

# Employers Use Fun to Fight Turnover

## It's Serious Business!



Everyone has had a bad hair day, but how about a bad tie, bad hat or bad shoe day? More and more companies are putting together contests on the ugliest dressed. Another company sponsors an annual turkey bowl. Employees go out on the loading dock, take a frozen turkey and try to knock down as many empty wine bottles as possible.

This is not evidence of companies gone nuts, but tactics used to ward off a serious business problem.

The biggest problem facing business today is how to keep and motivate workers. The other problem slapping them in the face is high turnover. Today's mobile employees jump ship for as little as a \$1.00/hr. raise...*unless something keeps them*. That something may equate to a fun, flexible workplace that gives them more freedom and responsibility. Wouldn't it be great if you *enjoyed* going to work? What if your supervisors showed *appreciation* for what you did?

A company experiencing high turnover has a serious financial problem. It costs anywhere from \$4,000-\$15,000 to recruit, hire and train a new employee. One Atlanta company lost 420 of the 431 employees they hired this year. If it costs them \$4,000 per employee, that equates to a \$1.7 million loss. Unfortunately, most employers do not know how much turnover is costing them.

Here are a few examples of fun workplaces:

### Humor Corner

Give employees one corner of a break room or other area to post cartoons, illustrations and other items designed to relieve stress. At the end of each week, the staff can award a prize for the best submission.



### Flextime/flexshare

First Tennessee Bank believes that if you treat employees well, they, in return, treat your customers well. The use of flextime and flexshare programs has resulted in double the loan volume handled since 1992 with no increase in staff or major changes in systems or technology. An additional bonus: a giant leap in customer service ratings.

### The Talking Stick

Try introducing the "talking stick" into your office. This idea originated from a Native American tradition. Each month a different person in the office receives the talking stick which provides that person certain rights and privileges for the month. For example, the "owner" could provide fellow employees one hour a month administrative leave.



### Employee Dollars

At Phoenix Solutions Inc. employees award an "employee dollar" to fellow employees who do something special or exceed company expectations. Each month the employee with the most dollars gets movie tickets, dinner, and a plaque with their name as "Employee of the Month."

### Management by fooling around

Herb Kelleher, CEO and founder of Southwest Airlines, combines fun and hard work into something he calls

“management by fooling around.” At the nonconformist airline, everything—from the tickets and boarding passes to the casual dress and occasional costumes attendants wear—clearly demonstrates that something is different.

### Payday

A Milwaukee office manager doesn't just give out paychecks on payday—employees also receive a Payday candy bar with their check.

### Man Overboard Award

CIGNA believes in rewarding employees who go above and beyond for their customers. The Man Overboard Award is a life-saving ring, which the president presents to an employee at a special ceremony. CIGNA also pays teams for implementing ideas that improve productivity with awards as high as \$25,000.

### Choose Your Own Reward

A Miami-based business owner rewards her employees with parties, expensive dinners, chauffeured shopping sprees, spa sessions, and cooking lessons with Chef Paul Prodhomme. She lets her employees decide what they want, then figures out how much their package costs and also how much additional business they have to generate to cover those costs. Choose your own reward—sounds like fun!

### Engineering Bucks

The technicians at Weather Channel in Atlanta created their own recognition system called Tech Bucks. All they did was Xerox a dollar bill and give five of them out at the beginning of each month. They give them to each other for doing a good job. At the end of the month they tally up who got the most and the winner gets a special prize.



### Dancing the Macarena

Employees at PeopleSoft, Inc. still haven't forgotten the day that CEO David Duffield danced the Macarena in front of 500 happy co-workers. Duffield does not act like a boss. His office is a cubicle, he answers his own phone and opens his own mail. Annual employee turnover is three percent or one-

quarter of the national average. Employees who earn outstanding service awards get either \$500 in cash or 100 stock options.

### The Extra Mile

United Services Automobile Association (USAA) provides blank “Thank You” note stationary to their workers for a program called *The Extra Mile*. Employees are encouraged to say “Thank You” to each other for the help they receive at work. The most surprising thing happened on the first day USAA printed the notes . . . they ran out! The company couldn't keep up with the demand.

### Fat Friday

Just about everybody loves to eat, right? At Texas A&M the first Friday of each month is celebration time. Everyone brings food to share, and they celebrate birthdays for that month as well as work anniversaries.



### Surprise Celebrations

Often it's the unexpected and informal that employees enjoy as much as formal awards. Conduct frequent, unannounced recognition and award celebrations, such as having a pizza party. If you don't know of a reason to have a get-together for the work force, invent one.

### Gold Stars and Frogs

At Wachovia Bank, each Monday morning they set milestones for the week with input from staff members. On Friday, employees receive a Gold Star and \$2.00 (funny money) for each milestone met. Employees can also recognize their peers with a sticker of a frog, which is worth \$1.00. Staff members display the gold stars and frogs on a white cardboard poster. At the end of each month, they hold a random drawing for a dinner (\$50.00) and movies (\$25.00).

### Having Fun

Hal Rosenbluth, CEO of Rosenbluth International (the nation's fourth-largest travel services company) believes in

creating a fun work environment. He starts by hiring “nice people,” since he believes nice people like to work together and they like to have fun. Officers dedicate every Tuesday afternoon to serving high tea and discussing corporate values and other matters of importance to new recruits at the company’s Philadelphia headquarters. There’s a toll-free 800 number for any associate to contact Rosenbluth. He uses a sort of Crayola Rorschach test by sending associates crayons and blank paper to render their view of the company. A “happiness barometer” team meets every six months to benchmark attitudes and enjoyment levels.



### Faux Paus Award

Sometimes it’s fun to recognize an employee’s goof. Try the “Faux Paus Award”—a plaque or trophy passed around the organization at a monthly social event with the current recipient’s name engraved. The “keeper” of the award is responsible for selecting the next deserving recipient.

### After Dinner Phone Call

Even though you took time during the work day to thank the employee who went “above and beyond,” go a step further and call them at home after dinner to say thanks. You might be surprised how much this can mean.

### Breakfast with the President

The Human Resources Department of Nations Healthcare, Inc. initiated a “Breakfast with the President” program to improve communications between employees and the CEO. Each breakfast begins at approximately 8:15 a.m., with coffee and biscuits served by the staff, and ends when the discussion ends. Results—higher morale and a sense of open communication.

### Fun Fridays

A Dallas, TX unit of Sprint Corporation uses “Fun Fridays” to energize workers. Themes have included exchanging a plant with a co-worker, or ice cream socials where managers wore aprons and served sundaes.

### Thrilling

### Thursdays

Nike Employees in Beaverton, Oregon can’t wait for Thursday to roll around. They stop work at 4:30 in the afternoon and after some beer and soda they kayak across a lake, race bikes and compete in a 600-yard run.



#### About the Author

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