

CHAPTER 6

Small Business Communication

Practices Case Studies



BACK IN MOTION / Back in Motion is a full-service rehabilitation, disability management and vocational services company in British Columbia, Canada. Back in Motion has two primary locations (in Richmond and Surrey) and several smaller sites that provide select services. The two primary sites each provide state-of-the-art gym and rehabilitation facilities, offices, physical examination and assessment rooms, work simulation facilities, and offices.

According to Ken Hemphill, one of the managing directors, the company was started by a multidisciplinary group of four health care professionals and an administrative specialist in 1993. The company's ownership and senior executive team represent the disciplines of psychology, vocational rehabilitation, physical therapy and finance. In 2006, the company reported its size as 57 employees. Back in Motion was honored as one of the 30 "Best Workplaces" in Canada in 2005 by Great Place to Work® Institute Canada.

THE CULTURE

The organizational culture of Back in Motion is based on teamwork and achieving goals through open communication and respect for staff and clients. Staff describe it as productive and professional, fun and friendly. The staff represents a number of disciplines, including physicians, occupational therapists, psychologists, registered clinical counselors, physical therapists, kinesiologists and vocational rehabilitation counselors. This team of professionals appreciates the needs of both employers and workers as they support clients' progress toward returning to the workforce and independence.

Communication is a vital part of the culture. In a health care environment, communication between staff and management is just as important as the communication between staff and clients. Sensitivity to the needs and expectations of the client and the business are paramount for reaching goals at all levels.

The culture of openness and respect is evidenced through the company's use of communication to reach business goals and develop new services to grow the business. Staff are valued for their contributions to strategic planning initiatives and operations plans. Communication flows two-way as management engages staff in planning, and the staff raise issues to improve the operation of the company.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

The management team shares the responsibility for internal or employee communication. Marketing and business development are responsible for external communication. The internal communication mix for Back in Motion includes formal and informal strategies, depending on the nature of the messages.

Human resources issues tend to be handled on a formal and planned basis. Orientations, performance evaluations and career development initiatives are a few examples. It is important that all staff are provided with uniform information in a highly regulated sector like health care. Career development opportunities are provided for staff as a means to recognize their valuable professional contributions and continue to improve the services that the firm has to offer clients. Attending to staff needs for career development also allows the firm to remain competitive and to retain employees who might otherwise leave for opportunities at other businesses.

The most important ongoing communication practice is face-to-face communication. Even with the multiple locations, Hemphill emphasizes the importance of sharing information with staff and managers in person. "When we were small, just five people, face-to-face was enough. As we have grown in size and number of locations, communication by necessity has become more formal. But we still prefer to communicate face-to-face." This is accomplished through monthly operational meetings and less formal discussions with staff on a daily basis about company expectations, the company mission and vision, and the staff's role in reaching company goals.

Print and electronic communications are used to supplement the face-to-face communication opportunities. Summaries from meetings are shared with staff who are unable to attend. Print publications are used more for external communication.

E-mail provides uniform messages and reaches everyone in all locations at one time. But the quality of communication in e-mail is shallow. In this fast-paced environment, e-mail can easily be overlooked.

The monthly operational business meetings held at one of the two primary sites are the best means for two-way communication when the goal is to share information with all employees at once. Of course, direct unit manager communication with staff is critical to the success of the company.

Back in Motion is committed to maintaining its well-balanced organizational culture. Orientation includes a discussion about the organizational culture. The company conducted an internal corporate