

Beat the Holiday Season Productivity Slump

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During the holiday season productivity can suffer. Use these three strategies to keep employees engaged despite the distractions of the season.

The holidays bring excitement over vacation time to be spent with friends and family. The anticipation can be akin to children waiting for Santa's arrival, and yet that same giddiness can also lead to slumps in productivity. Many employees are overbooked, stressed out and distracted this time of year. While the season should be a time for relaxed rules and frivolity it can also be a nightmare for managers. Imagine this: 53% of workers shop online for holiday gifts at work, according to CareerBuilder's 2016 annual Cyber Monday survey.

Equally problematic is productivity being impeded by employees not taking enough time off. According to the 2016 ADP Sentiment Survey, most Canadian workers don't use their annual vacation entitlement resulting in unmotivated, unengaged employees who feel frazzled in their work without the reprieve of a break.

How do organizations ensure employees get the rest they need and deserve while ensuring they stay motivated and productive during the holiday season? Two speakers from 2017's Imagine Your Workplace Conference, Celese Fletcher and Corry Robertson, give us their insights.

SHARE YOUR VISION

Goal-setting is vital in any business, not only for senior management but for entry-level employees. Ensure that these objectives are shared from the top down, so that everyone is on board and understands their part in achieving organizational goals.

"Knowing the 'why' is inspiring and engaging. When you attach a message as to how each person's contribution plays a role in achieving the greater good, that gives people a sense of purpose," says Corry Robertson, executive coach with Corry Robertson Alive From 9-5, a corporate coaching company.

If you fear productivity might slope downwards during the holidays and don't know where to start, Robertson suggests a workplace coaching session might be the ticket. She notes that November is the

perfect time for companies to conduct coaching sessions, before the holiday madness sets in but with an eye towards the New Year and planning new initiatives.

COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE

The key to an engaged workplace is to have open communication. Fostering an environment of openness, in which employees can share triumphs and critiques without fear of reprisal, makes for a more meaningful work experience for all staff.

It's natural to want to start the New Year fresh. The post-holiday season is a chance to touch base with staff on a personal level, face to face, to hash out any issues or future planning to best support the employee. "Starting with a one-on-one chat, the manager can welcome back the employee by listening to holiday highlights — if the employee is interested — and then update the employee on what has gone on in his or her absence," says Celes Fletcher, Principal at the Fletcher Consultancy, which helps companies increase their own productivity.

The holiday season is also an ideal time to host a brainstorming session for staff, where everyone is able to provide their input. An open town-hall atmosphere is more likely to create an environment in which employees are willing to share, but consider this a chance to explore what works and what doesn't within your business, and help staff generate ideas for solutions.

Communication is also key in terms of mitigating the impact of workplace and personal stressors for staff. The holidays can be stressful for many, impacting an employee's work. December is a time that involves calendar-juggling, financial struggles (with the added cost of gifts, travel and child care) and family challenges. Robertson advises that this is an opportunity for managers to be mindful of the challenges facing their staff and have frank conversations about mitigating that stress.

GIVE YOUR EMPLOYEES SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO

A holiday party can frazzle already over-scheduled staff, and what is meant to be a thanks for a year of hard work can instead cause undue pressure. Robertson has an alternate idea. "Instead of the annual office party in December, I suggest you host your festive party in January when everyone is back to work. This is a great way to kick off the New Year with positive energy," she says.

Offering a positive event to look forward to upon returning to work can provide a respite from the back-to-work rush and help stave off the winter doldrums. Additionally, many venues consider January to be off-season and offer discounted rates, potentially saving you money. Scheduling your party after the holidays can also encourage novel themes, like a winter wonderland or carnival.

The holidays are a time for everyone to let loose. Ruining everyone's fun isn't likely to make people more productive, but not having a plan isn't a wise move either. Avoid the holiday season productivity slump by sharing your vision for the future, practicing open communication and ensuring that your office festivities are something to look forward to, not a drag. Additionally, Robertson and Fletcher

both note that a healthy, productive and engaged workplace culture is something that should be maintained year-round, not just over the holidays. “To achieve engagement any month of the year, leaders must be genuinely concerned about employee engagement ... 24/7/365,” says Robertson.

A positive workplace is one that staff look forward to returning to once they’ve had their fill of gingerbread and eggnog, which is a huge reason to celebrate.