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Effective Communication Drives Benefit Satisfaction

Let's face it: most employers have had the unenviable task of communicating a lot of grim news during the 2009 enrollment period. Due to rate increases— we saw some that were 15% and higher – employees have been hearing about higher copayments, increased contributions, and more. It's enough to make the typical employee flinch when the next e-mail message or newsletter hits his or her desk!

Well, maybe it wasn't *quite* that bad. In fact, our experience at BeneCom has been that communicating the rationale behind these changes has been effective in the short term. For instance, according to the latest *Study of Employee Benefits Trends* produced by MetLife, that approach seems to be working. The survey found that employees generally are more satisfied with their benefits than at any time since 2007. They have not cut back on participation in their benefits and, importantly, see their employers as being the primary source for providing those benefits.

Interestingly, *Trends* also revealed that employees are beginning to see their benefits' wellness programs as worth having. They're connecting participation in those programs with contributing to better health and productivity! All this is good news and demonstrates that combining thoughtful benefits planning with effective communication is having a positive effect.

For these reasons employers should plan to step up their 2010 communication efforts when considering their benefit initiatives. Effective communication will continue to reinforce employees' understanding and acceptance of these initiatives and go a long way toward setting the stage for the future.

When developing your follow-up communication plan, here are four proven techniques you might want to keep in mind:

- **Tell it like it is.** Employees are much more likely to accept change when they understand the "whys" that made it necessary. And don't waffle or try to sugarcoat it. Be straightforward in your explanation. It helps to use actual facts and figures and, since a picture is worth a thousand words, don't hesitate to include charts or graphs to provide visual impact.
- **Once is not enough.** One memo, one e-mail or one article in your organization's newsletter isn't enough. Repetition is important for your message to be effective. It's the same concept advertisers use when they show us the same advertisements over and over again. You can deliver your message using different words, but reiterating the thrust of your message not only drives home your point, it broadens the scope of your communication to those who may not have gotten it the first time around.

- **Use different media.** Rather than sticking to the same delivery method time after time, consider using e-mail, payroll stuffers, memos, the organization's intranet site or posters to get your message across. It also helps if the head of your organization and other department managers weave your message into their communication with employees. It reinforces the messages and adds validity to the rationale behind the change. If necessary, give other managers briefing notes so everyone is on message.
- **Develop a communication calendar.** Knowing what you're going to say and when you're going to say it helps keep your messages focused and your creative and production efforts on track. We've found that it also is very effective in helping us manage our communication budgets. A few minutes of planning avoids overtime and rush charges.

While changes in benefits that affect employees negatively are never popular, a good communications strategy coupled with effective tactics — ones that address the rationale behind the changes clearly and consistently — will go a very long way to improving understanding and acceptance.

When would be a good time to begin your follow-up communication plan?
There's no time like the present!

BeneCom has over 17 years of experience helping employers communicate with their employees. Let us help you develop a strategy and tactics that will help you successfully communicate with your employees in a way that educates, increases satisfaction and engages employees in a cost-effective fashion. **BeneCom Associates offers effective benefit communication strategies for every budget.**

To learn more about us call **860.674.2626** or visit us [online](#).