

# Proactive Benefits Communication Reassures Employees



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**In the absence of communication, the employee grapevine thrives.**

*By Karen M. Gustin, LLIF, Ameritas Group, Lincoln, Nebraska*

The current economic challenge is forcing many businesses to identify what is most important to the company and operations. While many want to take good care of employees by providing quality benefit packages, they are struggling with the realities of the market, including tight budgets and slower business growth. In a recent study by the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans, employers reported making plans to redesign employee benefits in order to cut costs.

## **EMPLOYEES WORRY ABOUT BENEFIT CHANGES**

While employees recognize that benefits cost employers a significant amount of money, they worry that the insurance plans and other benefits they value the most will be affected. They are nervous that benefit changes will result in higher out-of-pocket costs with increased deductibles and co-pays, lower coverage options, or elimination of valued benefit plans.

When employees are worried about benefits, their motivation can suffer, resulting in lower levels of performance and productivity.

Employers need to adopt proactive communications to keep employees updated on benefits. Employees want to know what to expect, so they can make appropriate plans and decisions. In the absence of information, the employee grapevine thrives.

### ***Here are seven suggestions for enhancing communication efforts:***

1. Develop a strategy for open and frequent communication about benefits through many channels and methods, such as team or department meetings, email, informational sessions at lunch or during breaks, posters, payroll stuffers, or audio or DVD messages. Communicate frequently and thoroughly to ensure the information on the grapevine is accurate and complete. Don't wait until you have all the details to begin sharing news with employees.
2. Personalize messages to reach different groups of employees with the information or details that are important to them.
3. Break information into small topics that are clear and concise. Provide charts that illustrate the facts. Most people read charts and illustrations before they read the copy.
4. Provide employees with ready access to information. Offer 24-hour comprehensive plan information via the company web site. Ensure that information is easy to find and understand.
5. Provide reliable lists of resources for employees to research information online, such as [www.medicinenet.com](http://www.medicinenet.com), [www.edoctoronline.com](http://www.edoctoronline.com), [www.webmd.com](http://www.webmd.com), or [www.mayoclinic.com](http://www.mayoclinic.com).

6. Listen to employees' ideas and concerns. Ask for feedback on the information provided, and follow up as needed.

7. Regularly evaluate communication messages and methods and adjust as necessary to maintain open relationships with employees.

### **PROVIDE VALUE, NOT JUST INFORMATION**

Research by Watson Wyatt's global services center confirms that businesses with highly effective communication programs experience a 47 percent higher return in employee productivity and performance. Give your business this advantage in a tough economy by strengthening your own proactive employee communications program.

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