

Christmas parties and bonuses make comeback

'There is a growing awareness that people are working a lot and appreciate any form of recognition'

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Love them or leave them, staff Christmas parties are staging a comeback after a period of decline, says the B.C. Human Resources Management Association.

The same goes for year-end bonuses, music to the ears of anyone eligible for a monetary boost in time for Christmas.

Both trends bode well for achieving organizational goals, said Christian Codrington, association senior operation manager. Association members — there are more than 5,500 and 3,000 affiliates across the province — gathered in Kamloops for a holiday social over the weekend.

"I think a couple of things are happening," Codrington said. "The recovery is happening, yes, but I also think there is a growing awareness that people are working a lot and appreciate any form of recognition."

A survey by GloboForce indicates 78 per cent of employees feel that being recognized motivates them on the job, and 70 per cent said they would work harder if they were recognized. An online survey by BMO found 17 per cent of B.C. employees and one-quarter of Canadian employees are expecting a year-end bonus. Most plan to use the bonus to invest or pay down debt.

The association maintains that employee recognition is a cost-effective investment too often overlooked or discarded in favour of the immediate bottom line.

"I think it is an unfortunate reality that things that don't bring in immediate returns get cut first," Codrington said. "Any time you recognize people, it has to be good for organizational goals and for recovery."

Benefits of formalized recognition programs are difficult to measure, but they play a significant role in employee retention and staff commitment, he said.

Employers looking to reduce costs by eliminating opportunities to thank and re-engage employees could result in a more frustrated, burned out and less enabled workforce.

“That often translates into higher turnover and retraining costs, and a bigger hit to profits.”

Seasonal celebrations don't have to take the form of a party. They can also mirror the organization culture. Codrington cited one employer who holds a day of employee volunteering for the local boys and girls club then hosts a dinner with staff.

“You'll lose valuable productivity for one day, but gain content employees and extend goodwill to the community. Your financial investment may be deductible, and your community visibility raised an important notch in the bargain.”

Codrington is convinced the regional economy is resurgent.

“You're seeing it, especially in the resource-based sector and the need for skilled labour. There is growth, and a projection in the central Interior and north that growth will outstrip demand.”

Another sign: the Kamloops chapter of the association had the largest membership growth of any in the province last year at 8.76 per cent, Codrington noted.

HR managers may have an ulterior motive in proclaiming the comeback of staff Christmas celebrations, he quipped.

“I think human resources really wanted to get out of the task of being party organizer.”

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