

Celebrating the Holidays in Your Workplace

There are so many holidays this time of year – Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and New Year's Day just to name a few – that it can serve as a great opportunity to recognize the diversity of your employees while also taking time to show them that you appreciate them.

It is important to be mindful that not everyone celebrates or looks forward to the holidays. However, everyone likes being appreciated so making the effort to recognize employees at this (or any) time of year can mean a lot to those people who have worked hard for you all year.

Family: Whether traveling to visit family, hosting family, or just taking time with children who are home from school, family is a central theme during the holiday season. If possible, allow employees to be flexible with their schedule so they don't miss important time with friends and family. Or consider hosting a family open house for employees to show off where they work and what they do.

Food: The holidays invoke yummy thoughts of special delicacies tied to the holidays and families. Special dishes or desserts are a fun way to bring people together. Let employees share their talents and traditions by hosting a dessert swap. And create an employee cookbook where employees can share their special recipes.

Traditions: While we are familiar with the traditions behind the holidays we celebrate, many people do not understand those in other religions or cultures. Use the holidays to educate employees on the meaning of holidays they may not celebrate by either bringing in experts or allowing employees to share their favorite customs.

Decorations: Lights, candles, wreaths...every holiday has some colors, adornments, or symbols closely linked to it. Decorating can help brighten up the workplace and make employees happier during their workday. Consider allowing employees to tastefully decorate their work area. Or dedicate a communal area for employees to decorate with one or two items to embrace the diversity of the different holidays. You can even have a contest to recognize the best decorations.

Gratitude: The holidays are meant to be a time of thankfulness (there's even a whole day dedicated to it!). Tell your employees how grateful you are for them and their efforts. Create a system to allow employees to recognize coworkers they are grateful for.

Community Service: Giving back and serving others is a theme of most holidays, even if sometimes overlooked by the presents. There are always organizations looking for help so let your employees focus on giving to others by organizing a toy or food drive. Or organize volunteers to help at a charitable event or soup kitchen. Consider making this a year-round focus by adding a volunteer time benefit or encouraging giving to local charities for other holidays (i.e., writing letters to service members for Veterans' Day; or organizing a supply drive for back-to-school).

Giving: There is a lot of focus on gift-giving this time of year, sometimes too much so. But the idea that "It's the thought that counts" is a valid one. Think of ways to bring a smile to your employees – a gift card to a local restaurant or a movie theater. Or add a small bonus into their paycheck (just be sure you tax everything correctly). Maybe let employees organize a small gift exchange.

Flexibility: While not a theme of the holidays, flexibility is a necessary skill to navigate them. Understand that employees will be stressed with shopping, cooking, traveling, and having their kids home from school. Work with managers to prioritize tasks and projects to ensure the important things are covered while putting off the things that can wait.

New Beginnings: Use the new year to introduce new changes or initiatives – update your handbook, roll out a new compensation plan, or announce an added benefit. Encourage employees to make work or personal resolutions or goals. Offer healthy-living incentives or remind employees of your company's continuing education benefit.

Whatever you choose to do:

- Remember to value each person's beliefs or lack thereof. Do not prioritize or minimize any faith or culture and do not force anyone to participate in anything.
- Be fair and equitable in whatever you choose to do. Don't require employees who don't celebrate or have kids to do everything so others can have time off. If you do need some to carry a larger load this time of year, reward them by giving them premium pay, a bonus, or extra time off later in the year.
- The holidays can be extremely hard for some people. Be on the lookout for employees who seem quieter or more despondent during these months. Show kindness and patience to those who may be withdrawn.

And, if this is your busy season, give your employees a big "thank you" and try to do something special for them in the new year.

Using the spirit of the holidays to find ways to appreciate your employees will make the holidays more meaningful and will start 2024 off right!

Happy holidays!!



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