

Business Courier of Cincinnati - May 26, 2008

<http://www.bizjournals.com/southflorida/othercities/cincinnati/stories/2008/05/26/focus3.html>

South Florida BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, May 23, 2008

Happy workplaces connect dots to healthy minds

Small, large incentives go long way toward improving loyalty, productivity and turnover

Business Courier of Cincinnati - by [Tanya Bricking Leach](#) Courier Contributor

It might be impossible to keep everybody happy at work. But if you walked out of the next staff meeting with a little extra cash in your pocket, would that be enough to improve your morale?

How about an on-site fitness center or day care, a flexible work schedule, adoption assistance or early dismissal on Fridays?

Some of the most innovative companies in the country are finding that those kinds of incentives can help keep employees grateful, in good health and just glad to be there.

That kind of thinking on the management end also can mean big payoffs in terms of increasing productivity and loyalty and reducing turnover and sick days, said Debbie Sessions, a partner with Porter Keadle Moore LLP, an Atlanta accounting firm that is one of this year's winners of the **American Psychological Association's** Psychologically Healthy Workplace awards.

Sessions calls it something else: Doing right by your employees. "Keeping our people happy is of utmost importance," she said. "If you don't do right by your employees, you won't have any - or any clients."

Pay attention to detail

Nobody who's been around for a while at the firm can forget the day the boss handed out 65 \$100 bills, or the time the company took everyone on a field trip to Miami to jet ski and hang out on a yacht for the day.

It's all about letting employees know they count, she said. "I honestly believe you can throw a lot of money at people, but if you're not paying attention to the other things, it doesn't matter," Sessions said.

At **Nike Tennessee**, the little things mean having a gym at work, offering healthy food choices in the cafeteria and creating an online forum where co-workers can exchange compliments, concerns and ideas.

At Ohio's **Dayton Marriott Hotel**, it means making sure the housekeeper who wants to go home and read to her grandchildren after work can do it. The hotel turned its conference room

into a tutoring center where employees can have two hours of tutoring a week within their regular work schedule at no extra cost. They're even paid for half of those hours.

It makes work feel like an extended family, said Toni Kennedy, the hotel's general manager. When she walks down the hall, she runs into housekeepers and laundry room workers who tell her about practicing math to earn their GEDs.

"We give them encouragement," Kennedy said. "Sometimes they don't get that at home."

The big picture

While these companies are among those the American Psychological Association spotlighted this year, the problem is most companies miss the big picture, said Dr. Gabriela Cora, president of the **Executive Health & Wealth Institute**, a Miami consulting company.

"It's not just a one-time thing," she said. "It always comes back to getting upper management or leadership involved. I've seen companies spend so much money, but it doesn't work unless upper management is involved and is totally behind it."

Many employers fail to connect the dots that they're shelling out a lot in health insurance for employees' mental health problems, such as depression, or in sick days and resignations, said Debbie Dutton-Lambert, chief vocational officer of **Greater Cincinnati Behavioral Health Services**.

The best way to create a psychologically healthy workplace is to pay attention to what's bothering people, she said. "It makes good business sense to have a humanistic and holistic approach to the workplace."

Employees crave a sense of belonging, said Edwin Barnes, a clinical psychologist in private practice in Cincinnati. Even if some of the people aren't happy all the time, they can still feel as if they have a place to belong.

Get Ahead

Communicate: Listen to your employees and offer feedback.

Work-life balance: Flex schedules or assistance with child care or elder care.

Health and safety: Programs to lose weight, quit smoking.

Employee growth: Classes, tuition help, coaching, mentoring.

Recognition: A little praise never hurts.

Employee involvement: Employees feel heard if they have a say in the decision-making. Allow them to participate in making improvements.

Source: American Psychological Association

All contents of this site © American City Business Journals Inc. All rights reserved.