

## Eli's Rehab Report

### Staffing Strategies: Improve Internal Communication With This Easy 4-Step Strategy

**Start evaluating and then enhancing your communication system.**

Excellent communication is important for every healthcare provider, but are you looking beyond communication with patients and the community? If you're not working on internal communication as well, you're doing your practice a disservice.

It stands to reason that if employees know what the organization is trying to achieve and how they can contribute, they are likely to be better able to contribute  and most employees do like to do the right thing.

Continually improving internal communication throughout your organization can prove challenging. Take a look at these expert tips on proven ways to enhance your company's communication strategies.

#### **Step 1: Evaluate What You Already Have**

Before you can determine where  or even if  your communication system is lacking, you need to evaluate what you already have in place. The easiest approach is often to evaluate employees' perceptions of the current approach. But you need to note that this does not necessarily relate to effectiveness of communication.

Start with focus groups made up of employees from various departments and levels within the organization to discuss and evaluate the current system. During the communication evaluation, identify these key components:

- What methods of communication are you currently using within the organization?
- Are some departments communicating better than others? If so, how?
- What information are you communicating through each method of communication?
- Do the current methods work and are the employees getting the information they need to do their jobs and to be content within the organization?
- Where are there communication gaps, and why?

#### **Step 2: Start Small, and Add On**

With technology being what it is these days, you have a variety of ways you can communicate with your employees. Consider telephone trees, faxes, the internet, a company intranet, emails, regular in-person meetings and pieces such as memos and newsletters. You should pick one method at a time and perfect that one before adding another method.

**Determine what works for you:** Evaluate whether your company would benefit from communication such as weekly organizational updates from the CEO or the human resources director. Have each department head send in a brief update for the department and compile them all into one document or email. Or would a monthly in-person meeting that is mandatory for every employee work better? The answers to these questions all depend on the needs of your employees. Most likely a combination of some, or even all, of the approaches mentioned above will work out best.

**Consider this:** Newsletters and intranets don't really communicate. They may move some information around to a few people if you are lucky. You need to find a way to get executives out to talk with employees in groups where they can discuss issues  no more than about 40 people so there can be real discussions.

**Tip:** Different forms of communication may work better for various people and departments in your organization. For example, email notices may work better for office personnel who spend several hours a day working at a computer than

for physicians or therapists who are seeing patients for most of the day.

**Warning:** Use caution when you're communicating through electronic means such as email and even teleconferences. You should share information about big changes, potentially bad news or any communication that could be emotionally charged in a face-to-face atmosphere that encourages questions and open discussion.

### **Step 3: Don't Do All the Talking**

Talking and disseminating information is only half of the communication process. You need to be sure you're listening as well. Give your employees a way to communicate with others, from their direct coworkers to higher management and human resources.

Listening is important in many aspects of the workplace from teamwork to performance reviews. Listening isn't just about conveying information; it's also about building relationships. Employing effective listening as part of your overall communications strategy will help promote morale and reduce turnover.

### **Step 4: Reevaluate Each Year**

The only way you're going to improve your organization's communication is to ask your employees whether the company is effectively communicating. Regularly check in with various people to see how they feel communication is going and to solicit new ideas for ways to improve.

One year after the initial focus group review, perform an employee survey focusing on communications. This gives your organization a chance to find out what is working and what is not, make improvements and then measure and benchmark against national norms later.