

# **101 Management Problems Solved:**

## ***How Successful Women Tackled Common Leadership Challenges***

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# Progressive Women's Leadership 101 Success Stories

## What if you could get 100 women leaders in a room to get their advice on the most common management challenges today?

Challenges such as how to motivate employees, improve office morale, get your teams to work together or make hiring and training easier?

### *We have the next best thing.*

Our 101 Management Solutions: Success Stories From Women Leaders is your go-to guide for the most creative and effective ways to resolve issues you face every day. These 101 solutions offer unique approaches to issues every woman leader faces at some point.

The best part? They all come straight from a trusted community of your peers. It's like conducting a giant networking session without leaving your desk.

### *Take a glance at some examples:*

**To boost morale:** *"We ended hectic weeks with an in-office spa day."*

**To enforce the rules:** *"For absences, we turned to an old-school communication tool."*

**To motivate the team:** *"We made team incentives a family affair."*

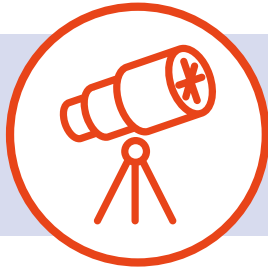
**To hire and retain employees:** *"We ditched the 'career ladder' for a different approach."*

***These solutions from real women in management positions will help you solve situations such as how to:***

- motivate your team to take their work to the next level
- find the right new hires and keep them
- enforce company and department rules while appreciating employees
- encourage employees to work together
- incentivize employees to accept challenges
- resolve conflicts so everyone wins
- overcome team ruts and inspire employees
- train employees to successfully get their jobs done

**Once you've read 101 Management Solutions, you'll have the expert advice you need from women who lead, right at your fingertips, anytime you need it.**

# Chapter 1: Finding and Keeping Top Employees



Finding and keeping great employees is the goal of every manager. But recruiting success can be elusive. There are effective ways to improve the chances of finding and hiring the right candidates for every position. These leaders came up with some novel approaches to solve their hiring and retention challenges.

## 1. Coffee sessions find diamonds in the rough

Like any good company, we encourage our employees to refer job candidates to us.

The problem is not all the referrals we receive look like good fits.

That puts us in a tough spot. We don't want to waste time bringing in obvious bad fits for interviews, and we also don't want to leave a bad taste in employees' mouths by not talking to those they refer to us.

Not giving the referrals a chance at all could discourage employees from providing referrals in the future. So we had to find a way to walk that fine line.

### *A different kind of interview*

My solution: When we receive a referral from an employee – and the person doesn't seem to be a good fit for any of our openings – rather than just turning the person down for an interview, I at least try to take the referral out for coffee.

I keep the conversation professional, while feeling out if the candidate is a good positional or cultural fit. After all, resumes can't tell you everything.

Now at least the candidate and the person who referred him or her feels like they've been treated with respect.

But sometimes, I end up liking the person enough to bring him or her in for a formal interview.

Overall, these coffee sessions have helped us find talent we may have otherwise turned away, and they've kept employees eager to keep the referrals coming in.

(Leela Srinivasan, CMO, San Francisco)

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## 2. Key to employee development: Maintenance

How can you help people become better employees who meet goals and move upward in their careers?

For us, the key is not to wait until things are going the wrong way to initiate employee development.

We call it preventive maintenance. It helps managers and employees collaborate on a positive note, rather than spend too much negative time finding and fixing shortcomings.

### *Adjust as time goes on*

Shortly after initial training, managers sit down with new employees to map out a shared vision for their development – the skills they need and want to gain, the knowledge they should have, goals they must meet and career advancement they'd like to achieve.

Then when they review performance quarterly, they check that the employee is developing through training and new challenges.

Of course, the vision can change over time, and then the manager and employee adjust.

(Rebecca Gibson, Manager, Indianapolis)

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### **3. Ask this to increase training success**

Some of our supervisors were frustrated with employees they'd recently hired.

For different reasons, the new hires didn't seem to "get it." They struggled to catch on in training and perform on the job.

The supervisors felt they'd failed at hiring good fits. The employees were second-guessing their job choice too.

#### ***Get ahead of apprehension***

I suspected the problem wasn't with the job fit. It was the training fit.

I asked supervisors to review how they'd trained their new employees, then asked the employees, "How do you learn?"

That question opened eyes. With some coaxing, some employees said they liked to take notes. Some said they did well learning side by side with hands-on practice. Others liked to read and try.

When supervisors recognized the difference in preferences, they adjusted training and quickly helped new hires successfully settle into their jobs.

(Yvonne Zeminski, Senior VP Branch Administration, Hampstead, MD)

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### **4. Shadow session brings new hires on board**

Turnover is a common problem in our industry, and our company wasn't immune.

Even with offering good benefits and better pay than competitors, we were still having trouble keeping new employees.

To find out what was going on, we conducted some exit interviews.

They revealed a significant problem we needed to address: It seemed no matter how much time we put into our job descriptions, they didn't quite give applicants a full picture of what their jobs would be like.

As a result, some employees would leave soon after starting – not because it was a bad job, but because it just wasn't quite what they expected.

### **Trying it out**

Our solution? When we felt strongly about a candidate after his or her initial interview, we'd have the person shadow an employee for a while.

This showed the candidate exactly what our work environment was like, while showing the person what he or she would be doing on a daily basis.

After this shadow session, some candidates said the job wasn't for them and left, which was better than wasting resources on a bad hire.

But many did take the job. And since they started with a much clearer picture of what to expect, those employees are sticking around longer.

(Lisa Waldron, HR Manager, Alma, GA)

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## **5. 5 important questions to ask before coaching**

Managers often want to jump in and coach immediately when they see employees struggle. And that can be a problem.

I've done it. It's worked to fix a problem on the spot. But it often failed to fix a problem long term.

Any kind of training takes planning, and I thought maybe I should plan for my on-the-spot coaching, too.

I couldn't do an all-out scheduled training session. But gathering a few thoughts and ideas before I stepped in would be a better start.

### **What to cover**

I started asking myself four questions before I did quick coaching to make sure I covered the bases:



- What is the performance issue we need to work on?
- Have I already given feedback and, if so, what was the result?
- What is the outcome I want for this session?
- What is the ultimate outcome I want?

(Dianne Durkin, Author, Portsmouth, NH)

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***We gave employees time off to take classes at local colleges during the work day.***

## **6. Opportunity + Time = Training success**

Like most companies, we wanted our employees to expand their skills and knowledge. Then they could do better work and take on more responsibility.

So we made training a high priority with regular job-related sessions, plus some multi-day sessions on leadership and technology.

However, this initiative had the biggest impact on the success of continual learning: We gave employees time off to take classes at local colleges during the work day.

### ***Making it convenient***

The classes didn't interfere with their lives outside of work, so they were more inclined to sign up.

That helped them get the classes they wanted and needed.

Many people have been able to reach goals and earn degrees.

Their increased skills and knowledge has helped our company succeed as well.

(Julie Buchholz, HR Generalist, Philadelphia)

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## 7. Coaching program gave new managers the confidence they needed

Our company experienced some growing pains recently. We needed managers ... fast ... so we filled the positions with the best workers we had in house.

But some didn't feel as confident as we did about their leadership skills. Most were in a management position for the first time – and it showed.

They were turning to a couple of veteran managers for advice. But after a while, the veteran managers came to us complaining that they couldn't coach the new managers and do their jobs.

We couldn't just stand pat or we'd risk losing employees due to poor management.

### *Paid for itself*

We decided to bite the bullet – by hiring coaches to fill the demand for the veteran managers' expertise.

They set up a whole coaching program for our growing managers. The first step of the program was an orientation session that identified what goals the managers set for themselves.

What followed were biweekly, 45-minute one-on-one sessions that taught our managers the skills they needed.

The coaches were an expense, but the payoff has been worth it. Now our managers are more confident and everyone's more confident in them.

Plus, we calculated that the money we saved due to the ensuing reduction in turnover has paid for the coaching program twofold.

(Julie Walch, Director of HR, Dayton, OH)

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## 8. Rotating schedule kept us from losing great employees

When the economy tanked a few years ago, we hit a rough patch and had to go through some layoffs.

But we felt the slowdown was temporary, and we didn't want to lose any of our highly skilled, well-trained employees to the layoffs permanently.

So we started kicking around ideas on how to keep key employees within arm's reach – and away from competitors – so we could bring them back when things turned around.

And we came up with a great one: Instead of picking and choosing who'd be laid off, we decided to implement a rotating layoff schedule.

### *Unique schedule*

We divided employees into groups of five, and one employee would only be out of work for a month. After that, the person would come back and we'd move on to the next employee.

Under this plan, everyone would be part of the layoffs but not suffer long term.

We also asked some employees if they had a preference on when they wouldn't be working (some had seasonal, part-time jobs they could fall back on). Employees didn't lose vacation or sick time benefits either.

Result: We didn't lose any employees. Once business picked up we were able to bring everyone back.

Bonus: Employees appreciated how much we did to ease the blow for them.

(Michele Lombardo, Office Manager, Pottstown, PA)



***To liven up training and improve learning retention, we created a trivia-style game.***

## 9. Fun training game improved retention

It's tough to get employees absorbed in training. Here's a technique that's helped.

Some topics, by nature, are boring. Some presentations, by style, are boring.

The worst part: Bored employees aren't going to retain the information.

To liven up training and improve learning retention, we created a trivia-style game.

### ***A little playtime***

We divided employees into groups of 10 or 15. We'd ask individuals within the groups a question about the information we covered. If someone got the answer wrong, he or she was out.

After 15 or 20 questions, the team with the most members remaining won the game and a prize.

The value of the prize depended on the importance of the topic we covered. Winners of our most important topics got \$10 gift cards to local lunch spots. For lesser topics, it might be candy.

Now employees are engaged and retaining training even better.

(Penny Powers, Director of HR, Pittsburgh)

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## 10. Workplace investigation approach kept us out of trouble

We needed a delicate way to handle a hostile work environment investigation.

Tensions were high, and we wanted to make sure all parties felt like they were treated fairly and respectfully.

The stakes were high, too. We didn't want to face a lawsuit from an employee who felt mistreated by a co-worker.

The whole situation forced us to come up with a strategy for handling these kinds of unfortunate situations safely and effectively.

Here's what we did:

### **Removed the tension**

We put both parties on paid suspension. Getting them out of the office helped the rest of the staff relax and get comfortable opening up about what was happening between both parties.

And to ensure impartiality and fairness in the investigation, we made sure to ask each employee in the department the exact same questions – ending with, “Is there anything else you'd like to add?”

Result: We got to the truth of the matter, and one of the parties was let go. And while that employee was upset with the conclusion, how we reached it couldn't be argued.

This wasn't a great situation, but thanks to our approach, we're in a better place now and have a plan for handling these issues moving forward.

(Lee Ann Meyer, HR Director, Wichita, KS)

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## **11. 'Jungle-gym' approach kept good talent**

There weren't a lot of management positions opening up at our company. As a result, some employees felt like there wasn't any room to grow.

This wasn't good for employee morale or retention.

So we needed to find a way to show employees that even if they couldn't immediately move into management, they could still grow.

Our solution: Rather than find avenues for vertical growth, we created a system that fostered horizontal growth.

### **We ditched the ‘ladder’**

We changed the philosophy of “career ladders” and adopted the philosophy of “career jungle gyms.”



**Rather than find avenues for vertical growth, we created a system that fostered horizontal growth.**

It says growth isn’t just about moving up, but also out – by adding skills within the organization.

We set up a system in which employees could come to their supervisors and talk about where they wanted to go with their careers.

From there, the supervisors and employees work with HR and other managers to find roles or assignments that help employees gain new skills and advance their career goals.

Example: If a person wanted to move into HR, we may arrange for him or her to take on a few basic HR tasks.

Now workers see there’s a lot of internal support to develop their skills and grow within the company, which has improved morale and retention.

(Annette Alexander, VP of HR, Austin, TX)

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## **12. Tweaking interview assessment helped our retention**

Our hiring process worked great for a while, until a recent rough patch. We were having trouble holding on to newer employees.

A major problem: Supervisors only checked in on employees occasionally, and some recent hires couldn’t deal with that hands-off management style.

But our hiring process should've screened out those workers. So we took a second look at our practices.

One thing we noticed: Our job description no longer accurately reflected the management process.

So we made the description more transparent to cut down on surprises for new hires. That was an easy fix.

### **A few pointers**

But then we dug a little deeper, asking supervisors what questions they threw at candidates during interviews. For the most part, they were fine, but we were able to give supervisors a few pointers to help applicants get a better sense of the job.

Example: We tried to help supervisors let their personalities shine through more, so candidates could get a feel for who they'd work for. We also started sending weekly emails with interviewing tips and sample questions to keep supervisors sharp.

Result: New hires seem to be settling in better than before, and we feel that will help us hold on to them.

(Linda Shamlin, HR Director, North Little Rock, AR)

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## **13. Streamlined filing process saved time**

Our filing system had gotten pretty inefficient.

Managers were holding on to certain employee documents. That meant when HR needed a file, it often had to waste time tracking it down through those managers. We were all starting to go crazy.

Keeping track of who had what was clumsy at best and a major time suck at worst.

What we needed was to get everyone on the same page, so HR could have copies of every document it needed on hand.

The problem: We had to do it without going digital (we just don't have the resources for that yet).

If all the documents HR needed were in the same location, it would save us a ton of time when we needed something.

### ***Brought info together***

So we went to each manager requesting every copy of their employee files, and we created a central repository of everything we had.

Next, we made sure managers knew what to send HR moving forward, so we didn't have to track down critical documents.

It sounds simple, but centralizing everything and letting our managers know what HR needs in the future has really been a game-changer.

The new system has saved us a lot of time and headaches. Plus, we're better prepared to make the jump to digital when that day arrives.

(Meg Brazell, HR Director, Richmond, VA)

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## **14. Plan made salary cuts easier to swallow**

When business slowed, the owners of our company told me something nobody wants to hear: We needed to let someone go to cut salary costs.

Of course, I didn't want to break up our tight-knit team if we could avoid it – especially if we'd just have to replace the person when business picked back up again.

I decided a better approach would be to cut hours and spread the burden out among our entire team.

But this would require everyone's buy-in – and to get it, I had to put my own hours on the chopping block. So I cut some of my hours. But it wasn't enough.



### ***Made it a team effort***

Next, I laid the situation out for the entire team – asking them to work out amongst themselves how to divvy up the rest of the cuts.

They knew what they could afford better than I did, so I figured this was the best approach. Plus, it made everyone feel involved in the decision-making process.

It took some time, but we eventually agreed on a plan.

When I presented it to ownership, they were on board.

In the end, we managed to slash an entire person's salary without having to let anyone go.

And when business picked back up, everyone got their hours back.

(Liz Tipton, Executive Vice President/CFO, Henderson, KY)

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## **15. 'Seat Shuffle' helped our employees connect**

We knew it would help employee engagement and retention if our people were constantly building relationships with different co-workers.

But that's not always easy when employees are busy.

So we instituted the "Seat Shuffle." Every few months, we had employees switch seats, so they'd sit next to people they hadn't gotten a chance to know.

In addition, we made sure employees from different departments like Sales and Marketing all sat together – rather than walling employees off by department.

### ***A group shuffle***

It started as a completely random seat shuffle, during which everyone in the office would move at once. But as we've grown, things have changed a little to avoid chaos.

Now we group people into areas based on customer personas.

Example: Sales and Marketing employees who work with customers in one particular industry – say, education – all sit together.

That area will then conduct its own shuffle – rather than moving everyone in the office at once.

The strategy has:

- helped employees make new friends
- led to faster communication between departments, and
- improved customer service – since departments can collaborate more easily.

(Kristen Kenny, Director of People Operations, Cambridge, MA)

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## 16. 3 ways to cut turnover on the front line

Our highest rate of turnover occurred on the front line. Naturally, we wanted to do a better job of keeping those employees. After all, they build and maintain relationships with customers.

We weren't in a position to increase pay – and money doesn't always make people happier in their jobs anyway.

But appreciation and recognition do – and we were in the position to give employees what they deserved. It was a matter of making the time to do it.

### *Small changes worked*

We made an informal plan to:

1. **Recognize.** VPs regularly stopped by to compliment front-liners for work they did with customers.
2. **Appreciate.** Managers wrote notes to employees and their families, thanking them for their contributions.
3. **Listen.** We solicited their ideas on changes that would affect their work. We acted on what was possible and thanked them for all their ideas.

(Melissa Kovacevic, Manager)

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## 17. We cut cross-training – and reaped the benefits

Even though it seems like a good idea, we had to be honest with ourselves: Cross-training wasn't right for our department.

Sure, it's great insurance to have everyone trained and ready to fill in the moment someone has to leave the office.

But after trying to cross-train everyone, we came to an important realization: There are some things certain people do better than others, and there are some people who don't seem able to master certain tasks.

In short, cross-training on all our responsibilities wasn't the best fit for our team.

### *Becoming experts*

So instead of cross-training, we took a close look at what each staffer enjoyed doing and what he or she did well.

Then we made them the primary agents for those tasks. People quickly became subject-matter experts, and their skills only improved with time.

Not only did we see efficiency go up, we also saw people start to "own" their assignments with a sense of pride.

Of course, we still have occasional cross-training so we're ready in case someone goes on vacation.

But we do so with much less frequency.

(Elke Sanborn, HR Director, Bellevue, WA)

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## 18. Motivation tool bonus: It helps us recruit good employees

Like many companies, we tried a variety of things to reward good work and keep our employees motivated. One of the smaller rewards we tried turned out to also be a great tool for recruiting and hiring.

We called it our “Top Performers Lunches.” We invited our best performers to enjoy a leisurely meal away from work and thank them for their extra efforts.

### *Mostly fun with a little business*

While it was mostly a social, fun lunch, we took some time to talk business. Specifically, we asked what skills they felt they had that helped them excel, what motivated them to do well and the special things they learned to do their jobs better.

They liked sharing this insight – often because they were things they didn’t think about, but were proud of.

We pulled together the feedback to help improve job descriptions and get a better picture of ideal job candidates.

(Heather Rattin, VP Of Operations)

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## 19. Getting employees to open up, share ideas

This is why it’s important for leaders to connect with front line employees.

They’re often the people who have the best ideas on how the organization can improve. Plus, genuine conversations between managers and employees help build morale.

But as leaders, we often spend so much time focused on numbers, goals, meetings and strategy that we don’t get a chance to connect with employees.

### **Fielding questions**

That was the case with me. So when I had the chance to meet with front line employees, I wanted it to be the most valuable time possible.

To make it happen in those kinds of meetings, I'd address the issues with a Q&A and open by saying, "I'm not going to sit down until I get at least three questions."

Once one person opens up, others chime in. Eventually we cover important subjects and generate ideas.

(Susan Story, Chief Executive)

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***We tweaked our hiring process so it emphasized the long-term benefits of working for us.***

## **20. Sold them on benefits right from the start**

Like other companies in our industry, we had to deal with a high turnover rate.

But we felt we offered many reasons for people to stay on board, especially when it came to our benefits.

We needed a way to make employees realize how good our company was.

### **A new focus up front**

We tweaked our hiring process so it emphasized the long-term benefits of working for us.

For example, we now talk to every new hire about the opportunity to receive a flexible schedule, a solid 401(k) and a generous insurance plan.

We also make sure to mention the professional skills they can develop with us.

Since we've made the change, the percentage of new hires that we've retained has ballooned.

Turnover is still an issue in our industry, but we're not as worried about it anymore.

(Stephanie Husted, HR Director, Dallas)

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## **21. New training program saves everyone time**

Our new employee orientation took a lot of time – for both employees and managers.

New hires would visit with HR for a few hours, then meet with their department manager to go over safety and other topics for a few more hours.

We knew we could cut orientation down to save everyone time.

### ***Videos make the difference***

In this case, uploading videos onto our Learning Management System was our best option.

We managed to condense our orientation materials – both on general topics and safety – into two 25-minute videos that can be accessed online.

New hires get the most important information right away – without managers having to sacrifice so much time.

By covering the most important issues right away, we can postpone the finer points until later training sessions.

And since the videos are in our system, we can easily and inexpensively change the content as we need to.

(Tomeka Blue, Bilingual Training Specialist/Instructional Designer, Wallace, NC)

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## 22. Tailored review forms improved performance

We'd been using a classic performance review template because we knew it worked for a lot of other companies.

But it wasn't working for us. The template didn't line up well with our company's positions or our employees' duties.

As a result, our performance reviews weren't as effective as we knew they could be, and people weren't getting good information to help them develop.

### *Made them custom*

That's why we decided to finally draw up our own templates customized to our employees' duties.

We also established benchmarks for managers to talk about during appraisals.

Now that managers aren't locked into communicating exclusively through a template, they have a much easier time giving specific feedback, and workers say they're now getting much more useful information.

(Marge Brentmeyer, Controller, Carson City, NV)

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## 23. Small choice improved our exit interviews

For a long time, we conducted our exit interviews using a form that the employees would fill out at home.

I always had a reservation about it: If the interview isn't done in person, we're not able to pick up on valuable non-verbal cues.

I didn't want to force people to do the exit interview in person – I knew some wouldn't be as comfortable or honest in such a setting.

### ***Gave them a choice***

So we decided to let the departing employees decide. They can either fill out the form at home, or they can meet with us in person.

It's a win-win for both parties.

People who are uncomfortable being honest face to face don't have to worry about others when they write down their responses.

And when people choose to do the interview in person, we get to hear their responses and pick up on their non-verbal cues.

(Mary Lewis, Director of HR, San Jose, CA)

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## **24. How we resolved the training needs of our offsite employees**

A number of our employees were on the road a lot or frequently working offsite. The problem was that they needed to take part in various training sessions, such as the ones we held on avoiding harassment.

How do you get employees to attend mandatory training when they're someplace else? With a little technology.

### ***Remote presentations***

First, we email offsite people the presentation that we use for in-house staff. Then we conference-call a group of offsite employees and take them through the presentation.

They follow along on their computers while listening to the presentation on the phone.

We save questions until the end so staff can hear each question asked.

The feedback's been great.



Employees get all the info they need without having to come into the workplace. And we fulfill our mandatory training requirements.

(Marcy Malkin-Starnes, Senior HR Specialist, Atlanta)

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## 25. Personalized video welcomes new hires



***We created personalized welcome messages for new hires that involved our entire team.***

We needed to spice up new hire orientation. We knew employee engagement can be made or broken during a person's first week, and we wanted to get it right.

First and foremost, we wanted new hires to feel welcome and like a valued part of the team.

Our onboarding process up to this point was pretty basic – mostly the standard filling out of employment forms and some initial training.

One thing it lacked was any sort of personalization for the new employee. So we set out to change that first.

### ***A direct welcome***

Our solution: We created personalized welcome messages for new hires that involved our entire team.

Now, before anyone new starts, we gather our entire staff and film a short welcome video (less than a minute long) using a smartphone.

Someone holds a sign with the new hire's name while the rest of the team cheers in the background – and we let people get wild. Some people have even dressed in costumes, like a panda suit, and danced around.

We turn the video into a GIF file and email it to the new hire before his or her first day. It shows people that we're excited to have them with us.

In turn, new hires get excited to be a part of our team, and many have shared the video with friends and family over social media.

(Leela Srinivasan, CMO, San Francisco)

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## 26. Improved our team mentoring program

We work hard at making new employees feel like part of the team. As a key to that effort, we started a mentoring program, in which new hires got teamed with non manager veterans who showed them the ropes.

Sometimes, however, the pairing of rookie and vet just didn't seem to click. In the worst cases, the rookie resigned early in the game.

### **Wait a while**

We noticed that after a couple of weeks on the job, new people seemed to find someone they had something in common with. Usually, the two became friendly. Then why not build our mentor program around that?

That meant delaying the pairing up, but we tried it: New hires worked for a couple of weeks, and then they got to request a specific mentor.

The modified program worked wonders. We hardly ever lose anyone because of a bad mentoring matchup.

(Dierdre Mullen, Development Director, Philadelphia)



Even successful leaders cope with their team's drop in morale from time to time. It's important to recognize when this happens and take active steps to turn things around. Consider these unique ideas from women leaders that helped them boost and sustain teamwork in their workplaces.

### **27. Take the sting out of negative feedback**

Given the nature of negative feedback, it can be an uncomfortable conversation that's met with resistance.

Done right, it can be a productive conversation that helps employees improve and managers lead better.

We've found a direct, factual way to handle negative feedback – and it works well.

#### ***A three-pronged approach***

We use a Situation-Behavior-Impact approach. As managers, we first describe the situation. We give specific details on the behavior that wasn't appropriate. Then we explain the impact it had on the situation, colleagues or department.

It's all factual. There's no judging, which makes it easier for managers to lay out and employees to digest.

From there, we talk about the exact thing that needs to change or be improved. We document the conversation and set a deadline.

This has helped us address issues and poor behavior with finesse.

(Melissa Kline, Supervisor, Exton, PA)

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## 28. Deal with gossip before it hurts morale

Gossip can hurt morale and productivity in any workplace. The worst part: Once it's said and spreads, it's nearly impossible to deflect the damage it started.

That's why I take extra efforts to get ahead of it. The key: transparency. I focus on keeping my employees as informed as possible. I concentrate on:

- **Progress.** In team meetings, I update them on projects and initiatives that don't involve them but could impact them. Then they shouldn't be caught off guard.
- **My position.** I email them details on what I'm involved in outside of our department, the status of those projects and my whereabouts.
- **Their insight.** I get their feedback ahead of potential changes and throughout transitions so they know their ideas count and information is shared up and down the line of command.

(Pamela Jett, CEO, Mesa, AZ)

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## 29. 'Guys Jar' helped us improve communication

We've all done it: used the word "guys" to describe a group of individuals - whether they're male, female or a mixed group.

Well, we wanted to put an end to that kind of thing, which some employees referred to as "creeping sexism."

We believe that language has a way of changing the way you think - and at the same time, we're always trying to inject more diversity into what's traditionally been a male-dominated industry (information technology). As a result, we wanted to stop using language that had a sexist tone.

That's when we implemented our "Guys Jar."

The concept is simple: We place a small jar in the office, and we ask anyone who wants to stop using the word “guys” in the casual sense to put a dollar in the jar whenever they’re guilty of a slip of the tongue.

### ***We made it fun***

We’re not in your face about it, and participation is completely voluntary. But a lot of employees use the jar. In fact, employees tend to put a dollar in whenever they accidentally attach the wrong gender to something or someone.

When the jar’s full, we pull out the money and donate it to a charity that’s near and dear to us.

Example: We’ve donated money to Girls Who Code, a non profit dedicated to closing the gender gap in IT fields.

It’s turned into a fun way to improve how we communicate.

(Kat Marchán, CLI Engineer, Oakland, CA)

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## **30. Build relationships at work with these steps**

Managers are great at their own jobs. But one area they could always stand to focus on is being able to work well with people above and below them.

As a result, I’m always on the lookout for ways managers can forge better relationships with their workers.

And I encourage managers and managers-to-be to follow three research-backed best practices for building better work relationships.

### **Use three rules**

1. **Smile.** Research has repeatedly shown that people who regularly smile are perceived as nicer, easier to work with and more successful.
2. **Acknowledge others.** Knowing their manager cares about them is one of the greatest drivers of employee engagement.

One strategy I recommend: Follow the 10/5 rule. Wave hello to people when they're 10 feet away, and actually say "hello" when they're five feet away.

3. **Listen.** If colleagues need to talk to you, put everything aside. Don't multi-task. Avoid distractions. Paraphrase their comments to ensure understanding. And acknowledge their feelings.

This has improved many managers' relationships with employees.

(Christine Porath, Professor of Management, McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University)

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## **31. 'Best-in-Show Awards' boost morale**

There's no way managers can see everything their employees do every day.

They'll see or know about big problems. And if little errors happen, employees usually fix and report them.

What managers more often missed were all the great things employees did. Some positive work went under the radar.

We didn't want to miss the opportunity to congratulate, reward and recognize employees for behind-the-scenes great work.

### **Small acknowledgments help**

That's what inspired us to start "Best-in-Show Awards."

We asked employees to nominate and vote on colleagues for special recognition for being a leader, extra productive, safety conscious or attendance conscious.

Then we awarded our winners with recognition and a cash incentive during an annual company get-together. It's really helped us build morale for work that might go under the radar.

(Cindy Cummings, HR Manager, Tulsa, OK)

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### 32. Mid day activity helps employees de-stress

A recent employee survey revealed something startling: Our people felt highly stressed, almost daily.



***We asked employees to nominate and vote on colleagues for special recognition for being a leader, extra productive, safety conscious or attendance conscious.***

We always try to stay tuned in and receptive to our workforce's wants and needs (hence the survey).

When the survey results revealed employees were stressed, we knew we needed to act fast.

The problem was, we couldn't do much about their workloads, and hiring additional help wasn't an option either.

We needed a cost-effective way to help our people get through the day.

#### ***Simple, low-cost solution***

So we sent out another survey asking our staff for suggestions. We figured: Why not poll the people directly in need?

We got some creative ideas back. But one stuck out to us because of how easy it would be to implement: a midday meditation session.

Once a day, for 30 minutes, we set up a break room with ambient noise from a smartphone.

Employees can drop in on the days they feel stressed – and it has become a popular attraction.

Everyone leaves looking refreshed, and employees are telling us it has helped reduce their stress levels.

In fact, it has been so successful, we may implement yoga or T'ai Chi classes next.

(Julie Newsom, Communications Specialist, Bloomington, IN)

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### 33. Here's how we de-stress a hectic office

The end of the year is our busiest time, and all the deadlines tend to get employees stressed.

We didn't want employees to get burned out, so we needed to give them a release from all the pressure.



***We took two of our conference rooms and turned them into massage parlors for a day.***

One of the first ways we tried to lift spirits was making coffee runs for people. Every day someone was designated to be the runner and would pick up co-workers' coffee orders.

It helped a little, but not everyone wanted coffee or treats, so it wasn't the stress reliever we were looking for.

Then someone joked about having a spa day at work, which seemed a little "out there."

But the more we thought about it, the more we liked the idea.

#### **Quick, but effective**

So we took two of our conference rooms and turned them into massage parlors for a day. Then we hired massage therapists and let everyone know they'd be in the office in the middle of our most hectic week.

People could stop in for 10 minutes, which is a blip in the grand scheme of the work day for us. But it was enough time to work wonders. While no one looks forward to our year-end crunch, everyone now looks forward to when the therapists come.



It's been a great way for employees to relieve stress, and it has served as a morale booster during our most hectic work season.

(Rachel Kenis, Director of Team Resources, Chicago)

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### 34. Extra day of PTO delivered our message

We wanted people to know that it's OK to take time off to take care of themselves.

But when we talked to our employees, many didn't feel comfortable missing work to go to the doctor for sick visits and/or preventive care – like vaccinations.

The latter was a big problem. No one wanted to take a sick day to keep themselves healthy if they didn't actually feel sick, even though that's exactly what we wanted them to do.

#### *Something needed to change*

We decided to introduce the idea of “unsick days.”



***We decided to introduce the idea of “unsick days.”***

The gist was we'd give employees an extra day of PTO specifically to see the doctor. More importantly, we launched an information campaign stressing that employees should take time out for their health.

One message we delivered: It'd hurt the company more if employees came to work sick and got others ill than if they just took a day off.

Employees had plenty of PTO already, but the added PTO day was meant to help drive home how serious we were about this issue.

Result: Employees are taking more sick days, especially those who used to “tough it out” and come in to work sick.

(Jessica Aptman, VP of Communications, New York)

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### **35. Got managers to start being more positive**

There had been a rise in the complaints from employees saying that managers were too hard on them.

The managers agreed they'd become a bit stricter. But in their defense, they said it was because business had picked up and employees weren't meeting expectations.

Still, we feared the situation would get worse. So we looked further into the complaints and saw that, at times, the managers were acting a bit too harshly, which wasn't acceptable.

But before we took any disciplinary action, we decided to hold manager communication training.

#### ***Set better expectations***

In training, we had our managers fill out worksheets that laid out what their expectations were for employees.

Then, we filled out our own worksheets with the expectations the company had for our managers.

The two worksheets were night-and-day different. Some managers' expectations were very negative, focusing only on how badly certain employees were underperforming.

But then we showed them our worksheets, which set more positive expectations, stressing the help they should be providing to their workers.

Seeing the difference in tone got managers to present their expectations in a more positive way. As a result, we've seen decreases in complaints and a noticeable increase in morale.

(Julie Hatcher, VP of HR, San Jose, CA)

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### 36. Old office became popular parental area

Our company prides itself on being a family-conscious, flexible work environment.



***We repurposed an old office meeting room into a quiet space for parents.***

Example: Parents can periodically bring their kids with them to work when the unexpected pops up.

But one day the family and work worlds collided – and not in a good way. An employee disturbed a mother’s breast milk, which she pumped at work and placed in the community fridge in the break room.

Both parties were upset, and the resulting discussion made us realize that we needed to make some changes while still keeping our family-friendly office environment intact.

#### ***A space for families***

Our solution: We repurposed an old office meeting room into a quiet space for parents.

They could use the room as a play area on the days their kids joined them at work, and it also provided a private place for mothers to nurse and pump comfortably.

A separate fridge was even put in just for mothers to store their milk, far away from people’s lunches or where it could be disturbed.

The room had a great impact. Many new parents appreciated having a space at work just for them.

Plus, it reminded workers just how family-friendly we really are.

(Ashley McEvoy, Company Group Chairman, Jacksonville, FL)

### **37. Gathering staff showed them it's OK to speak up**

Our company is relatively new, and we wanted to start things off on the right foot from not only a business perspective but also from an employee perspective.

To us that meant creating a culture where employees felt like they could bring anything up to management at any time.

It was also important to us that we make sure workers didn't feel ignored.

So we set to work preaching the importance of open communication. And to demonstrate exactly what that looks like, we started a unique morning routine.

#### ***Shared ideas, concerns***

Our entire staff gathers together for a few minutes each morning, and everyone – from our executives to our interns – is offered a moment to speak should they choose to do so.

What do we talk about? Employees can share ideas, concerns, needs or anything in between.

This morning gathering has helped employees find their voice and realize it's OK to speak up.

It has paved the way for new business ideas, as well as solutions to problems that have popped up as our company grows.

Plus, the meeting empowers workers to take charge and implement solutions on their own, which has led to some great innovations.

Our culture of open communication is a big reason employees love it here.

(Felicite Moorman, CEO, Philadelphia)

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### **38. 'Employee of Month' out; 'Team Player' in**

Our Employee of the Month Award had lost its luster.

Our old system – employees nominate, managers pick winners – no longer encouraged great work or even nominations for a couple of reasons:

A deserving person might have been passed over because others thought he got the award too much already. Or managers remembered one slipup by a person who fellow employees thought was great.

We found a better way to make it work. We made it purely colleague to colleague, removing management.

#### **Everyone gets a vote**

With the Team Player of the Month Award, employees nominated each other based on their contributions to the group and team efforts.

Then they voted on the winner each month. The new system kept everyone interested in giving the award and motivated to win.

(Krista Ciccozzi, Director of Technical Support, Atlanta)

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### **39. Learned – and shared – time management lessons**

Name one person who doesn't struggle with time management. It's a common problem across the board, from myself to my co-workers.

So I took a chance to not only teach a lesson, but learn one for myself, too.

### ***Learning to say no***

I noticed a lot of employees didn't know how to say "no" to extra tasks, so they were always overwhelmed and stressed. I asked them, "What are the most important things that need to happen? Who else can you leverage to get things done? What can you defer?"

It got their wheels turning.

Then I showed them a good time management technique I learned.

Every morning, I take 10 minutes to set my priorities for the day. From here, I make conscious choices instead of letting tasks and distractions rule my day. Slowly but surely, they started adopting my approach.

I even shared my color-coding calendar system with them.

They showed me a few tricks along the way, too. We're still working on it, but we've gotten much better at putting priorities in proper order.

(Jennifer Knickerbocker, Managing Partner, Nashville, TN)

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## **40. Make sure everyone feels special on their birthday**

Birthdays can be an awkward subject in the workplace. While we wanted to celebrate everyone's, it wasn't doable with the number of people we have.

Instead of trying to celebrate each person's birthday, I had a better idea: Group birthdays by month.

### ***Taking their turns***

Every month, I ask for a team of two volunteers to handle that month's birthdays.

One person is in charge of getting a card and the other is in charge of a dessert. The person in charge of the card drops it off at the front desk, where people have the entire month to stop by and sign it.

Then every last Friday of the month at 2 p.m., everyone gathers in the kitchen to sing “Happy Birthday” to anyone who had a birthday that month.

Every department is invited, so everyone can enjoy dessert and mingling with employees they don’t see on a regular basis.

Now, I’m not the only person who handles birthdays. Everyone pitches in and helps out. We all contribute to make each other feel special.

(Becky Blackstone, Administrative Assistant, Columbus, OH)

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## **41. Creating a ‘kiddie fee’ for personal fundraisers**

Everyone knows those times of the year: the many fundraising seasons of co-workers’ kids selling popcorn, cookies and more.

While I don’t mind contributing every once in a while, it felt unfair to buy from one co-worker and not another. And buying from everyone wasn’t an option.

We decided to do something about it as a company.

Instead of everyone picking an organization to contribute to, we have a “kiddie fee.”

Here’s how it works: If someone wants to contribute to a co-worker’s kid’s fundraiser, they pay a kiddie fee.

The person decides how much they want to contribute.

### ***Everyone gets a piece***

Then at the end of the year, the kiddie fee gets distributed throughout the company.

That way, everyone's kid gets a slice of the pie.

This put an immediate stop to people circulating their kid's fundraiser throughout the year.

And no one feels pressured to contribute – each person gets to call the shots on how much they spend.

The best part: There are no hurt feelings.

No one knows who contributed or how much.

(Terri Sargent, Administrative Specialist, Philadelphia)

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## **42. What every leader can learn from feedback**

We did a lot of things as a matter of course – training, reviews, feedback. The question was, were we doing them well enough?

While it all worked out fine, I didn't want any of it to be ineffective just because "that's what we always did."

The best way to avoid that was to really listen to the feedback from the people who experienced and participated in our activities.

### ***Don't take it as criticism***

So I made a point to ask, listen and act on what they had to say right after they participated in the training I provided.

A few people had some different ideas on how and when I could present things.

Some managers might have blown that off as criticism, but I listened closely to their reasons.

I made changes and as it turned out, people were even more willing to participate in the training.



Even better, now that they know I listen closely and act on their feedback, they're giving me more – which has led to other great ideas for me and them.

(Jean Andersen, RDN, Granby, CO)

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### **43. Step in their shoes to build employee morale**

Our employees worked hard to maintain the quality and consistency associated with our company. From time to time, they also went above the call of duty to help colleagues, customers and leadership.

We rewarded them financially and recognized their efforts. But nothing boosted morale like this reward:

Bosses stepped in and did their employees' jobs for some time.

#### ***Dual benefit***

Several leaders offered the reward when they ran contests and when they saw performance expectations exceeded.

They'd take over an employee's tasks for an hour or two while the employee enjoyed a longer break. In some cases, the employee sat in the boss' office for the day.

It had two benefits: Employees liked the time off or quiet office for a day. Leaders sharpened skills they may not have used in some time.

(Deborah Alvord, Customer Engagement Management, Raleigh, NC)

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## 44. Why it might be time to drop the comment box

You'd think that one of the best ways to get people to communicate with you online is to give them a way to comment.

Whether it's through an online blog or in-house intranet space for employees, the comment box has traditionally been the way to open up that communication.

We recently found an even better way.

### *Encouraged to go elsewhere*



*We thought we could get better, more useful conversations going if we turned off the comment box.*

We thought we could get better, more useful conversations going if we turned off the comment box. So as an experiment, we did just that.

Instead, we encouraged people to take the conversation further on Google Plus and Twitter.

Turned out, more people than ever contributed thoughtful insights and interacted more on those platforms than in traditional comment boxes.

We've used those conversations to stay abreast of what matters to our people.

(Sonia Simone, Co-Founder and Chief Content Officer, Copyblogger.com)

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## 45. Two minutes can make a positive difference

Even the best companies can benefit from improving their culture. I wanted to make ours even more positive for two reasons: to boost morale and improve collaboration.

I had read about a challenge that I thought could help. In short, you spend two minutes each day writing a positive email for a total of 21 days.

So I decided to take it myself.

### ***No extra time involved***

It wasn't a big time investment, but it was certainly a commitment. Every day, I dedicated the first two minutes of my work day to sending a positive email.

Whether it was praise on a job well done or just letting the person know how much he or she is appreciated, the email always brought a smile to the person's face.

After 21 days, I saw more success than I anticipated.

Not only was there a jump in morale and collaboration, but it also helped me, too.

It made me realize how many meaningful relationships – and how much support – I have.

(Michelle Gielan, Founder, Institute for Applied Positive Research)

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## **46. A better plan for Secret Santa exchanges**

Here's a workplace Secret Santa idea employers can keep in mind for next year.

The problem with traditional Secret Santa gift exchanges is participants rarely end up with a gift they want.

So while the exercise is supposed to be fun, it doesn't do as much as it could to build morale and spread the seasonal joy employers are hoping for.

But there's a better way.

One company came up with a unique spin on the traditional gift exchange.

As with a normal Secret Santa, employees who want to participate sign up. Then, they're assigned a co-worker to purchase a gift for.

### ***Make it a toy***

At that point, things get a little different. Participants are asked to buy a toy that fits their assigned co-worker's personality (e.g., a toy computer would be perfect for Bill over in IT.)

There are few other restrictions, but the gift has to be a toy.

Here's why: After employees open their gifts and have a good laugh at each other's expense, the unopened toys get donated to a charity that gives Christmas presents to local children.

It's a win-win all around. Employees get the fun of opening presents, without having to take unwanted junk home. Plus, they get to give something to kids in need.

(Suzanne Lucas, HR Specialist, on Inc.com)

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## **47. We boosted interest in noncash rewards**

Our system of noncash rewards and incentives was getting flat and dull.

No one seemed excited about getting an incentive. Was it only cash that would do the trick?

Turns out, our problem wasn't the incentives; we just had to do a better job of matching incentives with the people receiving them.

### ***What do you want?***

We did that in two ways: 1. When people came on board with us, we had them fill out a form listing their interests and likes – opera, auto racing, coin collecting, whatever. 2. We had current employees fill out the same form, too.

Then, when it came time to give employees a noncash award, we just looked at their lists and chose something compatible with their interests.

What a difference. Now, people actually strive for, and look forward to, getting the awards.

(Kristina Davis, HR Officer, Waynesboro, MS)

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## 48. Recognizing our top performers succeeded

As any manager knows, it's easy to get caught up in the day-to-day work and forget about recognizing staffers, especially if there isn't a lot of money to hand out.



***We make sure to ask top performers for their input before making any major decisions or enacting big changes in our department.***

I worried about morale slipping if we didn't try something to show how much we appreciated them.

### ***Ask for input***

Of course, we publicly recognize people for their efforts.

But over and above that, we make sure to ask top performers for their input before making any major decisions or enacting big changes in our department.

And I ask them about their thoughts on various initiatives, such as how we can improve our processes.

Recognizing staffers by empowering them to make decisions is now a regular routine in our department.

They've really responded – and morale continues to climb.

(Victoria Cunningham, A/P Manager, Camden, NJ)

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## 49. Got everyone to focus on performance

We knew enough to separate our performance-review discussions from talks about salary.

When you hold those discussions simultaneously, all that employees can think about is money, and the part about the performance gets lost. So we always held the performance review first, and then did the salary talk later.

Still, people realized the two went hand in hand, and even with the different meetings, they still seemed fixed on money, not performance.

Maybe more space would help.

### *More than 30 days*

In our case, we chose to separate the two by at about two months. That's an arbitrary period, but we wanted to make sure it was more than 30 days so there was a clear separation between the two.

Creating that extra time between the two meetings got people focused on each one at the appropriate times, and helped everyone concentrate on the issues one at a time.

(Jenny Berg, VP of HR, Cincinnati)

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## 50. Finding out what good employees want

Determining pay, benefits and incentives for top employees has always been tricky business for us.

The problem is magnified when we're dealing with some high performers. Those are the people who exceed the norm and deserve something extra.

***Just ask!***

What does it take to keep someone like that? Why not just ask them?

That's what we did during performance reviews for those people.

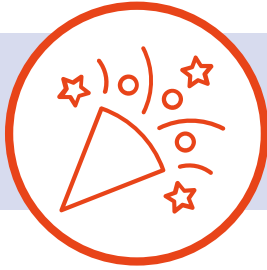
The question was: What benefit or incentive could another employer offer you to get you to change jobs?

You might think they'd mention outlandish perks. Guess what, though? Most didn't. Their requests were reasonable and usually doable, such as more flexible schedules.

As a result, our turnover rate among key people has gone lower and lower each year. And we're confident our incentives are at the right level for us.

(Lilly Eng, Development Director, Northbrook, IL)

## Chapter 3: Motivating Your Team For Success



Good leaders know their teams sometimes need extra motivation and inspiration to get their jobs done. Check these solutions women leaders created to step up their teams' game and aim for even greater success.

### 51. We drove employees out of their summer slump

Recently, we stumbled upon a great idea to give office morale a boost.

We'd noticed the whole office seemed to be in a bit of a lull.

It was the middle of summer, and the office had grown pretty quiet. For some reason, it seemed like everyone had a case of the summertime blues.

Then, a heat wave struck, and it gave us an idea on how we could provide a little pick-me-up.

We got in touch with a local vendor to get an ice cream truck out to our office for an afternoon.

On the day it was to arrive, we made a surprise announcement before lunch (so no one left the building to grab food and missed it) that the truck would arrive around noon and everyone was to help themselves.

#### **A cool break**

We figured noon was the best time, since it was the hottest part of the day, and employees were likely to be ready to go on break anyway.

It was great to see everyone scramble for the parking lot.

We saw the mood around the office pick up immediately. It also let employees know that we appreciate their hard work enough to treat them.



The best result was listening to everyone talk about the event days after the fact. The idea created a bit of a lasting buzz.

(Rhonda Cox, Operations Manager, Dallas)

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## 52. Play time gave us an edge over competition

To best serve customers, our employees have to stay on top of new developments in our industry. That way we stay up to date on what our customers are dealing with.



***We gather the entire office together and ask trivia questions about current industry events.***

So we're always looking for ways to stay abreast of what's happening in the industry and make it easy for our employees to share this info among themselves.

And any time we can inject some fun into the process, we try to do so. Recently, we came up with an idea that helped: a trivia face off.

A few times a week, for 15 to 20 minutes, we gather the entire office together and ask trivia questions about current industry events.

### ***A fun contest***

It helps employees hone their knowledge and share extra insights they have on the topics covered.

The trivia sessions aren't mandatory, but we encourage everyone to attend when work permits.

On Fridays, we up the ante by offering prizes, like gift cards, to those who answer questions correctly.

It's become popular, and it keeps everyone sharp and has improved communication. Plus, it's been a good way to measure where we should increase employee education efforts.

Bonus: Recently, a trivia face off sparked a brainstorming session that helped solve one of our team's problems.

(Leah Gallagher, Account Supervisor, Boston)

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### **53. We found a new way to channel staffers' ideas**

Goodbye time-wasting meetings, hello better feedback.

We're always looking for new ways to increase efficiency.

And some of our best ideas come from our employees, either through completely new ideas or feedback on current processes.

But it can be hard getting everyone together to brainstorm or talk about new projects.

When our IT department created a company-wide intranet, we immediately saw a chance to use it to our advantage: We could get everyone involved with fine-tuning our processes.

The first step was Convincing everyone to actually use the intranet. Our younger employees took to the new tool like ducks to water, but our older staffers were more reticent.

We wanted them to see the intranet as an indispensable part of their job, so we started giving them can't-ignore reasons to use it, like making it the only place they could obtain certain forms or read important department memos.

Eventually, with our encouragement, we got everyone familiar with using the new system. With that taken care of, we could move forward and start using it to our advantage.

### ***A two-dimensional approach***

We approached our goal from two directions: First, when we propose a change to a current policy or procedure, we post our thoughts on the intranet.

After we post what we plan on changing and how it'll affect their responsibilities, we ask employees to provide feedback on the proposed changes.

Our staffers then let us know if they like our proposed changes or if they think there's still room for improvement and if so, what needs to be improved.

Second, we made it easy for employees to post suggestions on the intranet.

Not every idea is a winner, but we're glad to see employees sending their suggestions straight to us rather than just kicking them around amongst themselves.

And some ideas have paid off. For example, we've been able to improve how we track costs by exploring new facets of our existing systems, which our employees had learned about.

It's great being able to solicit ideas and employee feedback without having to take time away from work for a meeting.

(Becky Schnack, Controller, Omaha, NE)

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## **54. Outdoor project helped staff work as a team**

We're always on the lookout for fun ways to help our employees bond. So when we saw an ad for the Green Thumbs at Work grant program in a local paper, we hopped all over it.

The program provides a government grant, which helps businesses create and maintain a small garden plot.

We immediately applied to get a grant – and we got it.

We didn't have much experience in the beginning, but the garden experts the program provided were a big help setting things up. We were even given seed packets with garlic, potatoes (my favorite), peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers – you name it.

### **Growing together**

Next, we had to figure out how we were going to work the garden.

We created a schedule for who was going to do what, and we tried to build it around people's preferences – some wanted to plant, while others wanted to weed.

Not only did the schedule help ensure the garden was maintained, but it also allowed us to determine who worked together.

Employees loved it. It helped everyone bond, and we got a lot of healthy food out of it. In fact, we couldn't eat it all. So we donated to food pantries and day care centers.

Now everyone's looking forward to next year's harvest.

(Jessica Mulligan, Wellness Coordinator & Co-owner, Hyde Park, VT)

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## **55. Down-to-earth ideas helped create better work/health balance**

We needed to find ways to help employees balance their work along with taking care of themselves.

Our industry can be pretty demanding at times. New deadlines can pop up at the last minute.

That can result in employees grabbing something quick to eat (i.e., fast food) and/or not making time to exercise during the week.

So we set out to create a workplace that better supported our employees' health and encouraged them to take more time out for themselves. We started by creating more opportunities for employees to make healthier choices by hosting events like:

- yoga sessions
- morning hikes around our facility, and
- daily in-office plank exercises at 4 p.m.

However and whenever we can, we also schedule various other activities that give employees a chance to get up and away from their desks.

### **Body and mind health**



***We encourage employees to spend one hour on Fridays taking a healthy action of their choice, to improve either their mental or physical health.***

Soon after launching these initiatives, we began to notice a great trend: People started connecting and building rapport over topics that weren't just work-related.

Example: While hiking, co-workers would talk about their families and hobbies rather than their work.

This was exactly the kind of break from the workday we wanted to create. Still, we wanted to do more.

To promote more of that balance, we began hosting "Healthy Hours." These work like traditional happy hours, only we bring in juices and other healthy drinks.

### **Take a Friday break**

Then, our senior VP provided us with another great idea that gave us an additional outlet to improve employees' health.

We encourage employees to spend one hour on Fridays taking a healthy action of their choice, to improve either their mental or physical health.

This could mean sleeping in for an hour and coming into work later, going to a yoga session they couldn't fit in earlier in the week or taking part in any other kind of healthy activity.

And we mean any kind of healthy activity (I spend my hour at a local coffee shop reading and relaxing).

We also ease the dress code on Fridays, so people can come in dressed down or wearing athletic gear.

It's been three years since we launched these initiatives.

Every event is voluntary, but we always have great participation and the reception from employees has been very positive.

Our people know we're here to help them be at their best while supporting healthy lifestyles.

(Amy Ogden, VP of Brand Development, New York)

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## **56. How we solved communication problems with remote workers**

Flexibility has always been a point of pride at our company.

What does that mean? We try to be as flexible as possible with our scheduling, and we allow people to work off-site as much as we can.

But as more people began to work off-site, a problem emerged: Employees were starting to feel less connected to each other.

We learned this through employee surveys and interviews, which we conduct regularly to see how well our flex initiatives are working.

Bottom line: We had to open up the lines of communication.

### ***Already had a tool***

We started looking into collaboration tools that would be cost-effective for our organization.



***We created a group called “Working Remotely” and invited everyone off-site to join it.***

And it turned out we already had one at our disposal, but we weren't taking full advantage of it. With our Microsoft Office 365 subscription, we had access to Yammer (think Facebook, but for businesses).

It serves as a central hub for team collaboration, allowing employees to chat and share their work/ideas.

We created a group called “Working Remotely” and invited everyone off-site to join it. Result: People began to introduce themselves almost immediately, starting up work conversations on the group wall.

After a few weeks, we considered Yammer a success. But we still had a few kinks to iron out.

### ***Working out the kinks***

As with any new tech rollout, there were IT-related growing pains. The system was new to a lot of people, and they had questions, concerns and a few tech problems.

Our solution: One of our IT people drafted a self-help document that addressed common remote work pain points and tech obstacles.

She then uploaded it to our Yammer page, making it available for discussion and comments.

Then, we followed it up by hosting a live chat with our IT department. During the chat, employees could ask specific questions and seek help for tech troubles.

The chat addressed things from Internet speeds to which program settings employees should be using.

Some employees (not just IT staff) jumped in to offer advice as well. It solved a lot of problems and served as the catalyst for future online discussions.

It was great to see everyone working together to address each other's problems. So we took that idea and ran with it.

To help employees feel even more connected, we got two of our top remote teams to host a webinar and share tips on things like working remotely and managing remote teams.

Thanks to the new social platform, employees don't just feel more connected, they are more connected.

Result: Communication's improved, and we can keep our flex programs without sacrificing productivity.

(Marcee Harris Schwartz, Director of Diversity and Inclusion, New York)

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## **57. Need the boss' support? This approach works**

It's never easy to ask for and get more resources or upgraded technology.

Our executives didn't approve every request that came their way. And who could blame them? It's their job to make sure we make smart investments.

That's why when we felt our department needed an upgrade, we wanted to make our request solid.

### ***Ready for the opportunity***

When we got the opportunity to present our ideas to the powers that be, this approach worked well.

We started by going over a project we had tried a few years prior that wasn't successful. We gave the reasons it didn't work and what we learned from the failure.

Then, with two options for the new project in mind, we went over the benefits of going forward on it. We touched on financial, process and personnel benefits and a projected ROI.



Going in with this detailed plan and orderly presentation helped us win approval!

(Tonya MacGaren, Manager, Minneapolis)

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## 58. How to deal with chronic complainers

Chronic Complainers: You probably dread encounters with them. Here's a way to turn those meet-ups into something positive.

I've had a few chronic complainers work for or with me over the years.

They talked about problems, not solutions. They complained for the sake of complaining about things we couldn't change.

And they whined about things they might be able to change if only they tried.

### *Handle with care*

They're tough to deal with. But I've found that this approach works best when managing Chronic Complainers on your team.

First, I stay relentlessly positive so I don't feed their complaining.

Then, I thank them for bringing the issue to my attention and ask probing questions such as, "How do you think we can fix that?" or "What are your recommendations on this?"

If they don't have any ideas, I say, "Thanks for pointing that out. When you have a recommendation, tell me about it." That gets them to either think or stop complaining!

(Pamela Jett, CEO, Mesa, AZ)

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## 59. What to do after giving bad news

Telling good employees bad news is one of a leader's toughest tasks. Here's an effective way to do it.

No one likes to tell a team it missed a goal or an employee she didn't get promoted.

But we had to do it from time to time, and this approach helped everyone – supervisors, employees and myself – get through it easier.

### *Get immediate feedback*

After we deliver the bad news, we ask employees how they feel. That tells them it's OK to share their frustrations or disappointments. We empathize, saying that it's understandable they feel that way.

Then we talk about strengths – real positives, no sugarcoating. We focus on how they can capitalize on them going forward.

For instance, we'll talk about how a team that missed a goal can use its strong attention to detail to meet the next one. Or we'll discuss how an employee who missed a promotion can use her time management skills to get a jump on the next available job.

(Yvonne Zeminski, Senior VP Branch Administration, Hampstead, MD)

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## 60. Special meal helps merge teams successfully

When our company merged departments, we gained several new members – and most of us had never worked together in the past.

We needed to get to know each other personally and professionally so we could avoid the hiccups that often happen when teams merge.

To help the team get to know each other and open up, we tried something that worked in the past: food and a casual environment. But this wasn't your typical potluck.

### **No pressure**

We went to an afternoon off-site class at a culinary school.

Standing side by side, learning new skills without pressure to succeed (after all, we didn't have to cook well to do our real jobs) and then sharing a meal we collaborated on for a few hours was a powerful team builder.

It helped us get to know each other's personalities and work styles. The merger went well – and we had a great time.

(Mira Anderson, Lead Recruiter, Chicago)

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## **61. Keeping improvement ideas coming**

We were doing well, but we believed every company has room for improvement.



**We developed a contest for the most effective employee suggestion.**

What's more, we felt the best ideas for operational improvements came from the people doing the work – our employees.

But they weren't offering many ideas. They did their work – and did it well – but weren't motivated to give suggestions.

So we gave them the motivation to give us their inspirational ideas for improvements.

### **Employees get involved**

We developed a contest for the most effective employee suggestion. Employees had a month to submit an idea, plus summarize how it would work and benefit the company.

From there, employees voted on our intranet for their favorites. We picked the winner from the top three and awarded the idea-maker a gift card. Now we continue to get lots of good ideas to use and improve.

(Jane Keathley, Owner, Earlysville, VA)

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## **62. Found workers to help with key transition**

Change was coming to the office, and not everyone was happy about it.

Our company was growing, which was great. But as a result, we were looking for some employees to move out of their current positions and help with the expansion efforts.

Example: We had to open a new facility across town, and we needed employees to get that facility up and running.

The problem was, naturally, that some employees weren't keen on moving and dealing with all the hassles that come with it.

Plus, we didn't want to force anyone to move. So we had to come up with a way to drum up volunteers.

### ***Not a move, an opportunity***

Our solution? Flip our sales pitch.

We stopped positioning it as a move or relocation, but rather an opportunity. This gave employees a chance to be on the forefront of something new and put their stamp on it. That got people's attention, and volunteers started coming forward.

But we didn't just take everyone who volunteered (no doubt adding to the allure of the move). We conducted interviews to select the best candidates.

In the end, we selected a strong group of individuals who were eager and qualified to make the move, and we avoided sending people who'd be unhappy in their new surroundings.

(Kathy Ocker, Director of HR, Springfield, MO)

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### **63. Quirky reward turned team performance around**

There was a team I worked with that was having trouble meeting their performance goals from week to week.

The manager was trying all kinds of different methods and incentives in an attempt to get the workers to hit their weekly goals. Little worked.

Still, the manager kept trying everything he could think of.

Then, finally, he came up with a quirky outside-the-box way to motivate his team.

#### ***A family affair***

The unique idea that finally made an impact: The manager promised the team that if they met their weekly goals, a phone call would be made to their mothers to tell them what a great job they were doing as a way of saying thank you.

It may sound silly, but it actually struck a chord with this group.

Of course, it wasn't the act of calling their mothers that got their attention, but rather the fact that the manager was willing to take the time to make such a personal gesture on their behalf.

Result: Taking that time to give workers a personalized thank-you really jump-started the team.

After that, his staffers began meeting their performance goals.

(Barbara Glanz, Presenter, SHRM15 Conference & Expo)

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## **64. Seven-option Rule brings you solutions**

Most of the time, it's business as usual for leaders. But periodically, a big obstacle or issue bubbles up, and it needs a serious fix.

I've used the 'Seven-option Rule' – and ask my managers and supervisors to use it, too – to overcome problems.

Whenever we're faced with a challenge that doesn't have an obvious fix, we come up with seven options.

### ***Gets everyone thinking***

It forces everyone to think beyond the obvious.

The first option usually does little or nothing. The last one is often at the other end of the spectrum.

Then, somewhere in between the two, when we're thinking broadly, the best solution comes out.

It's been a powerful problem-solving tool for a long time.

(Lynn Steenberg, CEO, Syracuse, NY)

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## 65. How to get employees on board for extra work

Most employees don't want to hear they're being given extra work to be done in a specific way by a set time. But, as managers, sometimes we have to dole out those kinds of assignments.

Then we get push-back and lots of "why" questions: Why do I have to do it like that? Why can't I have more time? Why now?

They're valid questions and concerns that need to be addressed.

### *Articulate the plus side*

To get cooperation for the extra work, I've found responding like this works well. I make no apologies, explain the reason behind the request and appeal to employees' pride.

For instance, I might say, "If you do it the way we've discussed and on time, it'll be something great that you and I will be proud of. You play a critical role in our success; and I know that's the kind of work you can do."

That almost always gets employees on board. And in the end, I'm proud of their work almost as much as they are.

(Terry St. Marie, Co-Founder, Portland, OR)

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## 66. Extra effort leads to better communication

When you empower employees to handle their jobs the best way they see fit, they can do extraordinary things for customers and the company. This situation reminded us of that.

When an employee contacted a customer prior to an appointment, he discovered the customer was deaf.

Our employee then called a friend who knew American Sign Language and asked her to make a video message for the customer to see the next day.

### ***A personal touch***

The message shown on his phone covered an intro of the employee and his friend, plus what the customer could expect during and after the appointment.

The customer was greatly pleased with the personal touch.

The employee's initiative inspired our company to create official company videos – much like his – that employees could use when helping customers who are deaf or speak a different language.

(Melina Metzger, PR Manager, Columbus, OH)

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## **67. We asked, 'Why are we still doing it this way?'**

Like most companies, we had too many rules, regulations and procedures. And at one point, they all made perfect sense.

Over time, things changed – but these rules didn't. We realized we were just doing them because "that's the way we've always done it!"

This might be the absolute worst reason for doing anything.

It was time to get rid of these outdated practices.

The best way to do this? Put them under the microscope.

### ***Making changes***

At first, we were hesitant to get the ball rolling.

But then we realized we could start small by asking ourselves just one question: Is there a better way to do this?



That got our team thinking. We started considering:

- alternative approaches
- better use of current technology, and
- ways to eliminate long-standing processes.

Just that one question helped us come up with more effective processes that were a better use of our resources – and our time.

And while we're still examining processes, we've made progress so far.

(Elizabeth Winters, Speaker at Skillpath Administrative Assistants Conference)

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## 68. How to fuel intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation – the kind that comes from within a person – can be the most powerful. It's also the hardest for managers to influence.

But it's possible.

### **Everyone's responsible**

I've found that these tactics help ignite employees' internal motivators:

- Having a practical vision. I regularly share the company vision and a positive way it's realized – perhaps with an industry accolade.
- Creating a responsible environment. I expect and encourage employees to take responsibility for what goes right and wrong. That puts them in control of our successes and helps them learn from failures.

- Staying positive. Not everything is good, but I try to remain positive so it catches on. For instance, I expect employees to back up complaints with three possible solutions. And we start meetings and end days with positive notes from colleagues and bosses.

(Dianne Durkin, President, Portsmouth, NH)

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## 69. How to keep people in the same role on the same page



***We implemented a monthly meeting for employees in the same role, regardless of the area they worked in.***

As our company grew, so did the number of people in the same or similar roles — and it wasn't easy to keep everyone on the same page.

The physical distance between them led them to start doing the same tasks differently.

While different can be good, it can also lead to inconsistencies in quality and protocol failures.

We wanted to make sure people in the same function continued to work in the same way.

### ***Revealed best practices***

That's why we implemented a monthly meeting for employees in the same role, regardless of the area they worked in.

Before the meeting, everyone suggested topics and concerns to cover.

During the meeting, employees shared best practices, reminded each other of protocol and offered advice when asked. If they hit bigger problems, they took them to HR.

(Tina Kalil, Executive Assistant, Rockville, MD)

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## 70. Three proven ways to motivate and reward employees

Employees worked hard and seldom complained as their workload grew.

We knew we had to do more to reward them because they deserved it and we wanted to keep morale high.

### *Rewards galore*

These three ongoing rewards and recognition tactics worked well to accomplish both goals:



*We created a “Kudos Wall” where we posted positive comments from colleagues and customers.*

- We handed out “spot rewards” to employees who met their expectations each month – usually a certificate and gift card.
- We gave “points-based rewards” to employees who did above-and-beyond-the-call-of-duty work. They accumulated points and turned them in for prizes.
- We created a “Kudos Wall” where we posted positive comments from colleagues and customers. It also included kind words from meetings. Then we put the names of those who were mentioned on the wall in a hat for regular prize raffles.

(Kim Gladbach, Manager, Schaumburg, IL)

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## 71. One question transformed our meetings

Meetings can get pretty stale, and we needed to spice ours up. We decided to pay a visit to a local business that’s known for its employee-friendly atmosphere.

One of the most helpful pieces of advice we took away from our visit was “What if?” meetings.

We cut back on our regular meetings to try these instead. Here's how it works:

There's no judgment from other attendees, and no decisions are made that day.

### ***Getting the creativity going***

Anyone can throw an idea on the table, as long as it begins with "What if?"

Then other people add to it. For example, we were looking for ways to reach more customers. So I asked, "What if we offered our services online?" Another person piped in, "What if we hired more people?"

We sit on the What ifs for a few days, then meet again for a regular meeting.

This time, decisions are made. We've all had time to mull over the possibilities and discuss the ideas that are worth keeping.

(Joan Burge, Speaker at the 2016 Administrative Professionals Conference)

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## **72. Tackling a big project in a manageable way**

Our files weren't organized as efficiently as they could be – and it was causing a number of problems.

The whole system was costing us precious time when we had to go to multiple files to get the info that we needed. We knew we had to take the time to set up a better system.

The question was how to find the time to do it.

### ***A little at a time***

Rather than tying up a big bunch of people's time, I decided to try a different approach.

Every afternoon, I set aside a half an hour or so for everyone to work on getting the new system set up. After 30 minutes, we'd go back to our regular work.

Sure, it was slow going, but the approach allowed us to tackle the problem without pushing other pressing tasks to the back burner.

And in a few weeks, we finished and the new system was up and running.

(Jazmin Mercado, HR Administrator, Lathrop, CA)

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### **73. Deliver bad news? Go straight to the top**

We faced a serious PR problem. Like so many companies these days, we were faced with another cut in benefits – this time, our 401(k) match program.

When we had adjusted benefits the year before, employees were angry and upset. That time, we'd explained the changes in a company-wide memo.

We'd learned from that. What was needed was a way to put a human face on the company's situation, and explain why the cuts were necessary.

Who better than our CEO to do it?

#### ***Gave them answers***

We assembled all employees for a meeting with the big boss. He explained our overall profit picture and why we had to suspend – temporarily, we hoped – our match.

The CEO then stayed to answer all the employees' questions.

How'd it all work out? Naturally, employees weren't overjoyed. But they understood, and appreciated getting the straight scoop.

(Denice Trovao, HR Director, Napa, CA)

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## 74. 'Month of thanks' to reward our employees

We demand a lot from our team members, and it seems like they always rise to the occasion.

We wanted to do something big to thank them for regularly going above and beyond the call of duty.

And we truly didn't think one event could be enough. The solution: an entire month of activities to thank our staff members for all that they do.

### *Letters and waffles*

We chose a typically less busy month for us. Then we set up the events.

For instance, managers wrote personal letters to people thanking them for what they did to make our company great. Or one day we had a day where we let employees wear pajamas to work. As part of that celebration, we had a waffle breakfast.

And we shared info about the events on our company blog so our customers could see how much our employees meant to us. That gave us some good PR and a major team morale boost.

(Deborah Sweeney, CEO, Calabasas, CA)

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## 75. Try small efforts to motivate team members

How do you keep employees motivated for the whole year? That was the question we were facing.

We wanted to do something that our people would appreciate but that wouldn't break the bank. Our solution: a year-round morale-building and recognition effort.

### *Individual treatment*

We plan out a number of small signs of recognition and incentives for important dates and milestones in individual employees' lives.

A few examples:

- Our president sends a personalized message to our staffers on their birthdays, and
- When employees have a child, our company presents them with a savings bond or a car seat for the new baby.

We hear every year about how employees really appreciate our efforts.

Best of all: The appreciation shows in our stellar retention rates.

(Karen Heiting, Executive Assistant, Burr Ridge, IL)

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## **76. No time for training? We changed that**

Our staff relies on monthly training sessions to build skills and keep everyone up to date on changes in our industry. To make sure the training was on target, we always asked for assessments of the sessions.

Often, people had the same comment: “I like the sessions, and learn a lot, but sometimes I can’t make it because of scheduling.”

We could have gone to the big boss and asked to make attendance mandatory, but no one really wanted to handle it that way. Besides, people wanted to attend; they just couldn’t.

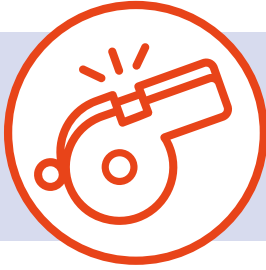
### **Record it**

How could we make the sessions more convenient? Record them.

We recorded videos of each session and made the videos available to anyone who wanted to see them. That worked out great for us. People love the idea of getting the training without having to worry about scheduling conflicts.

(Ann Geier, Director, Anderson, SC)

## Chapter 4: Enforcing the Rules



Leaders don't need to rule with an iron fist to enforce rules. The most successful ideas involve educating employees about what the rules are and why they're important. Consider these effective methods women leaders have used to encourage people to get on board following the rules.

### 77. Time-off incentive helped slash tardiness

We had a handful of employees who were chronically late. They never missed a day of work, but showing up late made things harder on the employees who covered for them.



*We came up with a great incentive that slashed late arrivals.*

Things had to change, but at the same time we didn't want to enforce policies that were heavy-handed.

Plus, the stragglers were already hurting themselves when they ended up with smaller paychecks at the end of the week due to their tardiness.

Knowing that taking a break from work is a real priority for some workers, we came up with a great incentive that slashed late arrivals.

#### ***Earned-hours plan worked***

If someone works a 40-hour week for a whole month, he or she earns three hours of personal/sick time. That adds up to another full week off a year.

Before we knew it, our stragglers were getting to work on time and their personal/sick days were adding up.

Employees are using their days for long holiday weekends, doctor's appointments or just banking them for extra down time.

Another plus: The hours accrued for perfect monthly attendance can be rolled over if an employee doesn't use his or her time by the end of the year.



This shows our employees that we value their time, and it keeps tardiness under control and production on track.

(Donna Kent, HR Director, Tuscumbia, AL)

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## 78. Changes gave our attendance policy more bite

We needed to give our attendance policy more teeth.

Our policy required employees to give us a week's notice for planned absences, like vacations.

To be honest, we were a little lenient with enforcement. Managers had a tendency to excuse first or second offenses if it didn't lead to major staffing problems.

Then, some employees started thinking it was OK to give managers a casual heads-up the day before an absence.

That was taking things to an extreme, and it was time to give the policy more bite.

### *Less lenient policy*

We rewrote the policy, extending the notice employees needed to provide from one week to two.

Then, we made the consequences for violating the policy stricter.

We created a three-strike rule:

- **Strike one** – Employees got a verbal warning for first offenses.
- **Strike two** – Violators had to meet with their manager to go over the policy in person.
- **Strike three** – This was grounds for dismissal.

So far, so good. More people are requesting time off within the required time frame, which has cut down on staffing problems. Even some of our worst offenders have fallen into line.

(Melissa Paul, Assistant Manager, Exton, PA)

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**After brainstorming some ideas, we created a trivia-style training game.**

## 79. Rules training game makes employees listen

Nobody likes sitting through a boring training session.

Worse yet, if employees aren't engaged in the topic – whether it's sexual harassment or fire safety – they're not going to absorb much information.

So we had to find a way to spice up our training to make sure employees walk away having learned something.

After brainstorming some ideas, we decided to make a game of it, and we created a trivia-style training game.

### **Gaming the rules**

We divide our attendees into groups of 10 to 15 people each.

Then we ask individuals within each group a question, like: "Is it OK for a male employee to say X, Y and Z to a female co-worker?"

If someone gets the answer incorrect, they're out.

And the team with the most members remaining after 15 to 20 questions wins the game ... and a prize.

The size of the prize depends on the importance of the topic we cover.

Example: For harassment training, each member of the winning team may get a \$10 gift card to a local lunch spot. For lesser topics, the winners get something smaller, like candy.

Result: Fewer yawns during training, which we're confident is translating into more engagement and info retention.

(Penny Powers, Director of HR, Pittsburgh)

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## **80. Interview form, training got managers to improve documentation**

Getting managers to write things down during the interview process was a real struggle.

They wouldn't document what they liked about a candidate or what they didn't like.

If we were ever accused of discrimination, defending our hiring decisions would be a real problem.

We kept telling our managers: "Document, document, document." But that didn't get us very far.

So I had to find a way to get something from managers.

When it comes to technical skills and experience, candidates either have the qualifications on paper or they don't – so documenting those areas wasn't the problem. It's when it came to assessing "fitness" that I needed managers to document candidates' strengths and weaknesses, so it didn't look like we were biased.

### ***New worksheet helped***

Using some behavioral assessments we get from a third-party provider and info I gathered from department managers on various jobs, I created an interview worksheet of sorts.

It's a form that requires managers to circle a block that corresponds with candidates' answers.

Example: For many positions, we ask candidates situational questions like, "What would you do if this happened?"

The form then contains answers we want to hear and answers we don't want to hear. Our managers just circle the block next to the response given. The interview forms aren't all the same, either. They vary by position.

Despite simplifying the process, we still got a lot of grumbling from managers. But we had to get them to see the light. So we did some training to further drive home the importance of this documentation.

### **Think like job seekers**

What finally helped make it stick? We told managers not to look at the hiring process through our eyes, but rather through the eyes of outsiders – like job seekers (and their attorneys).

A scenario we provided: Say a candidate's skills and experience matched the job requirements, and we opted not to hire the person.

What would it look like from the outside if our reasoning was simply "he or she wasn't a good fit" – with no info to back up that statement? It could look like we were picking on the person for a discriminatory reason.

The combo of the new forms and driving home the need to take outsiders' perspectives into account has started to get managers to document the interview process. We still have a way to go to get full manager buy-in, but we're in a better position now to defend hiring decisions.

(Shirley Simmons, HR Director, Centreville, IL)

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## **81. Unexpected absence? Not a problem for us**

Our list of responsibilities always seems to go on and on. With so much to take care of, we've divvied up many of the responsibilities among staffers.

Problem is, that also means there are a lot of areas staffers aren't exposed to very often.

And when someone is out – either due to sickness or vacation – someone needs to step up and fill the void.

That can be difficult if the person stepping up doesn't know how to handle the absent person's tasks.

That's why all staffers keep a log – sort of like a manual – of all the tasks they're responsible for. With it, they include all the steps they need to take to perform those tasks.

### **Working out a system**

On top of that, we use a buddy system in which each staffer has someone who can fill in for them if they need to take time off.

If their responsibilities ever change, they go over the new information with their backup. Same thing if they're preparing to head on vacation: The person leaving meets with the backup to review their responsibilities and discuss any recent changes.

This buddy system has helped the entire team keep up on our processes.

It's been extremely helpful this year, as we've already experienced a few unexpected absences.

(Barbara Wergeles, Controller, Warrensburg, MO)

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## **82. Uniform contest has employees excited**

Uniforms can be a drag. Sure, they serve an important purpose, but few employees jump for joy at the thought of wearing one.

We wanted our uniforms to be different – something employees did get excited about. After all, we believe that when employees look their best, they feel great and perform at their best.

Plus, a sharp-dressed employee will send all kinds of positive signs to our customers.

So we came up with a plan to redesign our uniforms that's sparked a lot of excitement around here.

### **Contest was a win-win**



***We created a uniform contest that gave a chance for an aspiring designer to land his or her first big break in the fashion industry.***

We created a uniform contest that gave a chance for an aspiring designer to land his or her first big break in the fashion industry.

We reached out to fashion institutes and universities, and encouraged them to motivate their students to submit designs to us based on the info we provided – descriptions of our employees' tasks and movements.

A panel of judges from our company will then select the winning uniform – the part of the process we're in now.

That designer will then receive a scholarship from us. It's a win-win. The designer gets help paying for education, and our employees get fashion-forward uniforms.

Needless to say, our employees can't wait to see what they'll be wearing.

(Lori Alford, COO, The Woodlands, TX)

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## **83. How we eased concerns about telecommuting**

HR and some of our managers knew offering employees a telecommuting option would boost morale and attract more talent, but not everyone on our leadership team was sold.

Their concerns – mostly about managing off-site employees and the effect on collaboration – were understandable. But we knew we had the people in place to make it work.

We just needed to address those concerns and convince our entire leadership team of the benefits of being more flexible when it came to telecommuting.

### **Selecting some rules**

Turns out, we had an ace – or rather, aces – up our sleeve: Some members of upper management had come from companies with successful telecommuting programs.

So we did two things:

- We picked their brains about what worked at their previous employers and what didn't, and
- We leaned on them to share their positive experiences with telecommuting to others on the leadership team.

We called them our “Executive Champions,” and they helped build the buy-in from upper management we needed to get our telecommuting efforts off the ground.

Now, after seeing the returns – higher morale and engagement, as well as a boost in recruiting – management's commitment to telecommuting has grown.

(Chrystal Ensey, Manager of Learning & Development, Los Angeles)

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## **84. Strategy put a halt to sick day abuse**

We were having a real problem with employees abusing their sick days. It was creating a lot of unnecessary work and stress for those employees left to take up the slack.

Plus, it was causing some projects to run past their deadlines.

Our response: We created an absence log. Once a supervisor noticed an employee was calling out sick frequently, we'd begin tracking the days the person called out.

Nine times out of 10, a telling pattern emerged.

### ***Tracking system helped***

So after an employee's sick days dropped to a certain number, we'd send them a document letting the person know how much time he or she had left.

The document, which had to be signed and returned, also informed the employee that a note would be required for every sick day moving forward and it needed to come from a doctor or dentist who treated them for an emergency.

We instantly saw a drastic change in call outs.

The end result? Not only has attendance improved, but projects are getting completed on time and employees are less stressed from having to cover for their co-workers.

(Lesa Myers, Benefits Coordinator – HR, Springfield, IL)

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## **85. Training co-workers to keep supplies stocked**

There's nothing worse than having a co-worker say, "We're out of my favorite kind of folder – and I need it now!"

We didn't have much of a tracking system with our supplies. So I decided to make one – by training my co-workers.

My first step was just for me. The supply closet is right near the copier.

So I kill two birds with one stone: Every time I use the copier, I check the supplies. It's an easy yet effective rule.

### ***Enlisted co-workers to help***

But that's not enough. So I started training my co-workers. When a supply is almost empty, it's up to them to tell me. If they don't, it doesn't get ordered until my next big order.

Unless it's an emergency, I say, "This'll have to wait until my next order. Otherwise, we don't get free shipping."



I suggest they check with other employees to see if they have the supply they're looking for.

Otherwise, they have to wait. It took a few times for them to catch on, but they've got it down to a science now.

With several sets of eyes – mine and my co-workers' – always on the supply closet, we hardly ever run out of anything now.

(Carla Maier, Administrative Assistant, Wixom, MI)

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## **86. An old-school communication tool that still works**

When it comes to response times, technology is a game-changer.

Expectations are higher than ever. People want you to respond right away, no matter what.

If I didn't respond right away to a call or email, I'd get tracked down!

Luckily, there's an old-school tool that still works to communicate exactly what needs to be said.

Whenever I need to leave my desk, I put up a sign. It doesn't matter if I'm running to lunch, grabbing something from the mailroom or in a meeting – a sign goes up on my desk.

### ***Setting boundaries***

On the sign, I write where I am and an expected return-by time.

I keep a bunch of them at my desk for my everyday tasks, so all I have to do is put up the sign and walk away.

Sometimes people wait around until I'm back. But more often than not, the person will either handle it himself or ask someone else to help out.

This is good news for me, because that's one less thing on my plate.

And the signs have helped set the right communication response expectations for anyone who needs me.

(Karen Custard, Administrative Assistant/Travel Coordinator, Meadville, PA)

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## **87. Went the extra mile to boost security**

Everywhere you turn, the news is full of scary stories. In this day and age, you can't be too careful, even in the office.

With our open-front office, I saw people coming and going all day. I also saw them wandering around.

We had no kind of security system in place – any person could walk into our building and wander around.

### ***No one kept track***

I raised my concerns, and they were heard loud and clear.

We asked our local fire and police departments to come in and give us a few pointers.

They suggested a badge and sign-in process, requiring each visitor to wear a badge and sign in and out.

We also added video surveillance and panic buttons at each desk.

And now all visitors must have an escort at all times. It doesn't matter if the person is going to the bathroom or leaving the building – all visitors have escorts, period.

So far, so good: We have an incident-free office. Everyone feels safe coming to work every day.

(Stacy Davis, Executive Assistant, Chehalis, WA)

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## 88. Close call got managers to start documenting

I was constantly trying to get my managers to document incidents.

They tended to come up with the same excuses: “I don’t have time” or “I’ll just remember it.”

I couldn’t get them to realize that remembering something doesn’t matter – if you don’t have evidence of an incident, you can’t prove it ever happened.

### *One person got the message*

Meanwhile, one manager started listening to me. He had an ongoing issue he was dealing with, and he documented it every step of the way.

The issue eventually ended up in court.

Because of his careful documentation, he was able to show that our company was in the right.

That got the attention of my other managers.

Since then, they’ve seen the importance of documentation, and they’ve started taking the time to do it.

(Cindy Lewis, Manager of Strategic Development, Little Rock, AR)

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## 89. Asking ‘Why?’ gets everyone in line

Sometimes reminders aren’t enough to change people’s actions and bad habits. Anybody can get stuck in a routine and make the same mistakes over and over again.

When people just go through the motions every day, they complete tasks without thinking.

We wanted to nip that in the bud.

### **Questions get them thinking**

So whenever we spot someone going against our best practices, we pull them aside and ask them why they were doing that.

Then, depending on their answer, we ask “Why?” again – and we keep asking “Why?” until we get to the root of the problem.

Once we identify the problem, we figure out a way to solve it and get the employee back on track.

The next time they go to complete the same task, they’re much less likely to repeat the mistake.

(Karen Whitt, Director of Legal and Risk, Monee, IL)

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## **90. We feel more confident about our BYOD policy**

Our company’s BYOD (bring your own device) policy was starting to give us some trouble.

Per our reimbursement policy, we gave our employees a flat rate for their wireless bills.

The problem was, we had no way of knowing if we were overpaying them or not, since we didn’t know how each person was actually using his or her device.

We definitely wanted to keep our BYOD policy, but if we were going to do that, we needed to reshape how we were reimbursing staffers.

### **‘Bring in your bills’**

In order to do that, we had to figure out how our employees were using their devices. So we asked them to bring their cellphone bills in for analysis.

We were worried there might be some pushback, but fortunately no one had a problem with it.

We examined the bills and looked for trends such as how much people paid for data or which features were used the most.

From there, we were able to create a policy that provided more accurate reimbursement according to staffers' phone plans and providers.

Our suspicions were right – we'd been over-reimbursing. With our updated policy, we've been able to reduce expenses while continuing the BYOD arrangement our staffers enjoy.

(Kate Wright, Controller, Wahpeton, ND)

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## 91. FMLA/ADA template keeps us in compliance

We frequently handle extended leave situations, and we wanted to cut down on inconsistent administration that could expose us to legal trouble.

And knowing we can be required to provide additional leave as an ADA accommodation after an employee exhausts 12 weeks of FMLA leave, we needed a process for handling those situations consistently.

It had to kick off the ADA's interactive process in a way that gathered the facts we needed to determine if extending someone's leave was reasonable or an undue hardship.

### **What we ask**

That's how I hit on the idea to create our leave-analysis template.

It asks supervisors to answer these key questions about an employee's leave:

- What impact has the absence had on co-workers or service delivery?
- What is the monetary cost of the person's absence?
- Could temporary staff be hired to fill the position?



***We handle every extended leave request on a case-by-case basis – a huge key to compliance.***

Once the template's complete, HR and I go through everything to make sure it's correct.

Then, we handle every extended leave request on a case-by-case basis – a huge key to compliance.

Result: The template's been invaluable. When denials were necessary, this documentation helped us defend and support our decisions.

(Lisa Dally, AA/EEO Officer/Medical Leave Coordinator, Madison, WI)

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## **92. Getting out the new-policy message**

We had been growing so quickly, we didn't get a chance to draft clear policies for new business areas.

That could lead to everything from inefficiencies to legal problems. What we needed to do was step back and come up with a concrete process for drafting and enforcing new policies.

### ***Entire team***

Our solution: When we needed a company policy in writing, we had the entire management team sit down together and hammer out the details.

Every manager got a say on what should and shouldn't be included.

Once a policy was created, managers were responsible for reviewing it with their employees.

With the policy process firmly in place, we can continue to expand, knowing we have multi-departmental input and cooperation.

Added bonus: Efficiency has increased, too.

(Marina Galhouse, Executive Director, Nogales, AZ)

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### 93. Made a game of required learning

I wanted to be more confident that workers retained the vital safety info from our training sessions. The sessions covered everything that the regs require of us and more.

But I wanted an interactive way for our employees to absorb the material.

#### *Used 'safety trivia'*

I thought adding some competitive fun would help.

So at the beginning of the session, I asked that everyone pay special attention to the highlighted points on each presentation slide and to take notes on those points.

Then, at the end of the meeting, I split everyone into teams for "Safety Trivial Pursuit." I color coded the safety topics. Workers could pick a topic for their question.

The winning team members got a gift certificate to our nearest car wash.

Now, I have veteran managers begging to play the game in sessions.

(Andrea Riley, Safety Officer, Charlotte, NC)

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### 94. Solved our absenteeism problem

We're far from overstaffed. So when employees didn't come in to work, it really hurt our productivity.

We needed a way to encourage regular attendance.

Our plan: Recognize employees with good attendance records – and give the not-so-reliable employees an incentive to cut down absenteeism.

### ***Extra vacation days***

A “Perfect Attendance Policy” was the solution. The policy rewarded an extra vacation day for every six months of perfect attendance. Employees with perfect attendance got certificates, and we posted their names on a bulletin board.

After the first year, the program was a hit.

Our hard-working employees love to hang up their perfect attendance certificates for all to see.

More important: Absenteeism is down and productivity is up.

(Sue Strassner, Manager, Montgomery, PA)

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## **95. Got a better response to our surveys**

Whenever we made changes to policies, we liked to get employee feedback via surveys to ensure everyone was on board with our ideas.

Problem: People either just weren’t filling out the surveys or were taking forever to get them back to us.

### ***Let’s do a good deed***

It was frustrating, but we understood that employees were busy and kept putting the surveys on the back burner. We had to give them a good reason to respond.

Our suggestion: The company will make a small donation to an employee’s favorite charity for every completed employee survey.

That gave employees another reason to complete and return their surveys to us.



We got back more surveys than we'd ever gotten before, giving us valuable info on which to base decisions. Plus, we did a good deed by donating to the charity.

(Theresa Lane, HR Manager, Cutler, ME)

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## 96. Getting policies enforced consistently

When employees began complaining that our policies weren't being enforced uniformly, we needed to act. Managers needed to understand that they had to enforce policies consistently, in every department – or else we were going to end up in court.

### *Looked at real cases*

We decided we had to emphasize that managers themselves, not just the company, could be held responsible in court if we were sued. That might get their attention.

Going over court cases where this had happened, we discussed what those managers could have done to avoid trouble. We also looked at instances where similar problems had occurred in our own company and how they had been handled correctly or incorrectly.

Policies are now being enforced the same way in every department at all times, and it's really tightened up the ship around here. Both productivity and retention have improved.

(Bonnie Harmon, HR Coordinator, Malden, MA)

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## 97. Set rules on texting and other cell use

Our employees' use of text messages was becoming a problem for us. Old, young, middle-aged – all our employees were texting on work time.

Worse, some staffers were texting work-related info to their supervisors. That included letting their managers know they'd be out sick on a particular day or even quitting via text.

So when it was time for a review of our policies, we knew texting rules needed an overhaul.

### **Clear guidelines**

We knew it would be impossible to prohibit texting at work. Instead, we strongly discouraged the use of personal cell phones on work time.

More importantly, we made it clear that texting isn't an acceptable form of workplace communication – for purposes of sick leave or any other official request or notification.

That's cut down on nonwork-related and other types of texting that had been so troublesome.

(Terri Granados, Program Director, Kennewick, WA)

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## **98. Building more enthusiasm for safety**

Safety meetings are a necessity in our business. But our employees weren't exactly enthusiastic about them. Instead of looking forward to learning, workers were more likely to dread attending.

That got us thinking. If they thought the sessions were tedious, they were more likely to tune out and miss important information. Our challenge: Find ways to make safety meetings more compelling.

### **Little things mean a lot**

We succeeded when we realized that a few little things can add up.

For instance, instead of having just one person do all the talking, we made it a point to involve everyone in the discussions.

We also got more interactive. If we were discussing fire safety, we showed how a fire extinguisher works, instead of just talking about it or showing a video.

It all leads to more enthusiasm and better learning.

(Regina Griffin, HT Safety Coordinator, Modesto, CA)

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## 99. Role-playing helped solve difficult situations

After another manager and I successfully solved a difficult-worker problem, I came across an idea.

Why not share with the other managers what happened in this situation and how we responded to it?



***We role-play every new difficult employee situation among our managers and add each one to a training manual for managers.***

Rather than send out a long memo or some instructions on handling the situation, I felt a little role-playing would work better.

### ***Show, not tell***

With the help of the manager involved, we acted out the situation in our next managers' meeting.

It was a quick dialogue between the manager and the difficult worker. We then outlined what steps were taken to solve the problem.

Now, we role-play every new difficult employee situation among our managers and add each one to a training manual for managers.

This gives us confidence we're prepared for almost every difficult employee situation.

(Cindy Vrancheff, HR Coordinator, Jackson, MI)

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## 100. Clear policies boosted office communication

Our employees had a range of expectations when it came to office communication.

Some read our company newsletters – others didn't.

Some answered email messages immediately – others waited.

Instead of letting employees decide what they considered acceptable, we decided to set standards across the board.

### *Updated communication policies*

To do that, we created detailed communication policies.

They included: how soon they should answer email and voicemail messages, which meetings were mandatory and which company newsletters they were expected to read.

Clearly stating those policies did the trick.

Now all employees read our company newsletters and answer email messages quickly.

(Jacqueline Boone, Patient Services Director, Chicago)

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## 101. Made a game of 'boring' training

Whenever the time came to review employment regulations with our supervisors, they moaned.

And really, who could blame them? Sitting through a session about the latest twists and turns in, for instance, FMLA regulations, wasn't the most exciting part of their day.

The training was important, however, and we couldn't just drop it and risk ignorance among supervisors.

Then I got an idea one day when I overheard people talking about a “Jeopardy” contestant who was nearly unbeatable: Let’s turn the training into a game.

***‘Alex, I’ll take ...’***

We mixed in a Jeopardy-like game that quizzed supervisors on their knowledge of the regulations. And we gave out small prizes to the winners and goofy gag gifts to the losers. Our supervisors loved it.

And now, no one complains that it’s boring.

(Ruth Skolnik, HR Director, San Bernardino, CA)

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