

When I get ready to talk to people, I spend two thirds of the time thinking what they want to hear and one third thinking about what I want to say. - Abraham Lincoln
The problem with communication ... is the illusion that it has been accomplished. - George Bernard Shaw
Communication works for those who work at it. - John Powell

CAN THEY HEAR YOU NOW? COMMUNICATING WELLNESS EFFECTIVELY

Some wellness programs designed with the best of intentions often do not succeed because they lack an effective communication plan. Such a plan is important because it can help increase employee participation and engagement. Once employees take advantage of wellness program components, they can improve their health.



Wellness communication is more than just putting up flyers to announce a health fair. It is a group of strategies employed to ensure that wellness and health related information reach employees and move them towards better health. This requires:

- Name and brand recognition
- Consistent messaging
- Multiple communication channels
- Repetition and reinforcement
- The four Rs: reliability, relevance, repetition and reinforcement

Name and Brand Recognition

When developing a communication plan, the cornerstone of it should be a name and brand for the wellness program. A wellness program should have its own identity and be easy for employees to recognize.

The name of a worksite wellness program should be unique and representative of the company and its employee. You may want to consider including employees' input when selecting a name by setting up a contest or assigning it as a task for the

wellness committee. Once there is a name for the wellness program, you can use that to build a logo that complements the name.

No matter how you select a name for your wellness program, use it regularly so that it is well recognized by employees. Here are some ideas:

- Establish a dedicated e-mail account using the wellness program name. This will readily identify communications from the wellness program
- Include the wellness program name on printed materials, including any promotional prizes
- When mentioning the wellness program in staff meetings, refer to it by name and not "the company wellness program"

Consistent Messaging

A mark of an effective communication plan in any place is consistent messaging. It is important when selling a product or service and is as equally important when encouraging employees to live healthier.

Frame your message: To ensure a consistent message, you must first create or frame that message. Frame your message to align with your wellness program. Whatever key message(s) you want to emphasize to employees, they would be better received if they match program goals and components. This does not mean that a company which does not offer cessation services should not encourage employees to quit tobacco use, but it would be a harder sell to employees.

Include Vendors: Wellness vendors and health insurance carriers are important partners for so many reasons, including ensuring consistent messaging to employees. They also provide health information to employees, usually through collateral material they have developed or purchased. Work with them to ensure that the health information they are sharing with employees is consistent with the wellness program. For example, if heart disease is a key part of your program, work with your health insurance carrier(s) to conduct targeted mailings to employees that have existing diagnoses. The carrier can do this in a manner that protects the privacy and medical information of the employees.

Establish an information center: The involvement of various parties can often result in confusion and inconsistency in messaging. You should designate one person (or team) to coordinate wellness



WELLNESS WATCH

As employers are faced with increasingly difficult financial pressure, they are growing more concerned about their greatest expense: the health of their employees. A study by Pricewaterhouse Coopers showed that more employers are dissatisfied with their health insurers. Despite efforts at shifting costs to employees, employers want insurers to provide: 1) meaningful, high-quality data that can identify waste; 2) more personal health technology; and 3) strategies to better engage employees. For more on the report, go to <http://www.pwc.com/us/whatemployerswant>.

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communication. This individual would serve as a gatekeeper, reviewing and being involved in the development of communication materials (brochures, mailings, flyers, etc). Some other things this person can do include:

- Preparing and sending e-mails to employees
- Helping to plan kick-off and other wellness events
- Responding to employee inquiries related to the wellness program

Multiple Communication Channels

In today's society, there is no shortage of information. There are a variety of channels for educating, informing and connecting with other people.

Paper: Paper is a conventional method of communication and still proves to be a useful tool for wellness programs. Flyers on bulletin boards inform employees of upcoming events and paycheck stuffers can be used to promote a campaign or share healthy recipes. When using paper media:

- Keep things simple and easy to read. Don't clutter the writing area with too many words and technical terms
- Use color and attention-grabbing images/graphics
- Make sure not to waste paper. Print just enough flyers for posting and print paycheck stuffers multiples on a sheet so you can cut them to size
- Remember to keep bulletin boards clean, organized and up to date

Electronic: Electronic media has added new dimensions to communications. With intranet, e-mail and discussion boards, you can greatly expand the reach of wellness communication. Some things you can do include:

- Developing an online health resource page that can be added to the company intranet for easy access to health information
- Sending out monthly e-newsletters with fitness tips, healthy recipes and health observances

Word of mouth: Although it is low-tech and may be considered archaic, word of mouth continues to be an effective channel of communication. Employees that can serve as a mouthpiece for the wellness program and promote activities and components are an asset. You may consider such individuals wellness champions or ambassadors. By sharing their success stories and adding a personal touch to the wellness program, these individuals help legitimize the program and win the trust of other employees.

Four Rs: Reliability, Relevance, Repetition and Reinforcement

As you craft your wellness message(s) and develop activities, keep in mind the importance of relevance, reliability, repetition and reinforcement.

Reliability: Good communication must be founded upon good information. A basic internet search on a health topic could yield some sources that are not credible and others which may be little more than marketing schemes. Make sure that all wellness communication is based on credible information from reputable health organizations (American Heart Association, etc), universities and government agencies.

Relevance: Many people glance over wellness information because they don't think it relates to them. They may not see themselves as fitness buffs or may think health changes are too complicated or expensive. You will need to:

- Know your employees. Use surveys and health assessments to identify the key health issues, concerns and interest of your employee population
- Keep information actionable. Don't overstate the problem, but tell employees what steps they should be taking to improve their health.

Repetition: Those in the field of health education understand that communication requires repetition. It is by conveying the same information in different ways and at different times that the target audience understands and acts on that information. For example, to promote fruits and vegetables during National Nutrition Month in March,

- Use table tents to share tips on buying and preparing fruits and vegetables
- Feature a fruit and vegetable on the bulletin board, including their benefits
- Include area farmers markets as a paystub insert

Reinforcement: Integrating wellness communication into the culture at your worksite can help to reinforce your wellness message(s).

- Get leadership at your company to author communication that includes wellness messages. They may even be able to author kick-off and other announcements to employees
- Consider healthy changes to your office and work location like adding a water cooler and including nuts and dried fruit in the vending machine
- Allow employees to take walking breaks during the work day or encourage stretch breaks

Health Observances

March

National Sleep Awareness Week® (March 7-13)
National Sleep Foundation
www.sleepfoundation.org

World Kidney Day (March 11)
National Kidney Foundation
www.kidney.org/news/wkd/index.cfm

American Diabetes Alert Day (March 23)
American Diabetes Association
www.diabetes.org

National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month
Cancer Research and Prevention Foundation
www.preventcancer.org/colorectal

National Kidney Month
American Dietetic Association
www.eatright.org

National Nutrition Month®
American Dietetic Association
www.eatright.org

Workplace Eye Health and Safety Month
Prevent Blindness America
www.preventblindness.org

April

Alcohol Awareness Month
SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
ncadi.samhsa.gov

Cancer Control Month
American Cancer Society
www.cancer.org

STD Awareness Month
American Social Health Association
www.ashastd.org

May

North American Occupational Safety and Health Week (May 2-8)
American Society of Safety Engineers
Canadian Society of Safety Engineering
U.S. Occupational Safety & Health Administration
www.asse.org/naosh

National Women's Health Week (May 9-15)
US DHHS - Office on Women's Health
www.womenshealth.gov/whw

National Employee Health & Fitness Day (May 19)
National Association for Health and Fitness
www.physicalfitness.org

American Stroke Month
American Heart Association
www.americanheart.org

Asthma and Allergy Awareness Month
Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America
www.aafa.org

Mental Health Month
Mental Health America
www.mentalhealthamerica.net

National High Blood Pressure Education Month
National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute
hin.nhlbi.nih.gov/nhbpep_kit/

Better Sleep Month
Better Sleep Council
www.bettersleep.org



RESOURCE CORNER

OTHER GEORGIA PROGRAMS

Georgia's Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative

The goal of Georgia's Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative is to prevent and control obesity and other chronic diseases through the promotion of breastfeeding, healthy eating and physical activity initiatives.

You can read the Initiative's 10-year plan at <http://health.state.ga.us/pdfs/familyhealth/nutrition/NutritionandPhysicalActivityPlanFINAL.pdf>.

For more information on Georgia's Nutrition and Physical Activity Initiative, go to <http://health.state.ga.us/nutandpa/>.

RESOURCE MATERIALS

Bay Area Nutrition and Physical Activity Collaborative (BANPAC) - Healthy Vending Machine Toolkit

In an effort to assist organizations and communities develop and implement healthy vending machine policies, BANPAC has created the Healthy Vending Machine Toolkit. This Toolkit provides help with Assessment, Policy Development and Evaluation. http://www.banpac.org/healthy_vending_machine_toolkit.htm.

Rockland County Department of Health-Salad Club

In recognition of National Nutrition Month, you can establish a salad club at your worksite. Resources and salad recipes are available at <http://www.co.rockland.ny.us/health/FC/H/wellness/salad/club.htm>.

UPCOMING EVENTS

National Retail Clinic Summit
March 1-2, 2010 - Philadelphia, PA
<http://www.retailclinicsummit.com/>

Art & Science of Health Promotion Conference
March 15-19, 2010 - Hilton Head Island, SC
<http://www.healthpromotionjournal.com/>

AAOHN Annual Conference
April 13-15, 2010 - Anaheim, CA
<https://www.aaohn.org/conference-items/aaohn-2010-annual-conference.html>

AHIP Wellness 2010
April 21, 28 & May 5, 2010 - Virtual Seminar
<http://www.ahip.org/links/wellness2010/>

10th IHPM Int'l Health & Productivity Conf
March 29-31, 2010 - Orlando, FL
11th IHPM Health & Productivity Conf
April 4-6, 2010 - Orlando, FL
<http://www.ihpm.org/>

7th Annual Nutrition & Health Conference
May 9-12, 2010 - Atlanta, GA
<http://www.nutritionandhealthconf.org/>

WORKSITE WELLNESS IN THE NEWS

[Patient Money: How to Find Mental Health Care When Money is Tight](#) - *New York Times*, November 21, 2009

[Health Care Savings May Start in Employee Diets](#) - *New York Times*, November 29, 2009

[Do health Care Savings Start in the Cafeteria?](#) - *New York Times*, November 29, 2009

[Myth of the Deficient Older Employee](#) - *New York Times*, December 13, 2009

[Reduction of Family-Friendly Job Benefits Hurts Working Women Most](#) - *US News*, December 14, 2009

[Tobacco-rich NC Bans Smoking in Bars, Restaurants](#) - *USA Today*, January 2, 2010

[Get Fit on a Budget](#) - *Wall Street Journal*, January 17, 2010

[Think Happy Thoughts at Work](#) - *Wall Street Journal*, January 27, 2010

[Medicine at Work Bring the Doctor to You](#) - *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, January 28, 2010

[Workers Fear Stigma of Seeking Mental Health Care](#) - *BusinessWeek*, January 31, 2010

[Wellness Efforts Face Hurdle](#) - *Wall Street Journal*, February, 2010

[How Disease Management Works](#) - *BusinessWeek*, February 4, 2010

[Take Your Meds, Exercise and Spend Billions](#) - *BusinessWeek*, February 4, 2010

[Speed Bump on Incentives](#) - *New York Times*, February 5, 2010

[At least 5 Dead in Connecticut Power Plant Blast](#) - *Reuters*, February 7, 2010

[Even When Treated, Depression Costs Employers](#) - *Reuters*, February 9, 2010

[Audit Raised Concerns About a Union Administrator Before Charges Were Filed](#) - *New York Times*, February 10, 2010



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