

BEST PERKS OR BEST PRACTICES?

You can hardly open a news site these days without seeing a headline that includes the words *culture, engagement, employee happiness*, or their ilk, and you've undoubtedly read a hundred articles about this year's most-desired perks and the importance of hiring a Chief Happiness Officer. For many employers, it's easy to feel like you're getting left behind in a wake of free food, ping-pong tables, and bring-your-dog-to-work policies, but we implore you to ponder this simple question: Which is more important in the long run, trendy perks or timeless practices?

Weekly, we survey about 2,000 job seekers and ask them to tell us why they want to work for a dream employer—*and you know what?*—very few select or write in a perk as one of their top reasons. Three of the most common attributes people desire in an employer are actually pretty attainable for every company, and they stand the test of time: on-the-job training/upward mobility, a little flexibility, and a good employer reputation.

CAREER PROGRESSION & TRAINING: TURNING 'JUST A JOB' INTO A LONG-TERM CAREER

Having a plan for new hires—especially entry-level ones—should be a no-brainer! Each year, we survey about 1,200 employers about wages, benefits, perks, and other offerings, and our 2019 survey reveals about two-thirds of employers offer some sort of formal career progression program within the first year on the job. Do you? Here are some best practices to get the most out of your training dollars and let employees know you place a high value on their professional development:

- Create one-on-one mentorships so tenured employees guide new hires through your onboarding/training program
- Don't just teach company-specific operations; train on both soft and hard skills that are transferable
- When applicable, offer partial or full sponsorship of an industry-recognized certification
- Create a leadership "academy" or series of seminars so high-performing talent can gain necessary skills for promotion
- Promote job openings and conduct interviews *internally* for a fixed period of time before searching externally

FLEXIBILITY: THE ART OF BENDING WITHOUT BREAKING

There are a couple of ways you can offer the level of flexibility the average employee needs without adopting a fully flexible or remote work environment or wreaking total havoc on your production schedule. If you don't currently offer any paid or unpaid time off, start doing so. The same employer survey referenced above reveals about 90% of industrial employers offer a time-off benefit, with an average offering of seven days of paid time off (PTO) and/or five days of unpaid time off in the first year. But don't craft a usage policy so rigid it frustrates people because that can result in job abandonment. You should allow hourly employees who earn PTO to elect to use *unpaid* time off before exhausting their bank of PTO days if they only need to be out of the office for a couple of hours, and allow all employees to take their allotted time off as needed (in half-day or smaller increments), instead of requiring a full day off of work each time.

REPUTATION: THE MOST IMPORTANT BRAND YOU'LL EVER BUILD

A good reputation is more than having an internationally recognized name or product, and you can't earn it by advertising in the local newspaper. Being recognized as a good employer and corporate citizen takes effort, but it doesn't have to be a costly or overly challenging venture. In addition to fixing internal workplace issues in an effort to turn employees into brand advocates (which you can do through surveys that solicit feedback and identify areas for improvement), you should be out in the community building awareness and affection among the general public. Here are a few ways to help build great brand reputation:

- Get involved with school districts through mentoring or career programs
- Encourage or sponsor employee participation in parades or other community events
- Sponsor companywide volunteer events or allow departments to volunteer together on specified days
- Allow employees to pick the charity you support and to organize fundraising events

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- Attend local job fairs so your name is always at the front of job seekers' minds, even if you only have a few open positions
- Give new employees free apparel so they can be walking billboards

CONCLUSION

No single leader, team, benefit, or piece of equipment can trump the importance of consistently meeting the essential needs—however humdrum they may be—of employees. So, the next time you run an internal survey and people nit-pick at the smallest things or request outlandish perks, ask yourself this: Have we satisfied the most basic needs of our employees, or are they grasping at straws because they don't feel taken care of?

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