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Are you feeding staff morale?

'Talent is hard to keep but we're not losing people'

Presented by



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In the current environment of workplace cutbacks, layoffs and worries about job stability, at least one company has managed to maintain a high level of morale among its 170 employees.

Mississauga, Ont.-based PointClickCare.com, provides employees with a healthy lunch every day, allows them to take a break to get a massage from a certified therapist, or even nap in a "quiet room" if they want. It's all part of the the health-care software company's

philosophy that success is measured by employee loyalty. "We think our employees are the absolute key to our success," says Mike Wessinger, president of PointClickCare.com. The company is doing well enough that it has not had to consider staff reductions, although Mr. Wessinger says even if it wasn't doing well, layoffs would leave managers stuck recruiting and training top talent to rebuild staff numbers once the economy recovered.

He says lunch costs about \$10 a day for each employee, an expense he says is "either neutral or it saves money in the long run.

"If somebody crosses the street [to take another job] for an extra \$5,000 in salary and it takes somebody else seven months of ramp-up time to replace that person, what does that cost?" he asks.

Other perks at the company include social events such as bowling during the workday, where executives take time to interact and get to know the staff.

The effort has translated into a turnover rate of zero. "Technical talent is really hard to keep, but we're not losing people," Mr. Wessinger says.

It's an achievement the company is proud of in an economic climate that has fostered trepidation and self-preservation at many workplaces.

A global survey by management consultancy RogenSi found while employees are passionate about their work, they have little confidence in their leaders. "In some organizations, they have seen their colleagues being laid off," says Alex Jakobson, director of RogenSi's North American operations in New York. "The leaders are perhaps focusing more on the business than the people."

Most notably, the survey found of the 2,000 employees polled for the Global Mindset Survey, those in Canada had the least confidence in their company's plan to weather the economic downturn without significant cuts, and salespeople were particularly pessimistic.

Employees between the ages of 25 and 35 have the least loyalty when they are in workplaces suffering from low morale "and they have less to lose" calling it quits and moving on, Mr. Jakobson says.

The survey was conducted to assess the affects of economic pressures on workplace morale and employee engagement in the context of RogenSi's Exceptional Performance (EP) training program. The program was designed to build mental toughness among workplace leaders in challenging times.

Alan Farnsworth, a senior vice-president at Rochester, N. Y.-based Bausch & Lomb, retained the consultant to help boost morale at the company's customer service and information technology departments before the recession took hold.

"I was concerned about a defeatist attitude that was creeping into my leadership team, a bit of a sense of helplessness and blaming external circumstances for not accomplishing the objectives we set out," he says.

The program taught managers to seek "positive solutions to problems and get out of that negative spiral of 'blame and complain,'" he says. It revitalized the workplace.

He contends that it is imperative weaknesses in leadership be resolved quickly to preserve the morale of an entire workplace.

A National Employment Survey recently conducted by employment law firm Rubin Thomlinson LLP found 70% of Canadian workplaces polled were experiencing depleted levels of morale.

"What [the survey] highlighted is you think about the people who have been laid off from their jobs and the life-altering experience it is, but you should think about the people who are left behind and are traumatized watching colleagues getting walked out the door," says Janice Rubin, a founding partner of the firm.

Benefits such as those offered at Point- ClickCare.com become vital for employers to maintain morale during recessionary times. "Now's not the time to cut out every group or social event but maybe do something more low key," Ms. Rubin says. The survey, which had a 5% response rate from the 4,000 employers sent the questionnaire, shows that more than half of the respondents had reduced their complement of staff in the past 12 months. Ms. Rubin says the purpose of the survey was to ascertain the long-term effect of layoffs and workplace cost reductions.

"The story behind the numbers is a human story," she says.

"If the recession continues and uncertainty in the workplace remains, we will likely see employee burn-out, an increased number of stress leaves, workplace harassment issues and more mistakes being made."

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