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the impact of stress on employees through rewarding employees who ...

Jeannie Ruesch • Dec. 27, 2022



By Jeannie Ruesch.

As we approach the end of the holiday season celebrations, there's another season on the horizon: the one called Busy Season. It has definitely earned its reputation based on the deep breaths and battening down of the hatches as the profession gears up to get through it (and the vendors who support you rally around).

It's hard on both firm leaders and employees who struggle to keep pace with

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Recognizing and rewarding successful employees and new team members through meaningful engagement is more important than ever to retain top talent – particularly in a distributed workforce.

Recognize Successful Employees in Meaningful Moments

Creating a positive work environment starts by calling out excellent work across the firm. To congratulate employees who go above and beyond, shout outs at staff meetings or town halls are excellent public forums to reward hard work while creating an encouraging work environment for both in-person and remote employees. A positive work environment empowers employees at all levels to thrive, which is particularly important for new or junior employees who might still feel insecure in their role.

Early in my career, I remember feeling unsure about how to connect with senior leaders in my company. They were busy, they often had people managing their calendar, and it could feel a bit awkward to schedule time above your own boss. This sentiment has only become more complex in this era of remote work environments.

There are different opportunities available for firm leaders to take the initiative to encourage interaction — creating open-door policies, scheduling skip-level meetings to talk to the people who report to your direct reports and/or scheduling time to meet with those teams together. It's often said that middle managers are the actual creators of culture, but the senior leaders have a role to play here too, as positive feedback and reinforcement from managers and other project leaders go a long way toward helping with employee retention.

But recognition isn't just from the top. Leaders and managers can also create and lead a culture that encourages and empowers employees to recognize their

teammates, as well. Some options here include adding in team-building activities, or

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successfully blending in-person, hybrid and fully remote workers is trickier than ever before. Arranging in-person gatherings can be complicated in a distributed workforce and may seem less likely during busy season — even though that might be when you need them most.

For teams spread across the country, retreats where the entire team can gather together and connect in a focused environment can be a powerful tool for keeping a widespread team engaged and focused on future goals. I've heard of a number of firms planning retreats and other in-person gatherings to create an opportunity for training and connection, not just for new employees but for existing employees as well. Consider planning something for right after busy season to give the team something to look forward to.

If hybrid and remote options are new to your firm, when planning events, be sure to consider if the activity is inclusive no matter where someone lives and works. If you're planning events at offices, also plan something online for your remote workers at the same time. There are many ways to make virtual or hybrid employees feel like they are part of the party too, from mailings of swag boxes to gift cards to local restaurants. It's important to make sure your firm is meeting the needs of in-person, hybrid and remote employees.

Lastly, employee engagement surveys are a valuable tool to make sure your benefits and incentives align with what your employees really want. Ask what matters most to them and how your firm can support their needs during busy season. Would a no-meeting Friday be more beneficial? Or does collaborative team time on Wednesday morning sound like a better fit for your firm? Flexible working hours and other arrangements are key benefits for many employees, particularly working parents.

Work smarter, not harder by using automated technologies

For firms who might have new staff members or employees in different roles, firm

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value work such as advisory services.

Eye on the prize: another successful busy season

An accountant's work-life balance can easily be upended during busy season, so encourage employees to find opportunities to recharge and restore balance. While stress is difficult to avoid during this hectic time, practice leaders can mitigate the impact of stress on employees through rewarding employees who go above and beyond and fostering a positive work environment to prioritize employee morale and improve long-term employee retention.

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