

HR MAGAZINE | FALL 2019

## 7 Affordable Ways to Boost Morale

Feedback

Try these simple, low-cost ideas for making positive changes in your workplace.

By Joe Cantlupe | August 29, 2019

**Y**ou don't have to spend a lot to make a big difference in your workplace. We asked HR practitioners, via the SHRM Connect (<https://community.shrm.org/communities/community-home/digestviewer/viewthread?MessageKey=a3ef7df4-1416-4a29-a2c5-764338518c39&CommunityKey=f76f449f-c3bd-474d-af46-fde525aadf97&tab=digestviewer>)online community and

LinkedIn, (<https://www.linkedin.com/company/shrm/>) to share their ideas for easy, affordable ways to boost morale in the work environment. Many of the ideas show how effective HR can be by simply helping employees relax, connect and enjoy each other's company. And the end result?

"Happy people are productive people," says Dawn Craig, SHRM-CP, director of HR and Compliance at the Clarus Benefits Group, a consulting and insurance brokerage company in Houston.

## Give Employees a Voice

For some companies, boosting morale and encouraging teamwork are orchestrated parts of a specific plan to give back to the community. Other companies simply gather volunteers and go for it—they hold events with the primary aim of letting employees have fun and enjoy each other's company.

Employees at Clarus volunteer to serve on an engagement committee. In the past, they have proposed a variety of events, including collecting food for local charities, decorating the lobby for holidays and holding a Halloween costume contest.

Craig offers some advice: Don't let managers do the event planning. Let employees make the decisions. That helps employees feel listened to, she says.

Clarus employees have been receptive. And not just employees, she says, but clients. One client reported that such events have reduced employee turnover to 22 percent from 36 percent in six months.

## Encourage Friendly Competition

They're energetic employees, and sometimes they need to blow off steam. So why not have a tug-of-war?

That's what Symplicity Corp. in Arlington, Va., invites its employees to do periodically throughout the year, says Mel Hennigan, SHRM-SCP, the software company's vice president of people.

About 30 employees gather in the parking lot, and the tug begins. They pull, they huff, they puff. Or they collapse in laughter. The game is a great diversion and has been a hit with employees, says Hennigan, a member of the Society for Human Resource Management Special Expertise Panel on Talent Acquisition.

Symplicity's tug-of-war isn't competitive. (Well, maybe a little bit.) Nor is it expensive: The thick, braided rope cost \$70, she says, and has been re-used numerous times.

**'Happy people are  
productive people.'**

Dawn Craig

Other inexpensive events include:

**Game nights.** Employees bring games (especially strategy-based games) to the table. Outside the office, employees join in online or Xbox games. The company provides \$30 worth of snacks and beverages.

**Guest speakers.** Once a quarter, a guest speaker is invited through a professional network. The topics, including cybersecurity and healthy living, can be work-related—or not. “The possibilities are endless,” Hennigan says.

Employees also are invited to movie nights, live music events and camp-outs.

The events are orchestrated by Symplicity’s “party people group,” about eight to 10 volunteers who get together each February to brainstorm events for the year.

### Promote Healthy Living

A San Diego hotel group relayed the importance of healthy eating to its housekeeping staff by providing nutritious snacks, including apples, frozen fruit trays, salad and healthy burritos every Friday.

The hotels partnered with a community program, Live Well @ Work, (<https://ucsdcommunityhealth.org/work/live-well-at-work/>) to teach about nutrition in fun, positive ways, recalls Shawn Stout-Jough, SHRM-SCP, about her former employer. She now works as a principal consultant for Strategic HR Advisory in San Diego.

The hotels didn’t only give food, but food-for-thought. They arranged to help employees understand the ins-and-outs of nutrition labels and demonstrated, for example, how much sugar is in a bottle of soda. The organization tapped community groups and the American Red Cross to provide free recipe books and pedometers. The hotels also scheduled occasional exercise sessions for some prework stretches.

“Fruit Fridays” was “an extremely successful program and very low-cost other than time for meetings,” Stout-Jough says. “We’ve always been looking for ways to engage our employees and make them healthier. It definitely improved morale and provided a short break from the normal day. And it was fun.”

### Get Employees Moving

Talk about throwbacks. Scranton Gillette Communications runs a Tour de France tricycle race for employees. No, that’s not a typo. Tricycle race.

For the past two summers, the company’s HR department has rounded up donated tricycles and scheduled a fairly slow “race” around the office parking lot, says Emily Sammons, HR and facilities manager for the Arlington Heights, Ill., company.

As employees tackle each 50-yard race to make it to the next round of competition, their colleagues staff hydration stations, Sammons says, doling out Dixie cups of water. To top it off, the winners take home small trophies.

The company is big into fitness programs and cheerleads for other events, too. It runs a summer challenge encouraging employees to count their steps. HR team members keep a spreadsheet to log their steps over a four-week period, she says. Prizes are given for the most overall steps, the most improved participant and the first to reach a personal milestone, such as 50 or 75 miles.



Feedback

The HR team also sponsors a “stairmageddon,” calling on its 130 employees to count the number of stairs they climb in a day. The person who takes the most flights wins a gift card, Sammons says.

Other fun events include a mini-golf tournament, played in the office hallways; a Wiffle ball home run derby (scheduled to coincide with the start of baseball season); and a paper airplane contest, which has employees launching their creations into an atrium from the second floor.

It’s not all about fitness, though. Employee appreciation is also shown on Strawberry Shortcake Day and Root Beer Float Day with low-cost (if not low-calorie) treats.

Employees also enjoy no-cost activities such as designated days to wear their favorite sports team jerseys.

Each employee who participates receives a raffle ticket. At the end of the month, one employee wins a \$20 gift card and is featured in the next employee newsletter.



## Communicate Clear Goals

Games and fun events can do more than just bring people together.

One of the most important things a company can do is let employees know what's expected of them. But that wasn't happening at Hi-Grade Welding and Manufacturing in Schaumburg, Ill. So the HR team sought ways to improve communication between managers and the company's 116 employees.

Changes began with the purchase of two \$500 televisions, one for the shop floor and another for the lobby. Each department's goals are displayed on the TV screens, along with numbers reflecting the amount of rejected products. The quality of work has improved (and the amount of rejected products has been reduced) since the statistics have been shared openly, says Belen Huerta, HR manager at the company that specializes in making complex machine parts. That simple change helped motivate and engage employees in a friendly competition with other departments to improve quality, she adds.

## Help the Community

One of Symplicity's most popular events is a program coordinated by the company that enables employees to volunteer at a food kitchen in Washington, D.C., Hennigan says.

Employees also take paid time off from work to read to children and participate in Earth Day cleanups, she adds.

While working for the hotel group, Stout-Jough says, she was involved in Red Nose Day, (<https://rednoseday.org/>) an annual charity drive in the U.S. and the United Kingdom that raises money for children in need. Red noses were sold at Walgreens for \$1 each, and the effort resulted in donations of \$5,000 in a year and a "lot of positive feedback from employees," she says. "It's such a great charity and helps children everywhere."

## Say Thank You

Two years ago, Jennifer Weber, an HR assistant manager at Enertech Global LLC in Mitchell, S.D., was looking for a way to recognize the company's 116 employees.

She glued a penny to a piece of card stock and added the words, "Just like finding a penny is good luck, we are lucky to have YOU. Thank you for everything you do every day." As an extra touch, the plant manager signed each card.

"When I walk around, I still see people that have theirs hanging up," she adds. "At the end of the day, we all just want to feel wanted and appreciated."

That's why the HR team at Clarus tries to do something special when employees are working on major projects and under a lot of stress. The HR professionals hand out small gifts along with notes expressing their thanks.

The gestures help maintain morale, Craig says, and let "employees know we appreciate all they're doing for us."

The HR team tries to introduce a little levity into their messages to lighten the workers' mental load. In the past, employees have received a bag of microwave popcorn with a note: "Bursting with excitement you're on our team!" or a Mounds candy bar with the message: "Thank you for the mounds of work you're doing!"



Feedback

Other small gifts to show gratitude include:

**Highlighters.** "You're the HIGHLIGHT of our day."

**Fun-shaped paperclips.** "Thanks for keeping things together around here."

**Chewing gum.** “Your hard work BLOWS us away.”

**Mentos mints.** “We’ve MENTO tell you how much we appreciate you.”

**Donuts.** “We DONUT know what we’d do without great employees like you.”

When the company wants to commend employees for a specific effort, Craig and her team place messages on their desks before they start the workday. The surprise gesture helps them “start their day off on a good note,” she says.

“While these are small, inexpensive tokens, they really mean the world to the employees,” Craig says.

“It shows it doesn’t take something grand to make a difference.

A little goes a long way!”

*Joe Cantlupe is a freelance writer in Silver Spring, Md.*

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