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Create a Great Work Environment: Kforce



The past year has been challenging for the economy and for business overall. Despite the downturn, some staffing companies have managed to maintain a positive work environment with innovative programs that boost employee morale.

[Kforce](#) is one such company.

Kforce Staffing is a full-service professional staffing firm providing contract and direct hire staffing. Peter Alonso, Chief Talent Officer of Kforce, describes how companies can use employee recognition programs to bolster morale in a recessionary environment.

Monster: Amidst this year's economic challenges, how has your company managed to maintain employee performance and satisfaction?

Peter Alonso: Kforce fundamentally believes that people are our greatest asset, highlighted by our tag line "Great People = Great Results." Recognition, appreciation and support are even more important during challenging economic times. In fact focus on these activities should increase during these times. Our firm increased the commitment to our Great People during this difficult time by establishing the Chief Talent Officer function at the beginning of 2009. This has allowed a single leader to be dedicated to maintaining employee performance and satisfaction. The challenge is to make the workplace better and help employees execute smarter, with fewer resources. We all have had to work harder to motivate our people. Part of that is providing encouragement and "high-fiving" every win. In a recent Kforce employee survey, we found that our peer to peer recognition is in the 90th percentile -- which is really just a testament to our great culture.

Monster: Have employee recognition programs played a role?

Alonso: Yes, our recognition programs play a key role in the engagement (we prefer this word to satisfaction -- we want fully engaged employees who are passionate about their work), retention and ultimate performance of our great people. We have numerous recognition programs geared at different segments of our employee population. During this year 's economic challenges, we 've focused extensively on reviewing our entire recognition strategy and making significant changes in terms of what, when, how and to whom we are rewarding.

Monster: Do you have any recommendations on how to initiate employee satisfaction and recognition programs on a limited budget?

Alonso: Organizations should not only look at where they are spending their recognition dollars but also measure and analyze the impact of their recognition programs. Additionally, it is imperative to constantly ask their employees what they think. Do they feel recognized? How do they want to be recognized? You have to keep your programs fresh and ensure you are providing recognition that is meaningful at an individual level. Managers need to know their employee 's reward preferences. If you recognize an employee publicly, and they aren't comfortable with that type of attention, then you've defeated the purpose of the recognition and, in fact, have done the exact opposite of what you were trying to achieve.

At Kforce, we looked at where we were spending our money on recognition and asked our employees through a variety of venues for their opinion. Based on that data, we decided to eliminate some recognition programs that were not giving us the greatest "bang for our buck " and replaced them with other programs and rewards.

Organizations should also develop metrics around their recognition programs and share the results regularly with the senior leaders to allow them to have a better understanding of the return on investment on these initiatives. Real data demonstrating how recognition programs are meeting business objectives will increase executive support. It will also help increase investment into these initiatives and reduce the likelihood of the recognition budget being reduced or eliminated.

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If your senior leaders fully understand the link between employee engagement, retention, performance, sales and shareholder value, you will develop the support needed to execute particular strategies and initiatives. At Kforce, we are very fortunate to have an executive committee and management team that really appreciates the value of employee recognition and engagement.

Monster: What other efforts have helped your company maintain a positive workplace environment?

Alonso: Our recognition and inspiration department is responsible for our neatly designed and well implemented reward programs. The success of these programs is due to our field management teams that have gone above and beyond to implement and support these programs. We leverage the relationship that exists between the manager and the employee. Our experience has been that the most meaningful recognition comes from the employee 's direct manager in front of his/her peer group.

Monster: Are there ways to build camaraderie when times get tough?

Alonso: Establishing a communications venue to announce employee victories is a must. Especially when times get tough, an employee win or accomplishment should be promoted to create a sense of accomplishment and to cheer on other team members. We have also formalized our stewardship programs that are making a big impact in our community. Employees that give together are more fulfilled and more engaged.

Another important element is to have a positive attitude and to "check your ego at the door." There is much that is beyond our control, but one of the areas that we can control is our attitude. And attitude is a contagious thing. A leader 's attitude and outlook have a huge influence on his/her employees. During these tough times, employees look to their managers to reassure them and to maintain a positive outlook.

Monster: Do you plan to maintain any new initiatives even after the economy recovers?

Alonso: Absolutely! Inspiring and recognizing our great people is at the core of our business model. Since our business strategy is always evolving, our recognition programs will evolve and be in sync with our firm 's business direction and goals.

Monster: Do you have any other recommendations for maintaining a great work environment in a downturn?

Alonso: Our leaders/managers are the focal point to managing and driving the performance of employees within the firm. The talent management organization works closely with the field leadership team to help them understand and leverage the broad range of options available for rewarding employee performance. These options include career development, mentorship programs, career and training opportunities, recognition and much more.

About the Company

Kforce is a full-service professional staffing firm providing contract and direct hire staffing solutions for hiring organizations and career management for job seekers in a variety of skill areas. For more than 45 years, Kforce has been providing professional staffing services based on the belief that great people equal great results. Kforce's 1,900 staffing specialists operate 62 offices in 41 markets in North America and two in the Philippines.

About the Author

As the Chief Talent Officer (CTO), Peter Alonso is responsible for the selection, attraction, development, performance management and inspiration of Kforce's Great People. Peter joined the Firm as an IT sales associate in 1985 and most recently served as the President of the Health & Life Sciences division. Peter has a B. A. in Economics from Denison University.

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