Successful Open Enrollment

5 Key Elements to a Successful Open Enrollment
Open Enrollment is a critical responsibility of HR departments. With just a small window of time to make changes, if open enrollment information is not effectively delivered and communicated, employees can be stuck with an unsatisfactory plan for a full year. In this eBook, we will explore five key elements to help HR professionals optimize their processes for a successful open enrollment.
Thorough preparation is essential to holding an effective and engaging open enrollment. This preparation should include: getting an early start, examining previous years’ successes and staying organized.

**Start early**

It’s never too early to start preparing for open enrollment. For example, companies that hold OE during the fall – as most do – should begin developing their benefits materials at the start of the summer, if not sooner.

**Evaluate past open enrollment periods**

A great way to improve open enrollment is to review the success or shortcomings of past OE periods. What worked? What didn’t? And which communication channels did employees seem to leverage the most?

Get employee feedback on last year’s open enrollment process as well as what new benefits they would most like to see. Use this information to shape future processes and benefit packages.

**Stay organized**

Moving benefits administration online can help HR professionals more effectively manage and evaluate the entire enrollment process. HR technology that includes benefits administration can help HR keep track of relevant documents and forms more easily.
Each year, employers need to update their benefits packages to ensure they are competitive and in line with employee needs.

**Respond to market changes**
The 2017 Employee Benefits Survey by the Society for Human Resource Management found that nearly one-third of companies increased their overall benefits offerings in the last 12 months, focusing most of their upgrades in health and wellness coverage. HR should take this opportunity to revise or upgrade the benefits plans their companies offer to keep up with the market and meet employee demand.

**Promote voluntary benefits**
Consider offering more voluntary benefits as they benefit employees and help companies manage costs. These can include short-term disability coverage, parental leave and financial benefits as well as newer offerings like student loan repayment assistance or pet insurance. Consider adding a wellness program — the SHRM survey found that 77 percent of organizations believed that their wellness program was somewhat or very effective in reducing health care costs.

**Update with regulatory changes**
All benefits should be reviewed to ensure they are up-to-date with federal and state policies. In-depth research now saves headaches down the line.
Another essential element of a successful open enrollment is the use of an innovative, integrated human capital management (HCM) platform that includes benefits administration features.

During open enrollment, HR professionals should strive to make it as easy and convenient as possible for employees to identify and select the best benefits plan to meet their needs. This can be achieved with an HCM system that enables workers to select their benefits and coverage plans online, as well as view important announcements and company documents. Enabling employees to choose their own benefits online also reduces the chance of errors from manual data entry.

To provide a positive user experience (UX), companies should select HCM platforms that are designed with the end user in mind, with an engaging user interface and intuitive navigation.

On the HR side, a HCM system with benefits functions can simplify administrative work by streamlining set-up of coverage and eligibility rules. The system should also include reporting and analytics functions to help organizations draw strategic insights into their open enrollment and benefits processes.
According to the 2016 Aflac Open Enrollment Survey, 61 percent of employees say there are at least some things they don’t understand about their companies’ overall benefits policies or offerings. Thorough and frequent communication with employees is essential to a successful open enrollment.

When it comes to effective communication about benefits, keep it clear, concise and direct.

Sending text-heavy emails about enrollment information several times a week will only frustrate employees and likely cause the emails to be ignored. Instead, provide more targeted messaging that extends beyond email, such as notices posted online via your HCM or the company intranet.

When crafting open enrollment messaging, remember to put benefits information into real, relatable terms. Avoid HR or insurance jargon and be sure to highlight the costs and savings related to each benefit – this is the information employees want. Total reward statements also can help employees more easily understand the financial impacts of benefits in relation to their compensation.
CHAPTER 5:

High Engagement

The fifth element essential to a successful open enrollment period is high engagement levels.

The open enrollment period can be a real source of stress for employees. Consider these stats from the 2016 Aflac Open Enrollment Survey:

- 72 percent of employees say reading about benefits is long, complicated or stressful
- 48 percent would rather do an unpleasant activity, such as walking across hot coals or talking to their ex, than complete their annual benefits enrollment
- 36 percent say the enrollment process makes them feel anxious, frustrated or confused

To overcome this negative reaction to open enrollment, HR should try to make open enrollment an event that is looked forward to, not dreaded.

One idea to build excitement and positivity around open enrollment is to incent or motivate employees to attend educational events regarding benefits. Provide food at meetings, such as catered lunches or breakfast pastries, or host an ice cream social during a seminar. Prizes for attendance to open enrollment events can be effective at increasing interest as well.
Conclusion

To optimize open enrollment, HR professionals should focus on five key elements: thorough preparation, competitive benefits, intuitive HR technology, effective communication and high engagement. By developing a strategy that supports all five elements, companies can enjoy a more productive and beneficial open enrollment.

Sources:


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