

6 Ways to Keep Employees Engaged During the Holiday Season

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While the time between Thanksgiving and the New Year is a celebratory one filled with holiday parties and spending time with loved ones, in the workplace it can be hard to balance a festive atmosphere while simultaneously keeping employees focused and productive. In fact, one recent study found that employee productivity drops by more than 50 percent around the holidays, and more than 10 percent of employees have already started to slack off before the month of December. The end of the year is also a time when employees reflect upon their own professional performance, expect recognition for their work and prepare for the year ahead.

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At Rocketrip we're obsessed with helping our clients find new ways to recruit, retain and engage employees by inspiring and rewarding their teams. Especially at this time of year, our clients always ask about ways to keep employees inspired and motivated.

While the tips below are specific to keeping employees engaged during the holiday season, they can – and should – be utilized

and practiced throughout the year.

Establish open communication about company performance.

When employees feel included in a company's success, they are more likely to feel valued and in control of their professional future and thus, more invested in the company's future. Researchers from Syracuse University and the University of Florida found that an organization's communication climate and system is a crucial factor that affects engagement. Transparency and disclosure about a company's year-end performance will be appreciated by employees and pay dividends not only during the holidays, but throughout the year as well.

Demonstrate enthusiasm for the year ahead by bringing employees together to highlight company initiatives, rollouts, improvements and milestones.

A new year sets the stage for a fresh start, filled with possibilities and excitement, but sentiment and attitude starts at the top and trickles down. When employers demonstrate enthusiasm for what's to come, it's contagious, and can boost employee motivation and engagement. Companies like PGI and Blinds.com find that town hall meetings can be useful ways to rally their teams and provide direct access to management and the C-suite. Regular internal newsletters from leadership are also a good way to let employees know about positive company updates.

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Clearly define goals for the year ahead.

While celebrations, acts of goodwill and compensation are important, communicate to employees that performance expectations remain high. One way to ensure that expectations are clearly identified is to have one-on-one constructive conversations that focus on areas of improvement and tactical ways to achieve goals. For example, at Google, employees set goals for themselves and outline a series of measurable results. Google CEO Sundar Pichai does the same for the entire company. Establishing realistic milestones and ensuring timely follow-up are critical.

Promote perks and benefits that boost mental health and physical well-being.

New Year's resolutions. Most of us make them. Some of us keep them, some of us don't. Either way, encourage employees' resolutions by showing support for their goals both in and outside of the workplace. According to MetLife's U.S. Employee Benefit Trends Study, employees both want and expect benefits that help them financially, but also those that meet more immediate needs, like gym memberships, healthy office snacks, paternity leave or instituting volunteer days.

Recognize exceptional work by employees.

Bonuses are not necessarily the only way to celebrate rock-star employees. Increased praise and attention by leadership are also effective ways to laud deserving employees, whether one-on-one or in a public setting in front of peers. One

report by the Society for Human Resource Management and Globoforce found that values-based employee recognition contributes substantially to a stronger culture and more engaged workplace. Providing exceptional employees with opportunities to lead projects and tasks that are of interest to them not only show appreciation, but also the utmost confidence in their abilities.

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Encourage employees to take the time off that they've earned.

Employees feel most loyal to their employers when they are recognized and rewarded, not just with compensation but also with time – one of the greatest currencies of all. Another option to consider, demonstrated by Capital One and Ericsson-Worldwide, is to allow employees to buy and sell vacation time, contributing greatly to overall employee satisfaction. While employees should use the time they've earned responsibly and thoughtfully, employers should hold them accountable in order to maintain mutual respect. The start of a new year is the best time to reinforce this mutual respect and partnership.

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