

Data and strategic communication planning improves CEO scores

When a leader rose to the top to become CEO of a Fortune 50 health benefits company, it was a defining moment for her as well as employees. Research points to the first 12 months on the job as critical to winning over the trust and confidence in employees (not to mention key external stakeholders). The CEO looked to the Internal Communications team to raise the bar on how the CEO, leaders and employees communicated, and the communications team turned to two agencies for support; they failed and lost precious time. Six months in her role, the reality was grim: there was no CEO communications plan, no strategic internal communications plan for the organization, and there was no data on what employees needed in their communications.

In less than one month, The Grossman Group armed the company with both. They fielded the company's first-ever Internal Communications Climate Index™ to measure key dimensions that shape employee perceptions about communications, including CEO and senior leadership communications. Not surprisingly, the data found a real need for improvement, especially senior leadership communications. Through its advanced statistics and regression analysis, the data also provided the company with specific drivers that directly impacted employee perceptions around CEO communications and other key outcomes.

The data powered the company's first strategic internal communications plan that set them on the fast track for success. In one year's time:

- CEO communications scores made **double digit gains**
- Overall quality of internal communications **increased on average 7 percentage points**
- Employees' ability to speak positively on behalf of the company **increased 11 percentage points**
- Perceptions of communications to help employees do their job **raised 15 percentage points**

That was four years ago. The company since then has weathered significant hardship in the economy and media – classic variables that impact employees' attitudes and engagement. It's also continued to work with The Grossman Group to measure CEO and overall internal communications, using the data to evolve their CEO and annual internal communication strategies.

Despite the business challenges, employees' perceptions of internal communications in the company have steadily improved between 2008 and 2011.

The organization's annual assessment includes index ratings as well as comparative data from other leading organizations. The company has seen significant jumps of between 4 points and 13 points for Senior Leadership communications and the other index dimensions. And, for an organization with a healthy competitive spirit, it now surpasses the comparative data's index score in three of the four dimensions studied, including those that tie directly to employee engagement – and ultimately impact productivity, morale and business results.

