

Motivation meltdown

Summer's sun, surf and sand distracting employees? How to keep them engaged

Are the dog days of summer taking a toll on your staff's creativity and productivity? Try one of these strategies to reenergize the workplace:

Get outside

Who doesn't want to be outdoors on a beautiful day? Exchange the wistful looks out the window for some actual fresh air. Encourage workers to take a laptop to an outdoor café or return calls via cellphone at a nearby park. Watch attention spans increase by moving a staff meeting outside.

"So often, the best way to up productivity and rekindle creativity is to simply step outside the office for a couple minutes," says Deborah Sweeney, CEO of MyCorporation.com. "During the summer months, my employees and I will sometimes take walks to Starbucks or Menchie's for a cool treat. Just enjoying some fresh air and getting moving can do wonders for your body and mind."

Go on a field trip

Remember the grade-school excitement of going someplace? Adults crave deviation from routine, too.

"I recently went rock climbing with my team, and it helped give us the extra burst of energy and excitement that we needed," says Elana Winchester, communications and marketing coordinator at Areyvut, Inc. "Not only was it a fun activity and a form of exercise, but after the completion of the activity we discussed as a group how rock climbing can teach us lessons to utilize in the workplace. We discussed how it takes teamwork and encouragement to get tasks done and also discovered how, just like one can reach the top of the wall using many different paths, so too an assignment can be completed using many different avenues."



Allow flex work

Focusing on results rather than hours clocked can motivate employees to do more—and they'll appreciate your consideration of their other obligations.

"Employees need flexibility in order to achieve work/life balance, especially during the summer when children are out of school and child care often falls to the working parent," says Deb LaMere, vice president of employee engagement at Ceridian. "Allow for flexible work options, like regularly working from home a few days a week or letting employees head out a few hours early, as long as their work is completed. When you give flexibility, you get better results—not just during the summer, but year-round."

Encourage creativity

Look at times when staff is lean as a chance to focus on the ones still there. Teaching an individual a new task, letting someone try a different responsibility,

or simply seeking out a person's thoughts over a casual lunch can keep engagement high.

Tim Elmore, president of Growing Leaders, suggests taking advantage of the slow time to give employees freedom for creative projects. "Allowing team members to work on whatever they want allows them to take initiative, be creative, and produce something on their own. Progressive companies like 3M and Google have found success in offering employees time to work on a project of their choosing, and as a result, it helps them feel more engaged, in control, and also inspired through innovation."

Set challenging goals

Sometimes a summer slump can result from low expectations during that season. Raising the bar can be the cure.

"Challenge your team to make summer the best quarter of year," says Geoff Gross, president and CEO of Medical Guardian. "Set performance goals and offer employees an immediate and meaningful target to work toward. Make sure everyone understands the goals and what their relative priority is."

Try an incentive

Finally, don't discount good old-fashioned rewards for outstanding performance.

"I recently introduced our 'beer money bonus' incentive for my team," says Chris Post, CEO and founder of Post Modern Marketing. "It's an extra \$20 for the weekend if they go the extra mile for the client, improve a company process, or just come up with a great idea. As a result, we have already found a few ways to complete tasks faster and cheaper."