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Q: What methods will help our regional offices communicate with each other more effectively?

Our regional offices don't communicate effectively and as a result a lot of work and best practice material is being overlooked. I've tried video conferences, an intranet and a staff newsletter, but there seems to be a general dislike of having to give aside time to do "extra work" on contributions.



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A: This is a very difficult situation, which I've been in myself.

The only way to make a difference is to have people on-site that can provide two-way communication support. Without a budget, you've got three main options – as long as your leadership is serious about increasing and improving communication. If they're not, then you need to be clear with them on what can reasonably be expected when all communication occurs only at the HQ level.

1. Making time

Your leadership would need to approve a change in position description for one person in each of your regional offices. This would mean re-writing the job descriptions and performance expectations for existing positions where the individuals' jobs or personal backgrounds make them suitable as communicators.

If line managers know that senior leadership expects this to be done well, you'll get the help you need.

This role could be people in HR, training, OD, or an administrative assistant. For each of these people, you'd need to create a job description, and performance metrics, for what you expect them to do and how many hours per month this will involve. Be sure to include regular time for you to have conference calls with them, and for them to obtain professional development in communication – or attending one-day training sessions as a group.

You'd also need to be given input to these people's performance reviews on their communication roles. If it's in writing and their immediate managers know that senior leadership expects this part of the job to be done well, then you'll get the help you need from these people. It goes without saying that you need to be sure the people selected want to do this as well.

2. The academic approach

Do something similar to option 1 in terms of creating written expectations, but then find students of PR or communication to take on these roles on a volunteer basis with the understanding that they'll have sample projects for their portfolios/resumes after working with you for free.

This is different from some internships where the students "help" with communication, but aren't actually responsible for results. You can either recruit interns individually, or befriend a university professor who could build in work at your organization as part of a class project each semester.

3. The "light duty" option

Depending on the work rules of your organization and local labor laws, you might also look at employees who've become temporarily physically disabled and are on "light duty" that doesn't require lifting, running, etc. If appropriate you could ask to have some of them assigned to you until they return to their normal workload.

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In any of these situations, expectations of time requirements, actions to be undertaken and results to be achieved need to be clear – first in your own mind, next for the HQ and local management teams and finally for the individuals doing the communication work.

Other recommendations:

TOOL: DHL's employee attitude tracker

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Measuring Your Impact Clinic