

language that makes employees *want to* read them. That language focuses on the benefits to employees and not just the features. It's written in a style that answers the readers' main question: "What's in it for me?"

Employers of Choice have newsletters that highlight and picture the accomplishments of individuals and departments for all to see. Sometimes graphs reflect the achievements; other times a picture is worth a thousand words. These employers know the power of acknowledgment and offer tribute to their high achievers.

Remember Your Alumni

We're watching a trend in which people return to employers they left—after a period of years, months, weeks, or even days. These returning workers are called "boomerang employees." The stigma of going back where you were has all but disappeared, but many employees still don't return. Why not? They haven't been invited!

Stay in touch with your alumni. Send them company newsletters, e-mail greetings, or birthday cards. Remember what aspects of your work excited them, then let them know about what's

Camet Corporation in Hiram, Ohio, has a monthly party for all employees who have birthdays in that month and those who have anniversary dates of employment during the same period. The company shuts down during the celebration time, about 20–30 minutes, while all the employees join together for cake and coffee, and punch or soft drinks. The company president offers a few words of congratulations and gives a quick report on corporate achievements. Who answers the telephones during this period? Retirees, who welcome an opportunity to come in once a month to visit with old friends.

Business Stationery, Inc., Cleveland, Ohio, was challenged by a high level of re-work. Recognizing that all the jobs that had to be done over were costing the company a lot of money, the managers decided to attack the problem head-on, with an incentive. They persuaded the company president to cook Easter breakfast for all employees on Good Friday if they met their goal. Then, they sweetened the deal by getting him to agree to wear a bunny suit while he cooked, if they reached a stretch goal.

Long story, short: the company president, Frank Spontelli, Jr., looked adorable in his bunny suit as he cooked breakfast for three shifts. Bonus: Frank worked as a short order cook in college, so the meals were well-prepared and delicious!

happening in those areas of your company. They might want to come back and become involved with those efforts again. Remember that people are changing jobs much more frequently now. In today's workplace, it seems like the right thing to do. Sometimes people jump the fence to go to where the grass is greener—only to discover that it's crab grass. They've made a mistake, but are they allowed to go back to where they were? If you'd like to have them back, tell them.

One company that has an interesting approach to Internal Marketing is the software cataloger, SoftChoice. This company wins employee accolades with its "virtual community center."

Located in Toronto, Canada, SoftChoice has a newsletter on their Intranet. Intranet technology gives them the resources to make the project a living document that reflects input not from a single editor, but from any employee who wants to contribute.

The SoftChoice Interactive Newsletter, or Sinews, as it came to be called, is more than a newsletter. Just as its name suggests, Sinews functions as the connective tissue in the organization. It's a community center with different departments containing articles that reflect news, such as the status of new branch openings, and forums for sharing best practices. As people lose interest in different topics, they disappear and are replaced by new departments.

When employees visit Sinews, they are encouraged to submit articles on any topic, post responses to existing topics, or e-mail the writer directly. New material is cycled through a minimal review process that addresses spelling, grammar, and punctuation issues. No one ever heavily edits the articles. Sinews gives literally every employee a voice to engage in public discourse on anything and everything.

Besides providing a valuable channel for proposing new ideas and sharing best practices, Sinews gives people the freedom to inform, commend, and criticize. This freedom enables SoftChoice to take full advantage of the creative minds it has in the organization. Because the idea for Sinews came out of such a dialogue—and because it fosters so many more dialogues—it truly reflects the innovation companies can achieve by understanding and promoting their corporate culture. The bottom line is workforce stability—in an organization with 247 employees located in 27 offices throughout North America, their turnover is only 6.1%.¹⁷

Some of the more enlightened companies, notably J.P. Morgan, even have alumni associations of people who used to work for their company. The company sponsors annual events for their former employees. Other companies even invite the former employees join in celebrations with their current employees. And guess what happens? Not surprisingly, some of those former employees choose to return to their previous employers.¹⁸

Notes

1. *Lean & Meaningful*, pp. 74–76, by Roger Herman and Joyce Gioia, Oakhill Press, 1998.
2. “Cheesecake Factory turns non-employees into recruiters,” by Roger Herman, *The Workforce Stability Alert*, February 1999, p. 3.
3. Interview with Bob Noble, December 17, 1999.
4. *Lean & Meaningful*, pp. 208–209, by Roger Herman and Joyce Gioia, Oakhill Press, 1998.
5. Interview with Dick Hall, December 16, 1999.
6. *1001 Ways to Reward Employees*, xv–xvi, by Bob Nelson, Workman Press, 1994.
7. “Small company offering big benefits—Blades & Associates,” *The Workforce Stability Alert*, October 1999, p. 4.
8. Jeanie Casison, *Incentive Magazine*, April 1999, p. 46.
9. Interview with Dick Hall, December 16, 1999.
10. “Celebrate with Children,” by Joyce Gioia, *The Workforce Stability Alert*, August 1998, p.5.
11. “Diligent Caring Yields 0.5 percent Turnover,” by Roger Herman, *The Workforce Stability Alert*, October 1998, p. 3.
12. “How You Gonna Keep ‘Em Down on the Firm?” by Chris Caggiano, *Inc. Magazine*, January 1998, p. 75.
13. *The 100 Best Companies to Work for in America*, by Robert Levering and Milton Moskowitz, Penguin Books, 1999, pp. 327–332.
14. “Top Companies for Executive Women,” *Working Women Magazine*, January 2000, p. 52.
15. “Sleep on This,” Anita Bruzzese, *Human Resource Executive*, May 19, 1998.
16. “Too stressed-out to work” Enjoy recess and snack times when you work for Gymboree,” by Joyce Gioia, *The Workforce Stability Alert*, August 1999.
17. “SoftChoice wins accolades with virtual ‘community center,’” *The Workforce Stability Alert*, February 1999, p. 2.
18. “Employees reunite to chew fat, talk jobs,” by Stephanie Armour, *USA Today*, July 9, 1999, p. 14B.

GROWTH AND OPPORTUNITY

Our strong economy has created a wide range of exciting, attractive jobs in many fields throughout the country. This plethora of opportunities will exist for years to come. Workers know they will have plenty of places to go, but they will have to be prepared to do the job required to have the best chance of being hired.

Whether they expect to change jobs within the same employer or go to a different company, these astute workers want to be as marketable as possible. To maintain their marketability, they must keep their skills sharp and pick up new skills and knowledge whenever possible. They want training. They want development opportunities. They want new challenges. They want mentoring and coaching.

Today's employees are more aggressive in their drive for ongoing learning and growth. Expect them to make these issues factors in their employment agreements. They want learning opportunities at work and/or they want reimbursement of their tuition, fees, and other costs of attending a nearby college or university. The interest will be in both academic courses and continuing education offerings.

PEOPLE WANT TO LEARN AND GROW

Employers of Choice recognize their people's burning desire to acquire knowledge and skill. They create and maintain a learning environment to respond to employee interest and to manifest the

employer's dedication to employee growth and development. Time off for training courses or to attend a college class will be commonplace, usually with ways for the employees to make up

the time by working longer hours or by doing special assignments.

Supervisors at all levels must encourage learning. Each performance appraisal interview should include a discussion of the next steps in the employee's development. A plan for the next period will be discussed and designed. This next-term plan will fit into the employee's long-term growth plan. Every employee—from the CEO to the custodian to the newest hire—will have a personal growth plan. Each plan will be different, of course, reflecting the type and degree of training to be accomplished.

Management people need training, development, and feedback to support their professional growth. While many companies invest heavily in educating middle managers and enhancing their skills, there is much more to be done. This circumstance is especially prevalent today, as corporate cultures and work environments undergo rapid change.

A number of employers have formed corporate universities to train and educate their people. The American Society for Training and Development describes this arena as the fastest growing segment of the adult education field. It is estimated that there are more than 1600 corporate universities today, as compared to 400 in 1998. At the current rate, the number of corporate universities could surpass the number of traditional universities by 2010. Corporate universities could become the primary educators of post-secondary students in the

At Baptist Hospital, Inc., Pensacola, Florida, cultural change was essential. Admissions were flat and patient satisfaction measured by a national survey was slightly below average. As part of the turnaround, the hospital made an investment in middle management development. Now, all of their leaders—nurse managers, supervisors, and department heads—go off-site for two days every 90 days. Employee forums are held every 90 days and employees are surveyed about their attitudes toward their supervisors. The leaders get "report cards" every three months to check behavior and performance against goals. The critical goals are customer service, efficiency, expense management, and employee turnover. Vice presidents are measured using the same criteria, and 20 percent of executive incentive compensation is based on employee turnover.¹