

case study

Increased Employee Engagement Makes Blue Ridge Companies Feel Like Home





When Blue Ridge Companies needed help connecting their organization and streamlining their HR and payroll processes, they handed over the keys to Paylocity.

The Challenge

Blue Ridge Companies is a full-service real estate firm specializing in development, general contracting and managing commercial properties as well as several multi-family properties. They are no stranger to a culture of caring. However, with more than 300 people spanning three divisions with multiple locations – many spending their days on the road – it became difficult to connect. Blue Ridge’s leadership turned to Paylocity to simplify their HR and payroll solutions in 2014. Over the past six years, the partnership between the companies has been growing. Paylocity has worked to fill critical needs for Blue Ridge, including their most recent challenge: communicating to on-the-go employees and having a place for their teams to access important documents. This is where the Paylocity solution for engagement and social collaboration, Community, entered the picture. Benefits Manager Laura Harrold says, “Prior to the adoption of Community, our system was a little bit broken. We had an employee portal but not everything lived there. We would have to send email after email and still couldn’t reach everyone since not everyone has a company email address.” VP of Human Resources Susan Watts chimed in, “It was very painful; it was a lot of emails and follow ups.”

“Not only does Paylocity have a great product – it's very inclusive and robust – but everyone at Paylocity is very interested in what their clients’ have to say.”

– Susan Watts, VP of Human Resources

The Approach

The idea of having an open platform for employees to share their unfiltered thoughts, feelings, and photos can sometimes cause hesitation for companies, but not for Blue Ridge. They jumped in with both feet, opening the door for their employees to have access to each other, as well as transparent and timely communication from leadership.

Company
Blue Ridge Companies

Industry
Real Estate

Location
High Point, NC

Size
300+ Employees

Customer Since
2014

Challenge
Blue Ridge Companies needed help connecting its on-the-go employees

Featured Solutions



human resources



payroll



onboarding



surveys



employee self service



performance management



peer recognition



learning management system



community



benefits

Results
Efficiently and seamlessly improved HR and payroll processes

Connect and engage employees directly from their mobile devices

A record number of employees completed courses through Learning Management System and enrolled in benefits before the deadline

Share
paylocity.com/BlueRidge



“Community has been a great way to share ideas. Everything from ‘this vendor is great to work with,’ to something personal that is happening. It’s an outlet to share best practices, brainstorm ideas, and collaborate.”

– Susan Watts, VP of Human Resources

Making the day-to-day Fun and Easy

In August 2019, Laura kicked off Employee Wellness month and hoped to use the experience to ramp up engagement through Community. She drove traffic to the tool by posting daily motivation, trivia, and contests. She incentivized the contests by giving away Fitbit fitness trackers and other wellness prizes. Laura was thrilled with the results. She exclaimed, “Within five minutes people were notifying me that they had already completed their tasks. So, it’s working!”

Getting in touch with the property managers, leasing agents, groundskeepers, and additional on-the-go roles has been challenging in the past. “Not everyone has a company email address, and not everyone had access to our portal. So, you can see there was a disconnect,” explains Susan. Community became a way to reach everyone. “We can post important announcements, any HR related documents, job postings, benefit information, company updates, and everyone gets alerted on their mobile device. It doesn’t matter where they are, we know they’ll see it.”

Susan created several Community groups, which are specialized pages where select users have access to post and share updates. “We have groups for community managers, regional managers, and service managers to share news and updates.” Laura says, “We are also seeing people post photos from their properties and updates for others to see.” Susan agrees Community has been a great way to share ideas. “Everything from ‘this vendor is great to work with,’ to something personal that is happening. It’s an outlet to share best practices, brainstorm ideas and collaborate.”


Blue Ridge was one of Paylocity’s very first clients to test out a new feature within Community, called Ask an

Expert. These private Q&A groups allow employees to ask a question to a designated admin in each group. Laura says, “I think these groups will really be helpful for open enrollment, benefits or other HR related questions where there is a level of sensitivity required.”

Connecting During COVID-19

Just months after Blue Ridge rolled out Community, the Coronavirus pandemic swept the nation. As an essential business, keeping employees informed and safe while keeping their doors open and lights on became the priority. Susan and Laura explain that they used this time to post videos from their executive vice president, daily updates, and even spotlight employees as Hero of the Day on the platform. During this time, employees felt more connected to each other than ever. “We’ve really seen Impressions (Paylocity’s peer-to-peer recognition platform) ramp up.” Impressions have doubled since the launch of Community. By educating new hires about it during orientation, as well as playing to the sales teams’ competitive spirit, people are captivated by it and more willing to participate. Susan adds, “we even see people post on the Community page outside of Impressions, ‘so and so did a great job with x.’”

“One good thing that has come out of the pandemic is that we’re using Community a lot more. We’ve found that there’s more usage for it. Some people are leveraging the groups to find out who needs more personal protective equipment (PPE) and share tips for working under these new conditions. The push notifications for the Paylocity platform are great because our teams already use the mobile punch-in feature in the self-service portal, so they’re already on their phone and get the Community updates much faster.”



“In the first day, we received 79% completion [for our wellness check survey]. And mind you, it is only required for those employees who must physically come into the office. I think that is amazing!”

Susan Watts, VP of Human Resources

When minutes matter, having accurate and correct information available is a game changer. The Reporting module and dashboards played a key role during this time of crisis. “We were able to access the Emergency Dashboard and pull a report to see who was missing emergency contact information. We sent out an announcement for people to update,” says Susan.

Surveys are a great way to gather feedback from employees – Blue Ridge regularly uses them as part of their onboarding process. However, during the coronavirus pandemic, Susan implemented a wellness check survey. Every day at 4 a.m. a survey is sent to employees before they clock in. The survey includes things such as, “do you have any symptoms such as fever, cough, etc.?” Susan says it has received a great response, “In the first day, we received 79% completion. And mind you, it is only required for those employees who must physically come into the office. I think that’s amazing!” Paylocity listened to Susan’s and other clients’ needs and created a mobile attestation feature, where employees answer a few questions before being allowed to clock in.

Engaging Employees

When people come to work at Blue Ridge, they stay! The average employee tenure at the company is 4.5 years. This year, the company will celebrate its 23rd anniversary, while many employees will be ringing in their 20th. The company is extremely generous with anniversaries, including things such as dinners and vacations. With the rollout of Community, these anniversaries are also shared on the tool, providing one more touch point to celebrate with colleagues.

Engagement can bring a company culture to life. Laura has pulled reports to find employees who were the most active on Community and surprised them with gift cards. These Community “E.P.I.C. Influencers” are people who act as adopters of the site, using it daily and encouraging others to do the same. E.P.I.C. Influencers embody the company values in everything they do, including their activity on Community.

Getting feedback from employees can always be a challenge. Laura and Susan found a great way to gather employees’ thoughts through the poll feature on Community. “Our holiday party is a huge celebration for Toys for Tots, and we raise a lot of money for that organization. We recently used Polls to get ideas for our holiday party. Sometimes if you send a survey, people feel they need to sit down and spend 20 minutes, and so they won’t take the time. But a poll is quick. We have also used polls in our daily trivia on Community. People love it.”

Preparing for Performance

The when and how of measuring performance is a hot-button topic for many HR professionals. Blue Ridge typically conducts 30-, 60-, 90-day reviews. Susan explained that the company is in the process of shifting their review structure. Leadership asks employees to log various accomplishments throughout the year using the Journals module. It's helping employees track progress throughout the year. "Everyone is using Journals, and it's going really well."

Lessons Learned

Blue Ridge currently has an operational Learning Management System (LMS) through a different provider tied to the compliance requirements for the Fair Housing Act. However, during open enrollment, Laura leveraged Paylocity's LMS program for the first time. "Previously, I would make videos and post to our version of the LMS. But no one would watch them, or there would be confusion, 'so, I have to go here and watch a video then I have to login to Paylocity to select my benefits?' There was just a disconnect. So, this time, I created the video and loaded it right into the Paylocity Learning module. Out of 288 assigned, 244 took the class, so I would call that a success," says Laura.

The team saw the same level of success with communications during the open enrollment period. In previous years, Laura would have to send out email after email, hounding people to complete their enrollment. Now that everything is housed in one place, she can post an announcement and track results. "When people click into the message, they're already in the Paylocity tool so it is simplified and easy for them to enroll," says Laura. "I think that has made a big difference."

The Payoff

Blue Ridge invested in the future when they made the switch to Paylocity more than six years ago. The partnership continues to develop with the integration of Community and LMS, which came at the perfect time. Community connected their workforce during a crisis, with important updates, communication, and a single source of company information. Blue Ridge leveraged Paylocity to check in with their employees via surveys and polls - opening the doors for feedback. The open enrollment process was more seamless and efficient than it has been in years thanks to the LMS solution. With mobile access to time clocks, PTO requests, Surveys, Community and LMS, Blue Ridge employees are able to access all their Paylocity solutions on the go - enabling the entire organization to be more efficient.

With people being the center of what they do, it's rewarding for Laura and Susan to see the employees engaged. "We love seeing people interact," says Laura. "They will share pictures from the property, things residents said, stuff they are proud of - it's encouraging to see." Blue Ridge has also seen a refreshing level of engagement from Paylocity. "We love you guys," exclaims Susan. "Paylocity engages with us and really listens to what we need. We get to meet the people that build our product, and they actually want to know what we want and make it happen. It is nice to know they're listening and make us feel like partners, not just clients."



"We love you guys! Paylocity is our partner. They listen to us; we get to meet the people that build our product and they actually want to know what we want and make it happen."

Susan Watts, VP of Human Resources