

Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina: Healthy Talent Management

[Home](#)

[Subscribe Free](#)

[Current Issue](#)

[Editorial Info](#)

[e-Media](#)

[e-Seminar](#)

[Archives](#)

[News & Events](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[About Us](#)

[Advertising](#)

March 2006 - Brian Summerfield

From the weather-beaten shoreline of the Outer Banks to the ancient Great Smoky Mountains, residents across North Carolina can count on two things: thrilling college basketball seasons and Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina.

In fact, the regional, nonprofit medical insurance provider covers residents in every one of the state's counties and delivers an assortment of health care solutions and information to approximately 3.3 million members, several hundred thousand of whom are served on behalf of other Blue Plans. To provide the level of service Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina's customers have come to expect, the organization has developed a system that lures and holds on to top talent.

"We have very high expectations on the part of our employees," said Lyn Hilvert, vice president of human resources at Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina. "It's very challenging to make sure that they're engaged and committed. They have high expectations about what they want from the company to start with. We implemented an employment brand three years ago. That's gone a long way toward giving us a really solid framework against which we can look at any new offerings or any major culture shifts that we are contemplating or anticipating."

That initiative operates out of the strategies and practices department within Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina's HR division. It impacts an overwhelming majority of the company's 3,700 workers as well as thousands of job-seekers who consider employment with the organization each year. The effort is guided by Tim Shore, brand manager at Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina. "In that role, I am responsible for all that is employment within the company—specifically, employment marketing," he said. "That includes anything that has to do with enhancing the performance of our recruiters, improving the quality of our hires and getting our brand message out to the public as well as our workforce. Our role is unique in that we're creating an internal brand for our workforce. We're trying to improve the quality of work life."

To sell Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina as an employer to both internal personnel and prospective hires, Shore and his team developed a marketing campaign worthy of Madison Avenue. "We call it CareerStyles, with the tagline of 'Innovative career styles designed around you,'" he said. "We want our employees to personalize these things. It's a combination of career development and your own personal lifestyle. It's utilizing the things that the company offers to you to create that unique way of doing your work and providing value to the company. From an external standpoint, we want to attract people to our organization who have the same principles and qualities that we value in our employees. We want to create a great environment for our employees to work in and thus retain them, and externally we want to attract high-quality individuals into our workforce."

A component of that strategy involves promoting the overall mission of Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina, not only to the target audiences of the brand marketing campaign, but also to the minds behind it. “The objectives of the company are very straightforward,” Shore said. “Our guiding principle is to provide quality health care through products, innovation and services to help our customers improve their health. I ask people who work within our group all the time, just to make sure that everyone still understands their role and how that impacts the company. We never want to get too far away from that.”

The nuts and bolts of the CareerStyles program are comprised of an integrated arrangement of a human resources information system, a learning management system and BrassRing’s recruitment management solution. These components are arranged in a kind of loop and can “talk” to each other, Shore said. “We have completed a project to integrate a separate learning management system into our system of systems, if you will. Right now, we have linked up our human resources information system, the BrassRing solution and our learning management system. Between the three of them, we get a great deal of information about our employees. We can now feed courses people take and degrees they acquire into that system. It all links up. When we hire someone in our BrassRing system, we basically push a button and that’s transferred into our human resources information system. Then, that will give information to those who are coordinating our new employee orientation program and also pass information to business units. That’s the information that goes to our HRIS, then that feeds changes in job codes and titles back into BrassRing, so those two are always running parallel.”

The company’s application of the BrassRing recruitment tool for internal talent management is somewhat unique. It wasn’t developed for that expressed purpose, and few if any companies have caught on to this functionality, Shore said. “We utilize that tool to help find the right matches for the people that our individual business units need to bring in to provide quality service and products to our customers,” he explained. “It is that cornerstone system that we use to not only find that talent, but to manage the talent that we have. It allows us to collect data through the resume and through other assessment tools that we can use within the system to find out what particular skills, experience and education that they have that might prove valuable in other areas of the company. As you grow in your career, and we find some skills that would be valuable in other areas in our company, then we put you in our talent management pool. That allows us to select from that pool those that we need in other parts of the organization to drive performance.”

Interestingly, Shore and his department discovered these additional elements well after the recruitment solution had been selected. They managed to get that performance from the product right out of the box. “It’s an unintended benefit,” he explained. “That’s not why we purchased this system at all. We were trying to manage the recruitment-selection process by hand, our time-to-fill was outrageous, we had no way to track some of our EEO compliance data—all these were reasons we purchased it. It was a nice perk to see that it could do these other things. I don’t think we have a lot of customization, but it’s certainly configured to comply with the processes that we use in our selection and talent management processes. I would say that on the whole, the product would be similar to any of their clients’, but the way we use components of the system make it unique to us. It’s how we configure and utilize it that makes it more of a talent management and marketing tool than many companies use it for.”

The overall three-part talent management system has yielded tremendous benefits for Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina. One particularly significant advantage has been employee retention and the cost savings derived thereof. “Right now, we’re at about 10.6 percent turnover,” Shore said. “In our industry, that’s huge. Most companies in our industry have call centers. These are traditional customer service centers that process insurance claims and have the phone units that answer calls from customers. In most industries, that’s a high-turnover area. In retail, that can be between 100 and 200 percent turnover. When we put that into dollars, we’re talking about savings of hundreds of thousands of dollars. Look at just a typical customer service representative: When you look at the salary and training time for each one of them—we have an extensive eight-week training program

that each one has to go through before they answer a single phone call—you're getting close to the hundred-thousand dollar mark. If you lose one of those, it's very expensive."

These achievements have not gone unnoticed by Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina's senior leadership, he said. "We're routinely meeting with our senior leaders to show them who these folks are and what they can offer and then strategically look throughout our organization to determine where those people need to be. They've seen the results. Our leadership has seen the ease with which we can find people now. They see a higher-quality employee coming in the door. They see our ability to find talent from within to put in a leadership role that otherwise would've taken months of time and thousands of dollars to find."

Hilvert agreed that much had been accomplished in the organization's HR sphere in general and recruitment and retention efforts in particular but added that there is still a good deal left on her division's plate. "We have a lot going on here," she said. "I think we're doing an outstanding job, but I think there's a lot that remains to be done. There's no end to the opportunities."

—Brian Summerfield, brians@wpsmag.com

Managing the Managers

One of the keys to success for virtually any organization is having a management tier staffed with first-rate professionals who can produce performance. Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina's managers spend considerable amounts of time interacting with their employees and sit down with them for extensive one-on-one performance-related sessions a few different times every year. "We have a formal performance review process annually. In addition to that, we have a semiannual coaching session. The manager spends time with the employee talking about how they're doing. More importantly, that's the time of year when they typically spend a lot of time on their career aspirations and developmental needs," said Lyn Hilvert, vice president of human resources at BlueCross BlueShield of North Carolina.

To help the organization's managers get the most out of these meetings, Hilvert and her staff have developed an assortment of professional development programs. "We provide a lot of training to new managers. All new managers have to go through several levels of leadership development training, and any current managers who either have the need or just want to can also enroll in that. There are sections in there around coaching and development, how to give feedback, etc."

In addition, Hilvert's division has a number of procedures in place to ensure managers are in fact meeting with their employees on a regular basis to discuss performance, such as HR liaisons to every line of business who monitor these interactions. "As part of the annual survey, we add an extensive piece of that around manager quality, where the employers are rating their managers on the feedback they get, whether it's helpful, how it's helped—those kinds of things," she said. "(Managers) have to turn in a review in order to make a recommendation for the employees' ratings, which also is necessary for their bonus or incentive payout. As a manager, if you haven't done their review, then you're not going to be able to make a recommendation for their bonus payout. We also have a pretty open environment. If a manager doesn't sit down with them, then we usually end up hearing about it."