

30 Ways to Keep Your Employees Interested

By Linda Zoerb

In case you haven't noticed, we are still chugging through an economic downturn. If you're like me, doing more with less is always a top priority. This approach can be especially true when managing your employees.

Keeping employees happy and working doesn't have to be an expensive venture or investment. Just in time for spring (and beyond), here's a quick list of what we're doing at La Crosse Floral to keep our employees engaged and show them they mean the world to us.

1. Hire your weaknesses — not clones of yourself. For example, if you are not a morning person, hire someone who is.
2. Look at the way you communicate. Verbal versus written, all styles are valid and important. Repeat information often and do not leave your staff guessing.
3. Create buffer zones and make an effort to understand the times to approach or not approach an employee.
4. Ensure your employees know your buffer zone, too. You may need time to answer emails, return phone calls or play catch-up after a day off.
5. Do not interrupt employees when they are with customers. After the customer leaves is a good time to analyze and correct.
6. Work to understand the differences between female versus male leadership approaches.
7. Praise all employees in public on occasion. Find something positive to say.
8. Cross department lines. If you supervise one area, take note of another department's efforts direct to the employee, not just their supervisor.

9. Write notes on their paychecks.
10. Send notes to employees' houses, randomly, as you are on vacation, or as you fly to a meeting.
11. Point out your own failures and issues and show and tell them how they do it better.
12. If you publish a newsletter, have employees write articles with a little personality.
13. Directly involve your employees with your customers. Remember that people buy from people. And people especially buy from people they know.
14. From a single plant or product to an entire department, support employees to reach "expert" status.
15. Teach your employees how to lead tour groups, give seminars. They know more than they think they do.
16. Have retail space devoted to staff picks versus your own picks. Employees love when their picks outsell yours. Customers enjoy this as well. It builds customer confidence in your employees and often takes the fear out of a purchase.
17. Via a suggestion box, or by having special request slips, let employees select merchandise at trade shows or out of catalogs. Not only are employees heard, but customers are heard also.
18. Have business cards for the entire team. They can take pride in being part of a team. And it is PR for you when they hand someone their card at the dry cleaner, auto repair place, etc.
19. Take time to find out their interests outside of work. What are their hobbies? Do they have pets? Children?
20. Donate to groups they are involved in. By supporting their causes, you support them.
21. So many of us are family businesses. A

big part of family are celebrations and food. Remember to celebrate, even the little things. Cook for your employees. When you meet sales goals, have a party in the breakroom.

22. Do not assume "oldies" know it all. New plants happen all the time and new products come in your door all the time. Even my 85-year-old dad gets retrained each spring season.
23. Most people applied for the job with you because they love plants and the outside. Remember that.
24. Share financial data with all employees — not just sales goals and progress charts. Talk about cash flow, operating loans, lines of credit, anticipated capital improvements, etc.
25. Remember, it isn't always about money. There are often other things of importance: time off, flexibility, etc. This is where small businesses can shine.
26. Be fun! I will sometimes make a spontaneous pitcher of piña coladas on a hot, busy day.
27. Teach basic spreadsheet reading and writing.
28. When you take a vacation, remember to take a vacation. Don't call in everyday to keep tabs. Stuff will happen — it will simply happen their way.
29. Remain accessible, but when you leave the building, accept that now they're in charge.
30. Walk around and personally hand out paychecks. You can talk directly with an employee and say, "Thank you." **LGR**

Linda Zoerb is the president of La Crosse Floral Co. in La Crosse, Wis. You can reach her at lindaz@lacrossefloral.net.

