

Make Your Work Life More Productive: Ideas for making work more enjoyable for you and your employees

(NorthShoreBank.com) Enjoying your work and helping your employees to enjoy working for you can lead to higher productivity, lower turnover and a better running organization. Here are some ideas you may find useful.

Set Priorities

Oscar Wilde once said, “Nothing focuses the mind like the sight of the gallows.” Both you and your employees should know what is important and focus on the high priority items. As a manager, you understand how everything in the business finally comes together to produce a profit. Identifying the critical items for success and then communicating the “how” and “why” can get everyone working toward the same objectives.

Set Deadlines

The newspaper industry revolves around deadlines. Everyone knows that for the morning paper to appear (in the morning), stories must be written, presses must print and trucks must deliver. Everyone knows the essential timing and responds. People like to know what is expected and when it is due. They respond to deadlines. Set realistic deadlines and help employees understand why a deadline has been set.

Pick some “Low Hanging Fruit”

Many businesses have multiple opportunities for improvement. Some are easier to achieve than others. By choosing some easy ones (and ones that can be accomplished relatively quickly), you may be able to achieve some quick success and energize the entire organization to accomplish more. Nothing breeds success like success.

Have Short-Term and Long-Term Goals

It is human nature to overestimate what can be accomplished in a short period of time and underestimate what can be accomplished over a long period of time. Take advantage of this tendency by giving employees some short-term projects where enthusiasm can carry the day combined with long-term projects that can produce significant positive change.

Hold Effective Meetings

Meetings take everyone’s time away from other tasks so make sure they are worth the time and effort. When scheduling a meeting, make sure the purpose of the meeting justifies the total time it is going to take. A one-hour meeting with eight people takes the equivalent of someone’s full workday. Be considerate of everyone’s time and avoid interruptions during the meeting.

An agenda can keep everyone focused. Setting a time limit at the beginning of the meeting will help produce conclusions because people will be less likely to get off track if they know how long they have to accomplish the purpose of the meeting.

Finally, don’t let someone monopolize the meeting with off-subject items. Personal stories or humor can have a place in the workplace, but not if it detracts from the purpose of the meeting.

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Learn to Listen

In most cases, your employees care about your business. They often have ideas and concerns that need to be addressed. Conveying a willingness to truly listen will encourage employees to offer constructive ideas (and sometimes criticisms) that can be important. Focus on what you are hearing, avoid rudely interrupting a speaker, and respond. Effective listening can show you care about what is being said and that you respect the person speaking.

Don't Overlook The Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit this Summer

(IRS.gov) Day camps are common during the summer months. Many parents pay for them for their children while they work or look for work. If this applies to you, your costs may qualify for a federal tax credit that can lower your taxes. Here are the top ten tips to know about the Child and Dependent Care Credit:

1. Care for Qualifying Persons. Your expenses must be for the care of one or more qualifying persons. Your dependent child or children under age 13 usually qualify.

2. Work-related Expenses. Your expenses for care must be work-related. This means that you must pay for the care so you can work or look for work. This rule also applies to your spouse if you file a joint return. Your spouse meets this rule during any month they are a full-time student. They also meet it if they're physically or mentally incapable of self-care.

3. Earned Income Required. You must have earned income, such as from wages, salaries and tips. It also includes net earnings from self-employment. Your spouse must also have earned income if you file jointly. Your spouse is treated as having earned income for any month that they are a full-time student or incapable of self-care. This rule also applies to you if you file a joint return.

4. Joint Return if Married. Generally, married couples must file a joint return. You can still take the credit, however, if you are legally separated or living apart from your spouse.

5. Type of Care. You may qualify for it whether you pay for care at home, at a daycare facility or at a day camp.

6. Credit Amount. The credit is worth between 20 and 35 percent of your allowable expenses. The percentage depends on the amount of your income.

7. Expense Limits. The total expense that you can use in a year is limited. The limit is \$3,000 for one qualifying person or \$6,000 for two or more.

8. Certain Care Does Not Qualify. You may not include the cost of certain types of care for the tax credit, including:

- Overnight camps or summer school tutoring costs.
- Care provided by your spouse or your child who is under age 19 at the end of the year.
- Care given by a person you can claim as your dependent.

9. Keep Records and Receipts. Keep all your receipts and records for when you file your tax return next year. You will need the name, address and taxpayer identification number of the care provider. You must report this information when you claim the credit on Form 2441, Child and Dependent Care Expenses.

10. Dependent Care Benefits. Special rules apply if you get dependent care benefits from your employer.

Remember that this credit is not just a summer tax benefit. You may be able to claim it for qualifying care that you pay for at any time during the year.