

GE HEALTHCARE

Employee-executive lunches

During her time at GE Healthcare, former internal communications director Aniko Czinege helped set up a program of regular “Meet an executive” lunches with 15-20 employees every two weeks. In the UK locations these sessions were called “Afternoon Tea,” in the US, “Brown Bag Lunch.” Cross-functional staff were invited to come and meet with an executive over sandwiches, and asked to fill out a short evaluation form afterwards to nail down the process. The business learned a lot from it.

☀ TOP TIP ☀

SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY

One key lesson has just been to keep things simple. “For example,” says Czinege, “we wanted these to be relaxed meetings between executive and staff in an informal environment. So we came up with all kinds of paraphernalia to create the right mood, encourage participation and get the look and feel right. We considered having name badges; we thought about having a prize draw to entice people along; we thought about the food and drink and whether to make it a sit-down meal; we thought about who should set the agenda, whether there should be a formal Q&A, and so on. What we learned through the process is to throw a lot of that out of the window. Just strip the process down: People get lunch; they can submit questions in advance if they want; but, mostly, they just chat.” As a result, the desired outcome – a relaxed atmosphere for a frank but open discussion – was achieved. “Much of that was to do with our behind-the-scenes

work” she continues. “We learned to do all the planning backstage – prepare tricky or controversial questions that we ourselves will ask the executive, for example, if we felt that employees weren’t being open about their issues – but then we tried to make the actual meetings themselves seem as informal as possible. One of the best measures for us was also just to do it. With science and pharmaceutical companies, there’s a tendency to get everything just right before you even think about launching it. But we found it’s much better to put things in place when they’re 80% right, and then say: ‘We’ll use the feedback to keep refining it.’”

☀ TOP TIP ☀

DO A “SHOW AND TELL”

As well as certain wider changes that came from the feedback (like scrapping the company video programs and holding more regular Town Hall meetings), one was to try to increase the amount of upward communication in the organization. As a result, the company introduced a feature to the more wide-ranging executive site visit program in which certain employees did a “show and tell.” They were given a forum to explain to the leader and other employees what they do, what projects they’re working on, what the key issues are, and how it’s going. “We learned through the feedback that it’s important to include that kind of thing in the site visits,” says Czinege. “It’s important to make sure they’re not just about the executive; that they’re a forum for a two-way dialogue on respective issues and solutions.”