

## Case Study: Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield

### Who

Excellus BlueCross BlueShield has a long history of excellence as part of a \$6.6 billion family of companies that finances and delivers health care services across upstate New York and long-term care insurance nationwide. The company provides health insurance to nearly 1.5 million members and employs about 5,500 New Yorkers. Excellus is known for its exceptional customer service and open, collaborative work environment.

### Challenge

In the ever-changing climate of health care, Excellus faced a dilemma: How to transition from a formal corporate culture of top-down authoritarian leadership to a more open, collaborative, people-centric work environment where employees feel more valued, respected, and engaged?

After becoming CEO in 2013, Chris Booth made a decision to begin the culture shift. "Chris's influence has been inspirational," says Keri Wood, Excellus's director of corporate culture and organizational effectiveness. "He is known in our organization as being someone who is truly authentic. His commitment and passion for transforming the culture has changed everything."

### Solution

Enter Brand Integrity. Excellus began its initial partnership with Brand Integrity in 2010 by implementing employee recognition software. The company called it "Celebrate You" and used it to encourage employees to post recognitions in appreciation of each other's work. When Booth became CEO, his goal was to make Excellus a better place to work. The organization tried some culture change efforts but wasn't seeing results. In Spring 2014, the company chose to broaden and deepen its partnership with Brand Integrity to focus on measuring and managing behaviors. As a result, Brand Integrity helped Excellus create its "Lifetime Way" featuring seven organizational values with corresponding behaviors that define what's needed to achieve successful business results: Values such as passionately serving customers, caring about each other, having open and honest conversations, and challenging and empowering each other to drive excellence. "We wanted to shift to a people-focused culture," Wood explains. "Our partnership with Brand Integrity is now about strategic recognition using the platform to reinforce those key behaviors evidenced in our shared values. It's been a huge transformation."

### Results

Excellus's ability to achieve short- and long-term business goals has greatly improved since starting its culture work. The company reported a net income of 1.7 percent on \$6 billion in premium revenue in 2016—up from 1.0 percent in 2015, and for the second consecutive year, the health plan had a \$63 million reduction in administrative expenses, which led to a net income of \$99.5 million. "Brand Integrity's commitment from day one to help Excellus on our culture journey has been handled with passion, clarity of support, exceptional strategic advice and counsel, attention to operational details, responsiveness to issues, and much more," says Dave Sanderson, SVP of Human Resources at Excellus. "The greatest value has been the ability to create a clear link for senior management

between engaged and motivated employees and business performance.” The shift toward engaging and motivating leadership has had a major impact on the whole organization. Employee engagement scores generated through biannual pulse surveys have consistently risen year over year. The average length of employment is 12 years. “We communicate and collaborate so much more effectively,” Wood explains. “Our upward journey has been exciting!”

## Next Steps

As Brand Integrity continues to refine its offerings and survey tools, Excellus plans to gauge internal customer satisfaction through quick, in-the-moment surveys. The goal is to help teams work collaboratively on future projects and pinpoint areas of opportunity to grow and improve the business. “We’re hoping the customer surveys will give us an accurate read on how well we’re living the Lifetime Way Values,” Wood says. “Our partnership with Brand Integrity has helped us to create an essential foundation for employee engagement, and we know it will continue to help the business evolve in the years to come.”

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## CONTACT US

brandintegrity.com  
engaged@brandintegrity.com  
(585) 442-5404



## ABOUT BRAND INTEGRITY

Brand Integrity is an employee engagement company with a unique solution for driving measurable and sustainable culture change, blending consulting with technology. Brand Integrity has helped hundreds of clients across 25 industries develop more effective and trusted leaders, create a better place to work, and gain and retain more profitable customers.