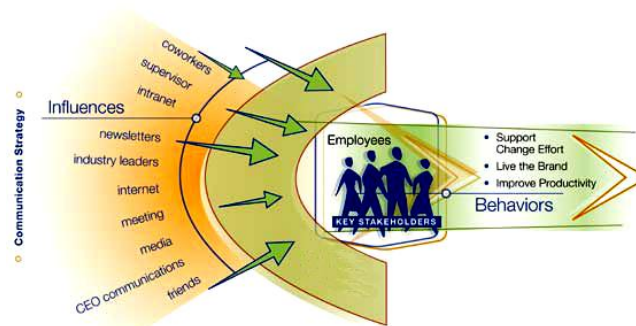


Don't Let High Tech Replace High Touch

By
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I know people who make phone calls hoping the person they're calling isn't there, so that they can leave a voice mail without having to actually have a discussion. Individuals who sit 20 feet from one another send emails to each other rather than going into one another's offices to talk face to face. Some folks use the anonymity of blogs to write uninformed, inaccurate, prejudiced, grammatically incorrect drivel about issues, people and companies. Executives, who are competent in many areas, can fail miserably because they don't know how to communicate.

Communication ... most of us stink at it. And that includes the organizations that we're part of.

According to Gallup, 69% of employees are not engaged or are actively disengaged on the job. The "actively disengaged" group alone costs businesses \$370 billion annually in lower productivity.

It's Easier to "Dictate" Than it is to "Communicate"

Apparently this trend is due in large part to companies', both large and small, inability to "connect" with employees ... to communicate. As a result, these organizations experience declines in innovation and growth while competitors attract and keep the best employees.

Employees decide every day how hard they'll work and how well, and they treat customers accordingly. Often the grapevine and the media have more credibility than senior management. These same employees spend a lot of time talking about the organizations they work for ... on and off the job. What they say often depends on whether they understand and believe in the company's strategy and if they are committed to making it happen.

So what can be done? More and more companies are putting internal communications on an equal par with external communications like marketing and public relations. Whether they have 20 employees or 2,000 employees, internal communications is quickly becoming an important tool to engage, educate, build enthusiasm and gain "buy in" to the company's vision, goals and values.

B&M helps several companies communicate regularly to employees via newsletters (both printed and electronic), training sessions, recognition programs, meetings with executives, contests and special events. All of these tools are aimed at letting employees know what is going on within company now, what is going to happen in the future ... and why.

Employees at some companies have little or no understanding of why new policies and procedures are put in place, and as a result they disengage from the responsibility of helping their employers attain competitive goals. They have no idea when open

positions will be filled, or if they will be filled. They only know that they have to pick up the slack created by a smaller work force. These employees do not feel part of a “team” because their employers do not “regularly” communicate corporate goals, pertinent industry news or rationale behind programs, procedures and decisions.

On the other hand, companies with organized internal communications programs find that employees’ morale is higher, productivity improves and retention rates are above average.

Internal Communication Programs Reap Many Benefits

One of our clients, Blackhawk Transport, keeps its employees in the loop. The company holds monthly drivers’ meetings that include top management. In addition, Blackhawk’s bi-monthly newsletter contains useful information about the company and its direction ... along with safety information, facts about new personnel, the state of the trucking industry and even some humor. Employees are encouraged to provide feedback on the effectiveness of new procedures and recommendations on other changes that could be made to help the company and its team members grow.

The company recently used its employee newsletter to announce and explain a new fuel conservation program. In subsequent issues, the company informed employees how the program was proceeding and even printed the fuel consumption statistics for its top 20 trucks. Imagine that. They got employees on board with a down-to-earth explanation of why the program was needed and then publicized how well employees were doing in meeting fuel consumption goals. Employees had something to talk about. Some of them had something to brag about.

The company’s web site is also designed to be “employee friendly”; providing a single source for information employees frequently need and a means to provide feedback to the company.

Blackhawk has learned that organizations with high levels of employee engagement enjoy increased worker retention and gain enthusiastic advocates for the company as a whole. In fact, Blackhawk’s number one resource for attracting new employees is its existing workforce.

Today’s employees expect a two-way dialogue about business issues and challenges. That’s why effective communication is a must for organizations striving to improve performance and keep their best performers. B&M helps companies implement strategic organizational programs that generate dialog by:

- Communicating the direction and objectives of the organization.
- Elaborating on the reason behind decisions.
- Communicating the roles employees play in helping the organizations meet objectives.
- Discussing the effect business decisions will have on employees.
- Engaging employees by soliciting input and providing effective feedback mechanisms in the process.
- Recognizing employee performance.
- Celebrating accomplishments and milestones.

By implementing a carefully thought-out internal communications program, organizations can leverage benefits for maximum advantage. Employee engagement can be the catalyst that leads a company to increased levels of productivity, creativity and bottomline results.

The key is an effective internal communication plan which includes regular communication of information relating to the company, external factors affecting the company and the decisions the company makes based on those factors.

Organized, regular internal communications...it’s not just for mega-corporations.



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