



MASSACHUSETTS

## Establishing Internal Communications as a Strategic Corporate Function

When I began working at BlueCross BlueShield, neither employees nor senior management saw Internal Communications as a valuable entity. My goal was to convince people in the company that effective employee communications should be a key business process, driven by business strategy, which, in turn, would create a more productive and committed workforce. To do this, I took advantage of emerging technologies and brokered mutually supportive partnerships company-wide. I established multiple channels of communications, and delivered timely, effective, and measurable communications to help drive the success of corporate goals.

Introduced video, electronic messaging boards, and other new technologies to better inform employees.



Over time, as the company came to appreciate the value of strategic internal communications, particularly during a time of challenges and rapid corporate change, I increased the communication team from two to seven members. Together, we found new ways to engage and inform employees, making communications more useful, easier to access, and easier to understand. We introduced videos and electronic messaging boards, and we organized regular meetings between senior executives and employees where company matters and industry concerns were discussed openly and honestly.

Surveys indicated that employee satisfaction with company communications nearly doubled during my tenure as Director of Internal Communications.

### **CHALLENGE:**

To transform an ineffective corporate function into a critical, vibrant, and respected entity that contributed to the fulfillment of corporate goals.

### **STRATEGY:**

Establish mutually supportive partnerships with select business units and leaders to generate enthusiasm and support for an improved and expanded internal communications function, which would produce “need to know” and targeted information to employees — at all levels — in a timely and effective manner. Create opportunities for the employees to explore company and industry topics more deeply, establishing a better understanding of corporate strategies and goals. Consistently employ a range of communication vehicles to let employees know that they are valued and critical to the success of the company.

## TACTICS:

- Assess employees'
  - understanding of corporate mission and goals,
  - communication needs and learning preferences
  - perception of their roles and value within the corporate structure

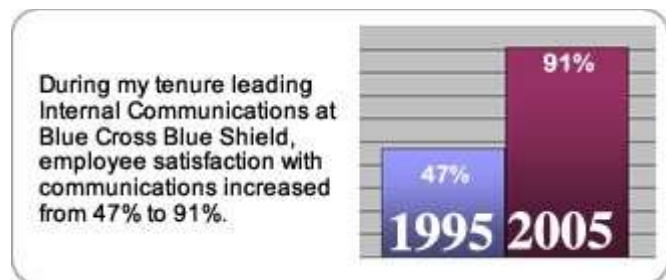
## Based on the assessment:

- Implement a variety of targeted communication approaches — including electronic, web-based, video, face-to-face meetings, and hard copy — to alert employees at all levels to “need to know” information
- Introduce new vehicles to support corporate initiatives
- Provide opportunities and information to give employees a broader understanding of Blue Cross Blue Shield goals and the health care industry
- Develop vehicles to recognize employees’ contributions and efforts
- Establish a comfortable platform for interaction between employees and senior leaders
- Survey employees every year to measure progress
- Create a "Diversity Speaker Series" to support company values and community goals

## RESULTS:

During my eight-year tenure as Manager and Director of Employee Communications at Blue Cross Blue Shield:

- Employee satisfaction with internal communications rose from 47% to 91%, and those rating it excellent rose by 10% in just a two-year period (37% -47%). By 2005, associates “knowledge of corporate goals” stood at 99% and the percentage of employee who cited “the grapevine” as a source of information declined overall from 21% to 4%
- Our department established a “best practice” standard for corporations and served as a model for other Blues plans
- The company came to recognize the importance of Internal Communications as a strategic partner and a critical element in measuring the success of the company; as well as the importance of associate contributions to that success
- New, targeted communication vehicles helped support corporate strategies, including new membership goals, while increasing member satisfaction



- Internal Communications grew from a two-person entity that used old and ineffective communications techniques into a vibrant, seven-person department that interacted effectively throughout the company. The team supported corporate strategies and goals by using a variety of communication channels: producing videos, using the company's intranet to deliver company news quickly and effectively, and maintaining electronic message boards at multiple locations
- I managed successful, multi-faceted communications campaign to inform and support the move of 1,400+ employees from one corporate headquarters to another. This effort was recognized with a Golden Quill Award from the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC)
- Integrated communications approaches — video, face-to-face, and electronic — successfully supported many initiatives, including the appointment of a new president and COO and the ultimate transition from one CEO to another.

