



Employee Engagement: Workplace and Corporate Giving



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INTRODUCTION

Charities @ Work engaged Dr. Linda Gornitsky of LBG Associates to conduct two focus groups to discuss various aspects of employee engagement. This paper covers the findings of the focus group about workplace and corporate giving, which was held during the Charities @ Work conference in New York in April 2012.

About Charities @ Work:

Charities@Work is an alliance of four nonprofit federations that serves as the cooperative voice for more than 2000 international, national, and local charities. Our mission is to provide employers with an efficient way to enhance their employee engagement programs and initiatives and to respond to growing employee interest through a wider range of giving options. The Charities@Work Alliance founders are: America's Charities, Community Health Charities, EarthShare and Global Impact. Visit www.charitiesatwork.org to learn more.

About LBG Associates:

LBG Associates, founded in 1993 by Dr. Linda Gornitsky, is a woman-owned consulting firm that specializes in the design, implementation, and management of corporate citizenship programs and initiatives. Our goal is to help companies develop strategic national and international corporate citizenship programs that generate positive, measurable benefits for the corporate bottom-line, as well as the community as a whole. LBG Associates provides advice, training, research and implementation in a personal, cost-effective, and timely manner. Our solutions are creative and innovative and drive social change. Visit www.lbg-associates.com for more information or call Dr. Gornitsky at 203-325-3154.

HOW COMPANIES ENGAGE EMPLOYEES

Eleven companies participated in this focus group. All participants considered workplace giving and corporate donations, through Matching Gifts or direct grants, as ways to engage employees. The methods that they used to engage associates fall into a few different categories, listed here with some specific tactics.

Incentives to donate:

- Providing Paid Time Off (PTO)
- Matching Gifts
- Offering Jeans for a Day
- Senior management face time
 - e.g., associates pay to play ping pong or basketball with the CEO, while others pay to be spectators
- Offering associates the opportunity to place a message for another associate in a helium balloon for a fee

Appeals to the heart:

- Sharing stories about how employees are impacted by particular nonprofits
- Lunch and learns which allow charities and employees to relay their personal experiences
- Educating employees on the nonprofits included in a company's workplace giving campaign
- Including associates' stories on the intranet

Ownership:

- Allowing each business location to set its own giving goal
 - This often results in ownership of the campaign and usually a stretch goal

Messaging:

- Clear and consistent communication yields the best results
- Non-solicitation policies that are strictly enforced lead to more engagement because this is the only time during the year that employees can be solicited

Competitions:

- Setting up competitions between business units
 - For example, the unit that has the highest participation rate gets dollars to donate to its preferred charity in the campaign

What's Popular Right Now

Competitions are very popular right now. One company encourages each department to select one charity as its preferred charity and then to raise money for that charity. Each department has a kick-off meeting and then tries to convince others to donate to its charity by explaining why it deserves their support. Frequently the department will make a video with the charity as its main persuasive effort.

Another creative competition is the “extreme cubicle makeover.” in which employees decorate their cubicles as they like and post pictures on the intranet. Then all employees vote for the best decorated cubicles. The winners receive a company donation to their favorite charities.

The “virtual auction” is also becoming popular. Here, employees put items up for auction with the proceeds going to a charity. Virtual auctions must be monitored carefully, though, as they can be abused (e.g., one associate tried to auction off his cat). One company tries to avoid inappropriate items by only allowing senior management to enter items for the auction.

Technology, and to some extent social media, have increased the ways companies can engage their employees. Intranets or public internet sites aimed at employees allow for both interaction (commenting, voting, bidding) and more engaging media (video, photo walls). Technology advances allow companies and employees to easily create engaging content that is shared with the community. A video, for example, can be filmed right on a smartphone and uploaded to YouTube in minutes.

The companies in the focus group do not specifically target certain demographics with different engagement efforts, but noted that more athletic opportunities draw the more youthful segment. For example, younger employees tend to enjoy raising funds by participating in sports activities such as playing baseball or softball and volunteering at more “physical projects” like Habitat builds.

Metrics

Although all the companies recognized the need for and value of metrics, very few collected many measurements. The common ones were:

- Dollars contributed
- Donor rate
- Number of charities

Some conducted a survey after each campaign to get associate feedback and others included a question in the company's workforce satisfaction survey. None had found a way to measure impact.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

The group agreed on a number of elements that lead to successfully engaging employees, including:

- Giving people choice
- Consistent and informative communications
- Involving senior management
- Engaging the lines of business
- Adding a competitive component
- Sharing information among CSR activity teams such as what worked best or didn't work well
- Empowering employees
 - Providing associates with the tools they need to ensure a successful activity such as toolkits, resource manuals, templates, and on-line resources and whatever additional support they might need
- Recognizing employees
 - Having the CEO recognize employees is particularly powerful

CHALLENGES

Making a Matching Gifts program a high engagement tool is challenging. Matching Gifts programs, while a nice employee benefit, lack the elements listed above to be a great engagement tool. This is not surprising--Matching Gifts is a transactional engagement that involves one person donating dollars to a few charities of his or her choice. There is no "buzz" or connection with people. In contrast, a workplace giving campaign can include team efforts as well as company-wide and departmental competitions that greatly increase involvement and the "fun factor."

Another challenge is maintaining the fine line between recognition and privacy. Inviting generous givers to leadership events or letting them wear jeans for a month clearly delineates the givers, and the level at which they are giving. Some employees feel it is inappropriate to make such distinctions in the workplace.

Engaging new leadership is proving to be a challenge. Many of the senior leaders who believed in the United Way and who donated at the highest levels are retiring and their replacements are not nearly as generous. How to best engage the new generation of

leaders and have them set an example for the rest of the employees is a big problem for many.

A final challenge is increasing employee engagement by providing a financial incentive. Many companies do not have the funds available to provide a match or make competition-based donations. Money still talks and those that have limited funds said they are finding it increasingly difficult to engage employees.