

A SPECIAL LOOK AT MORTGAGE INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT



How to Keep Employees Happy

By Kerry Elam

Many of us are working at least 40 hours per week. Some of us find a sense of accomplishment and joy from our work. Yet we all desire to find happiness in our jobs. It is important for both the firm and the employees to take an active role in having a positive working environment. As Henry Ford said on teamwork ...

*“Coming together is a beginning.
Keeping together is progress.
Working together is success.”*

This article will focus on ways to keep your employees happy through engaging them in the firm and ensuring an open line of communication.

1. Communication

An open line of communication is one of the most important aspects of ensuring your employees are aware of company news. Frequent and meaningful communication will give your employees the information they need to make decisions, foster ideas and keep everyone on the same page. Some examples include:

- Newsletters with relevant company information and include information on employees such as listing birthdays for the month, highlight an employee with their biography or interesting fact, provide information on industry training and conferences.
- “All Hands Meetings” or conference calls at least monthly and rotate ownership of the calls with management and staff to encourage participation and fresh ideas.
- Blast e-mails with real-time updates on the company.
- Encourage sharing of information across staff and with the management team by giving everyone a budget to get to know someone better.

2. Listening

Conduct an employee survey annually and provide detailed results and an implementation plan to include some of your employee’s ideas. People are more likely to provide meaningful comments if they know some of their ideas may be implemented.

3. Social events

Getting together as a firm builds relationships, and in turn, will promote better teamwork. Make sure to determine what your employees like to do by sending out surveys to allow them to choose. Some ideas for different types of events are:

- House party:** This is perfect if someone from the management team is willing to volunteer their house. Having a low-key party at someone’s house allows for a relaxed party and much more socialization. You can have catered, hire a band, play games, give prizes or have a cooking contest.
- Sporting events:** Choose a sport that the majority of your employees enjoy.
- Team building:** Hire an outside firm to come in and host a team building event. As an alternative, you can play a sport together such as bowling, pool or laser tag.
- Rent a bus:** Go on a field trip together depending upon preferences you could go on a wine tour, scavenger hunt, site seeing to local city or go to a close by theatre.
- Contests:** Organize online contests around the football season or March Madness for basketball. Prizes can be company swag. This will encourage friendly competition that helps folks to get to know each other better. It assists with the friendly banter and those kinds of things really help folks to open up.

4. Robust benefits package

Review your benefits package each year to ensure it is the best on the market for your size firm. Ensure that you are paying for a portion for their benefits and consider having a 401k matching program, tuition reimbursement, training budget, referral bonuses, sales incentives and floating holidays. Also, consider if you do not already do so, having a performance bonus to reward your employees.

5. Tenure awards

After a designated number of years of service, give employees an award, it could be monetary, a gift or giving additional vacation. Employees want to be valued for being loyal to your firm.

6. Recognition star player program

Implement a way for peers to recognize each other. A star player award is a way that employees can nominate their peers by providing management with the information on why the person should be awarded. The rewards can be monetary or prize-based, choose what works best for your firm. Kudos are another way everyone in the firm can highlight excellent performance. Empower a culture in which kudos are encouraged to blast out to all employees in the firm or to your immediate team and if you do a newsletter, you can solicit kudos for each edition.



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7. Charity

Participate in charity events throughout the year as a firm. You can make it competitive by forming small groups to choose a charity of choice and have a competition to see who can raise most money and provide best support to the organization of choice. This allows you to focus on more than one charity at a time and acts as a team building exercise. Another option is to choose one local charity to support year round and encourage your employees to help with the various volunteer activities throughout the year.

8. Training

As we know, you learn something new every day. Encourage your employees to go to trainings of interest, industry seminars or conferences and offer in-house trainings.

- Develop a list of trainings for your employees that they may be interested in based on the skills you are trying to build within your firm. By doing the research for your employees, they may simply scan the list and choose one.
- Offer your employees an annual training budget and encourage them to utilize the entire budget each year.
- Hold trainings to teach your employees about the history and culture of your firm and how they can be successful. Ensure they are educated on how they are to portray the company and know what is necessary for them to continue to grow within the firm.
- Implement a leadership training program in which you either hire outside firms or do internally to ensure every-

one is working together and learning lessons from each situation.

e. Solicit ideas from employees on trainings they want you to offer. They may provide you with your training schedule for the year.

9. Ask for help

Determine ways your employees can help grow the business and increase the bottom line. Make sure to reward employees for going above and beyond. Some ideas include: Writing articles to promote subject matter expertise of the firm, marketing assistance or interviewing new members of team. People want to help their companies be successful.

10. Open door policy

Make certain your employees know they can come and talk to anyone at any time—at the peer level, managerial level or executive level. By encouraging employees to talk and communicate, issues will be identified and resolved versus a culture that allows them to fester. Soliciting feedback so your employees have a “voice” is a key way to foster inclusion within the firm. Employees, who are able to contribute ideas of their own to the firm, are certain to be happier with results of change or new initiatives.

No matter what level you are in a firm, your actions will be followed. If you are nice to someone they will be nice back, if you act with compassion others will treat you with compassion, if you are engaged, others will follow your lead, if you smile at someone they will smile back at you. You are at work the majority of the time, so use your time in the best possible way. Utilize teamwork and workings towards a common goal, remembering you are all on the same team.

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