home.



Example for technology:

At open enrollment time, some companies use their various technology vehicles to remind employees to take action. One message — “Take action by November 11 to make any changes to your benefits for 2012.” Several technology vehicles:

- Email to employee's work email
- Recorded message sent to employee's work voicemail
- Text message sent to employees listing their cell phone number (and listed that they'd accept message from the company)
- Reminder posted on company's intranet site (and Internet site, if intranet is not accessible from home)
- Twitter alerts to remind employees of the deadline
- Article posted on internal company blog

Overwhelmed? Write On Target can help.

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