

PUBLICATION

Improving Employee Engagement During the Holidays

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The holiday season is an excellent time to consider how we can better serve our colleagues and community. Since "holiday season" can mean something very different for each person, it is important to focus on creating an inclusive workplace climate, which results in increased motivation, productivity and engagement. This requires not only learning from and listening to employees, it also requires taking action in response to what was learned and heard.

Five things your organization can do to increase engagement during the holiday season include (1) recognize successes, (2) give-back, (3) communicate, (4) promote health and (5) have fun.

(1) Don't simply recognize company achievements but shine light on those "unsung heroes" within your organization. These are the employees who go the extra mile, exemplify your company values and do work others may never see or hear about.

(2) Next, promote giving by offering volunteer opportunities and encouraging more work in the local community. This requires investing time to uncover what your community needs most, but some examples may include ringing bells for the Salvation Army, donating or sorting food at a local food bank, serving meals, collecting toys for Toys for Tots or having a clothing drive. Encouraging giving truly helps build camaraderie and creates a sense of happiness and light that can permeate the workplace.

(3) Another important tip is to COMMUNICATE. Communication is so critical to boosting motivation and engagement. Communicate with enthusiasm for past successes, current plans and what is on the horizon. Seeing light at the end of the tunnel sparks renewed focus.

(4) Promoting health is vital, especially around the holidays, when many can feel more stressed. There are many ways to promote mental and physical health like hosting flu-shot clinics, providing yoga classes, offering therapy sessions and launching walking clubs, among other options. Although it can be challenging to continue operations if too many employees request time off during the holiday season, encourage time off throughout the year so that everyone may rejuvenate and recover.

(5) Finally, make it fun! Enjoy the holidays – a variety of holidays – by allowing people to share their stories and traditions, wrap gifts together, swap gifts, host a party and celebrate together (differences and all).

We contacted several in-house counsel for their thoughts on how we can be better allies to colleagues and/or underserved and underrepresented communities. Here are some thoughts:

At Southern Company we live by the motto "Citizens Where we Serve." One way we carry that out as a legal team is through organized service days throughout the year. Most recently, as a way to help support local communities that are considered food deserts, we volunteered as a legal team at community gardens in Atlanta and Birmingham.

– Monica Graveline, Deputy General Counsel at Southern Company

There are no greater gifts one can give during the holidays than one's time and talent. Therefore, one way your organization can become active (and better) allies for underserved/underrepresented groups and important causes is to encourage and even incentivize your employees to take on pro bono matters as a way to "gift" your time and talents to those populations and causes. Make that a part of your organization's culture during the holiday season.

– *Jennifer L. Ervin, General Counsel at Clark Atlanta University*

The holiday season prompts an uptick in our normal sense of giving back, or helping those less fortunate than us. However, the underserved and underrepresented are less fortunate than us more than just during the holidays. I believe we can be better allies if we identify a cause we are passionate enough about that our "giving back" can last throughout the year, not end once December does. In addition to great causes during the holiday season, I personally have identified a passion in serving on 2 nonprofit boards, throughout the year, focused on breaking down barriers to prosperity and equal access to education.

– *Natalie R. Bolling, Senior Employment Attorney at Vulcan Materials Company*

We try to be more mindful as the holidays approach about making unrealistic deadlines for employees, particularly those on any form of personal or medical leave. Everyone is busy this time of year, especially including doctor's offices, so, we build in a couple more days for employees to return leave paperwork to account for delays outside of the employee's control.

– *Monika Luken, Senior Legal Counsel (North America) at CCL Industries*

Other recommendations include adopting families, making monetary donations, working with women's centers and shelters, and helping with local (or national) natural disaster relief funds. Whatever you or your organization decides is right for the holiday season, remember that not everyone's holiday season looks the same. While many are surrounded by love and happiness, others may face struggles of various kinds. A smile and kind gesture goes a long way. Being mindful of your own personal action is critical to creating inclusion, not only inside your organization but in your community.