

# How to Improve Your Workplace Culture This Summer



*By Paula Santonocito*

You certainly want to focus on workplace culture year round, but arguably there are more opportunities to create camaraderie during the summer months.

Here are a few ideas to help generate goodwill and foster teamwork.

**Start a walking club.** Yes, everything you've heard about fresh air and exercise is true. They really do improve health and morale. And now, a new study from Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Life Science Division in Berkeley, Calif., finds walking can lower risk of heart-related conditions as much as running.

Studies also find people who walk with a buddy are more likely to keep at it, and the workplace is packed with potential pals. An added benefit of employees walking together is they're likely to talk about things they have in common, and the number one thing is the job.

One option is an open club—anyone at the worksite may participate and everyone belongs to the same group. This will facilitate management and staff interaction and allow people from various departments to get to know one another. Another option is for each department to create its own group; then, the various groups compete against each other to meet fitness goals.

**Start a softball team.** Encourage team spirit by building a team, a softball team. Although participating in a league where you play other companies is one option, the initiative doesn't have to be that formal. Getting a group of employees together on the field for fun and time spent engaged in something other than work should be the goal.

With this in mind, encourage participation without regard for ability. This

isn't about most runs scored. Winning means everyone who wants to play gets a turn at bat and feels like part of the team.

**Designate an outdoor space for lunch.** Your cafeteria or lunchroom may be a sunny, cheerful place, but nothing compares to the great outdoors on a sunny day. If you have an available outdoor area, set up picnic tables or patio furniture and encourage employees to use the space. Don't forget trash and recyclable bins, and remember to establish guidelines for maintaining the area.

**Hold meeting outdoors.** Creative companies and innovative leaders realize the best ideas often occur when you think outside the box. So why not get out of the box that is your office? Breathe in the fresh air, take in the sunshine, and talk business in an environment where the sky truly is the limit.

**Hold a company picnic.** Organizing a company picnic may seem like one more task for HR at a time when the department already has so much to do. However, you don't have to go it alone. In fact, you may have to do very little.

Select a date and location and then ask for employee volunteers to organize and help host the event. The hosts and hostesses with the mostest will come forward and take over. Your role is to set the guidelines, communicate with the workforce—and perhaps bring the hot dog rolls.

**Get social with ice cream Fridays.** Speaking of summer food, what could be more social than an ice cream social? Friday afternoon is the perfect time to offer employees a treat.

Of course, you'll want to "weigh" this decision carefully. If a significant number of your employees are trying to lose weight, ice cream may not be viewed favorably.

**Modify the summer work schedule.** Is it possible to make changes to the workday or workweek during the summer months? For example, can employees opt to come in earlier so they can leave earlier? What about working longer days four days per week so you can offer three-day weekends?

Before you say no, seriously consider the possibility. Making even minor changes will go a long way toward making the workforce happier – and you may also benefit from the schedule change.

**Implement a more relaxed dress code.** Yes, yes, summer dress codes can be problematic – and relaxed dress codes even more so. Be that as it may, who doesn't want to be a bit more casual and comfortable during the summer months?

But the devil is in the details. Establish clear-cut standards, and spell out what is and is not acceptable. Make sure everyone knows the policy – and the consequences of not following it.

**Promote and encourage volunteerism.** Canadians like to give back, and they like companies that allow them to volunteer.

Although volunteering is not necessarily seasonal, there's something about summer that makes people feel good and therefore want to do good. In addition, outdoor volunteer opportunities with organizations like Habitat for Humanity are more available during the summer months.

Why not take advantage of everything summer has to offer and adopt one or more of these ideas? Your workplace, and therefore your organization, will be better for it.