



TenStep Supplemental Paper

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Improving Employee Morale the Picnic Way

HR managers often grapple to find the right solution for motivating their employees. Tangible and intangible benefits are tried aplenty, but the right success formula often remains a mystery. Some time-tested techniques in such uncertain times may just do the trick.

Company picnic – the evergreen success formula

The conventional company picnic is an option. For years, picnics have proved to be effective not only in providing the much needed physical and mental break from organizational activities but also in bringing the employees together at a more personal level. HR executives may find it difficult to explain the returns on investment of each such activity, but the tangible outcome of the same in terms of employee behavior and morale is clearly evident. Let us consider a few examples in order to fully comprehend the positive impact of such HR initiatives.

Employees of one public relations agency are sponsored twice each summer to take part in the company picnic. The importance of the occasion can be gauged from the fact that no employee schedules any other private appointment or activity on that day so as not to miss this event. Incidentally, the picnic is not an extravagant one that involves high costs; – the venue is actually a nearby park. It is almost like a family picnic, with each employee contributing some food for the occasion. The employees bask in happiness and feel rejuvenated as they take a well- deserved break with music, dance and games. The picnic has become an annual event for the past three years, and is the most popular occasion for the agency's employees. The outcome of the initiative has been lower rates of absenteeism, better understanding among employees, better team spirit, high performance levels and higher profits for the company.

One law firm conducts its annual barbecue on a grander scale. The firm invites its attorneys and their spouses from far flung places for the event. The get together of the firm's 400 plus employees has been an annual event for the past seventeen years at the home of the firm's managing partner. The attractions at the picnic include a twenty-two foot inflatable slide, pony rides, face painters, a Ferris wheel, miniature golf, volleyball, magicians, clowns, a zoo, goody bags for kids and a fully stocked ice cream truck.

While attorneys managed the six-foot grill, the firm's partners took charge of salads and desserts. Such picnics not only reinstate the firm's culture of extreme respect for its employees but also sustain a positive working environment and provide an opportunity for employees to introduce their families to colleagues. The picnic enhances employee morale and reinstates the feeling of 'family' within the organization. The very fact that the managing partner opens his home to all employees and their extended families instills a sense of importance of each person in the firm, which in turn, fuels a high degree of loyalty.

A place in the corporate calendar



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Company picnics are slowly but surely gaining popularity and are becoming an important event in the corporate calendar. It is not only a cost-effective exercise that can be customized to suit the culture and affordability of the company but is also free of the performance-related bottom-line scrutiny used in other employee rewards. Companies start organizing picnics in their early years when the number of employees in the company is still limited, and continue to do so over time. The employees are determined not to skip their company tradition, and begin to realize its immense intangible but real value.

For the company, the occasion enables a great rapport among the employees thereby making them more adaptive to each other in the real work environment. This, in turn, enhances their productivity levels and job satisfaction. Once the employees overcome their interpersonal problems at the workplace, it is reflected by the manner in which they deal with clients and prospects, thereby adding value to the organization both in terms of business prospects and revenues. Moreover, employees feel at ease when they put in joint efforts on team issues if they have personal connections forged at picnics.

Company picnics enhance workplace morale, relationship building and retention. The feeling of esprit-de-corps is reinstated in the employees through such informal gatherings, thereby creating a sense of corporate identity among the staff. This is particularly true in the modern day context where organizational structures are a blur and employees take up multi-tasking or cross- functional assignments as the situation demands. Such a structure involves a free exchange of ideas, information and support that is facilitated by the development of social networks and better understanding of each other triggered by the connection-building opportunities provided by office picnics. Moreover, such outings don the role of an outbound training program wherein team spirit and sense of direction is instilled among the employees. The staff also feels appreciated for their commitment and hard work.

Tangible results too

Company picnics can also generate a lot of tangible benefits. This can be measured from the rise in productivity levels of employees in the organization as a whole and the drop in employee absenteeism and turnover rates. Subsequently, it is often observed that the amount of money invested by the company is much less when compared to the costs arising from possible employee turnover.