

‘Selling’ employee benefits: 5 ways to repackaging perks & increase participation

It can be frustrating when employees don't rush to take part in optional benefits like elder care services, financial-planning seminars or even the EAP program.

But don't take it personally; just one in four employees participate in discretionary benefits, according to industry estimates. That's because different benefits are relevant to employees at different points in their lives.

Yet when an employee does need help with a childcare referral, retirement planning tips or some other assistance, the availability of your benefits can go a long way toward relieving stress and keeping that person happily employed.

The two keys to greater use of your work/life benefits: constant communication and the right kind of communication. Here are five suggestions to achieve those goals:

1. No news = no use. You've heard the saying, "No news is good news." Forget it. If employees don't receive constant reminders about a benefit, they'll forget it was ever there.

It's not enough to introduce a benefit with a one-time internal marketing blitz. If you publicize a benefit for new parents, the only employees who will take note are new parents. What about the employee who becomes a new parent six months later? And what about new hires?

Reintroduce your benefits at least once a quarter. And publicize anything that employees might consider a benefit: everything from the obvious, like a daycare center, to the subtle, like a relaxed dress code.

2. Commit to a communication schedule, and stick with it. Check the calendar: Is there a good month to talk about childcare—like May, when we celebrate Mother's Day, or August, when school starts? Find a "hook," something you can attach your information to that makes sense and grabs attention.

3. Use all communication tools available, including email, in-house social media or intranet, podcasts, your employee newsletter, fliers in every employee mailbox, paycheck inserts, bulletin boards, even bathroom walls.

4. Mail information to employees' homes, where spouses and children, who might not know about the services, can read about them.

5. Teach employees to rethink common benefits. The EAP, for instance, is thought of as being for employees in distress. But if you make an effort to explain that the benefit is also for employees who provide elder care, members of that group might realize it has more to offer than they thought.

After one large health care organization tried this approach, half of its EAP calls the next quarter were about elder care, up from 19% the quarter before. Likewise, explain that services like backup emergency care—typically thought of as a childcare benefit—are available for eldercare.