Planning the Perfect Holiday Party

Your team has worked hard all year to achieve the results you expect. They've come in early, stayed late, and performed duties far beyond those listed in their job description. You've set the bar high. Everyone knows what's expected and they respect you as a leader. You've remained highly professional throughout the whole year.

Now that Thanksgiving has come to pass, you find yourself feeling a little sentimental about the holidays. Sure, there's still plenty of work to be done. But, you've taken a step back to really appreciate the effort everyone's put forth for the past 11 months. To show them your appreciation, it's time to plan a company holiday party. You don't want to do the typical catered appetizers and cheap wine. You really want to show everyone a good time. Planning a party that everyone's sure to enjoy isn't easy. If you're not sure where to start, check out our list of best tips below.

Budget

As you start planning your holiday party, all sorts of ideas are going to run through your head. Maybe it would be cool to have a DJ. Perhaps it's a fancy offsite venue with room for all trappings imaginable. While all these ideas sound like a blast, you have to keep your budget in mind. Yes, you want to throw a party that everyone will remember. However, the last thing you want to do is spend a chunk of quarterly profits on one night of fun.

Before you start putting down deposits and ordering the finest sushi in town, do some research and make sure you stay within your budget.

Decide on a Theme

Themes are fun. That's the bottom line. And the best part? Your options are limitless. A good place to start is taking a poll. Come up with a few ideas and circulate them through your organization. Maybe it's a casino night. What about a masquerade party? Who doesn't love a luau when it's frigid outside? Whatever theme you choose, make sure it's fun and won't raise any red flags with HR.

Book a Venue

Your employees spend the majority of their waking hours at the office. That's the last place they want to cut loose and have a little fun. If it's in your budget, book an offsite venue. Maybe it's the county fairgrounds. What about a bowling alley or roller rink? Whatever you choose, make sure it's a place people can get to that's within your budget.

Icebreakers

Your employees love the fact that you're throwing a holiday party. They get to bring their significant others and have a night of fun. That doesn't mean that they're going to be super comfortable mingling with everyone in the group. Chances are, Greg from the engineering team isn't going out of his way to say hello to Sam from accounts payable.

Holiday parties are a great time to foster cross-departmental integration. This is easy when you set up activities that encourage bonding. Set up teams for charades. What about trivia? Again, you can get as creative as you want. Just make sure they're fun and allow people to let their guard down.

White Elephant Gift Exchange

Who doesn't love an old-fashioned gift exchange? Well before your party commences, communicate that everyone should bring a gift for a white elephant gift exchange. It's a good idea to set a limit on how much money people should spend on their gift so it doesn't become a financial burden in any way. Usually $10 or $20 is affordable for everyone.

Entertainment

Entertainers are a hit at every party. Whether it's a hypnotist, magician or Santa, entertainment adds a fun dynamic to any party. Whatever entertainment you decide on, make sure to reserve it well in advance. The holiday season is where entertainers make their money and they book up quickly.

Transportation

The idea of having a holiday party is for everyone to have a good time. As they should. It's inevitable that some folks are going to have a little too much to drink. You shouldn't, but some people will. It's important that they get home safely. Spend the extra money to have transportation arranged for people that shouldn't drive. Hire a local cab company. Post an ad on Craigslist for Uber and Lyft drivers letting them know that there will be plenty of fares once the festivities end. The last thing you want is someone making the wrong decision and having to deal with the consequences.

Holiday parties are meant to be fun. They're a chance for everyone to come together, bond and share in some holiday cheer. Throwing a party that's memorable goes a long way in not only showing your appreciation for your employees but, boosting morale and carrying momentum through the end of the year. As long as you follow some of the advice above, stay within budget and make sure everyone is safe, your holiday shindig is sure to be a success.

How To Save Time and Get More Done at Work

Now more than ever it's easy to get distracted at work. Between emails, people coming and going, LinkedIn and Facebook alerts and of course the phone, it's little wonder that you struggle to accomplish everything you have set out for the day. Sure, you tell your spouse, friends and family that you have no choice but to go in early, stay late and work on weekends. But are you really making the best use of every minute of the day? How much time do you honestly spend in the mental twilight zone looking at your ex-colleagues LinkedIn profile or checking your fantasy football lineup? You might not want to admit it, but there are some small steps you can take to be more efficient with your time and get more done.

Mindfulness

It might be hard to see the correlation, but studies have proven that incorporating the practice of mindfulness into your daily routine helps you stay focused and be more productive. So, what exactly is mindfulness? It can be anything from breathing exercises to a meditation routine to keeping a gratitude journal. The good thing about practicing mindfulness is that it doesn't take a lot of time. Even just a few minutes practiced on a daily basis can do wonders.

Time Blocking

Maybe you're good about time blocking. You set aside time throughout the week to check and send email, engage new prospects and get necessary tasks done. But how often are you interrupted? Either by someone else or of your own volition? In short, you know the importance of time blocking, but it often becomes difficult to stick to. Someone walks in your door, the phone rings or you see the email with the big red ! that says it just can't wait. Which leads us too... Plan your time blocks with a purpose. What do you want to get accomplished during that time block? Having a goal for the time block will help you stay on track.

Setting Professional Boundaries

If you're in any kind of position of leadership or you manage a team of people, you have to set professional boundaries. Of course, you have to have an open door, make sure everyone has the proper training and resources to do their job and meet the objectives set by your superiors. But what about you? Don't you need time to do your job instead of everyone else's? This is why it's important to make clear to everyone involved that you too need time to get things done. Whether that means locking your door for an hour after lunch or not being available on Wednesdays after 11:00 am, you need to make it clear to everyone that while you're there to support them, you too need time to do your job.

Define Happy Hour on Your Terms

Who doesn't love a break for some interoffice levity and time to shoot the breeze? It's healthy, no one will question that. But when that two-minute check-in about Sunday's game turns into a 45-minute conversation about more than running backs, you're wasting time. The last thing you want to do is kill collegiality and morale, but you still need to get work done. If you want to be at the top of your game, define what and when happy hour is. It's important but, should be dictated on your terms.

Smart Phones Make You Dumb

It's a bit worrisome to think about how much smartphones dictate your every move. Yes, they are a convenience that allows you to work remotely and always be on call. But have you ever stopped to think about how they affect your productivity? That new Instagram like or Facebook post. Mindless notifications populate your screen constantly and at the end of the day don't matter. They only serve as a time suck to make you jealous. After 30 minutes in fantasy land, you look at the clock and it's 3:30 and you wonder where you left off.

If you want to be more productive and efficient with your time, set aside periods of time when your phone is off and tucked away in your drawer. That text will be there in an hour. In the meantime, do yourself and everyone else a favor and get some important work done.

Know When You're at Your Best

There are certain times of the day when you're more productive than others. For some it's before the sun comes up and for others it's late in the day. Knowing when you're the most productive is vital to your success. If you're someone that likes to sleep in until 7:30, read the paper and have a leisurely morning until 10:00 then more power to you. On the other hand, if you like waking up early and getting a pile of work done before most people wake up, all the better. The key is to find the time of day when you're most productive and structure everything else around that.

The workplace demands a lot from you. There's the pressure of managing those under you and meeting the expectations of those above. Balancing everything is a full-time job to say the least. There's a reason divorce rates are on the rise and mental and physical health are gaining traction in the national conversation. If you want to increase your productivity, reduce stress and get the most out of each and every day, try implementing some of the strategies above. You might just find yourself excelling in your job and getting home in time for dinner with those that really matter.

How-To Avoid Hiring Toxic Employees

If you're a regular reader of my articles, you know how much importance I place

on hiring the right people. As I've written about previously, hiring the wrong people can prove expensive, adversely affect your bottom line and the morale of everyone in the organization. While there are plenty of ways to find those diamonds in the rough, there are also ways to weed out potential toxic employees during the hiring or interview process as well.

Make Everyone Part of the Process

If you're considering bringing someone onto to your team, there is likely no better feedback than from your team itself. For this reason, it's a great idea to get everyone together for lunch or dinner or some other fun activity outside the workplace to see how the potential hire gets along with everyone. Conversely, this opportunity gives the job candidate a chance to see how they will fit in with the culture and values of your team. This simple effort will let both parties know right away if it's going to be a good fit for everyone or not, and gives you a chance to see the person's personality outside of the somewhat artificial interview atmosphere.

Ask Open-Ended Questions

Too many interviewers make the mistake of asking yes and no questions from a preset template during an interview and fail to dig deeper to find out who they are really talking to. While there is a time and place for rudimentary questions, it's also important to ask hypothetical questions like "Give me an example of how you handled (fill in the blank) situation in the past." or "What would you do if your were faced with (fill in the blank) in the future?" While most good interviewees will be able to quickly cite one example when faced with these types of questions, they may have a more difficult time providing additional anecdotes. The best ones should be able to provide multiple examples and will give you a better idea of their depth of knowledge of the topic.

If you feel like you still need more insight, consider asking some of the following questions:

- What would you most like to improve about yourself?
- What do you think your former supervisor would say about you, positive and negative?

- What do you notice is different about yourself when you're under too much stress?
- What types of people do you work best with? How about those that you find difficult?
- Describe in detail a couple of instances where you failed in the past and how you dealt with it.

Pay Close Attention to Behaviors

As you ask the questions above, you should also take into consideration behaviors like punctuality and preparedness.

- Did the candidate show up on time for the interview with their affairs in order?
- Do they readily blame others, or do they seem to accept responsibility when things don't go as planned?
- Do they speak highly of former colleagues and employers? Or do they speak poorly of them and throw them under the bus?
- While answers to questions are important to take note of, so is the way someone behaves during an interview.

Ask Specific Questions when Checking References

Whether it's due to lack of time or the feeling that it's not important, most interviewers don't thoroughly vet a candidate through their references. Instead of calling references when time permits and having only a brief conversation, make the effort to schedule a few minutes when you can both talk about the potential hire in some depth.

When you get the time to chat with someone's reference, it's important to have some specific questions in mind to keep the conversation on track.

Some examples might include:

- Would you rehire this person? Why or why not?
- Did the person demonstrate emotional intelligence? Were they able to read people properly and react accordingly?
- Describe the duties of the position the person is interviewing for and ask their reference, "Do you feel (applicant's name) would be a good fit for this role and why?"
- Were they a team player or did they prefer to keep to themselves and worry only about their own work?
- How did they handle authority and constructive criticism?
- Is there anything else you should know about the candidate that hasn't been discussed?
- As you're processing the answers the reference is giving you, take note of more than just their words as you would when interviewing the candidate. Did the reference's tone of voice convey admiration for the candidate? Or did they speak quickly and seem nervous about providing honest answers?

These subtle clues can give you valuable insight into who the candidate is as well.

Be Respectful

It's easy to get so wrapped up in learning about someone else and their experiences that you forget to notice your own demeanor. How's your tone of voice? Are you actively listening and making eye contact? Or is your head buried in your notepad? If you act professionally and treat each candidate you interview with respect, you will likely receive the same in return.

Regardless of whether your hiring someone for C-suite position or a janitor, taking adequate time to ask the right questions and really get to know them can make all the difference. While making the occasional bad hire is something that every manager is going to do at some point, knowing how to weed out potentially toxic candidates goes a long way in saving money, maximizing productivity and keeping company morale high. If you put into practice even a few of the ideas discussed above, you'll be on your way to hiring only the best people for your

organization.

If you are hiring someone in the [life science industries in the Bay Area](#), I can help find a great employee that fits the position. Contact me, Jeff King, at jking@rqfocus.com or (541) 639-3501.

How to Deal with Difficult Employees

If you're in a position where you manage an entire department or even just a small team you've certainly had to deal with a bad egg or two. Whether the individual wasn't a good fit with the company culture, chronically showed up late or had problems with authority, you had to deal with them somehow. Though it's never a fun experience, it's a reality that every manager is going to have to deal with at some point.

Sadly, many managers let these people hold them captive because they are afraid to take action of any kind to either correct a behavior or dismiss the employee if that is what is necessary. This hesitation can have negative consequences for both you and the people you manage. In order to keep that from happening we've laid out the best ways to deal with difficult employees below.

Effective Feedback

Quality feedback, even if it is critical, is essential for handling employees that aren't performing up to standard. Where most managers spend weeks, months and even years complaining about employees and nothing else, good managers are willing to have difficult conversations and provide honest feedback if there are issues that need to be addressed.

How you go about providing this feedback is what makes all the difference though. Screaming, yelling and personal attacks only serve to add fuel to the fire and usually put the subject employee on the defensive. If you find yourself in a position where you're left with no choice but to have a difficult conversation with an employee, make sure you do so in a way that doesn't put them on the defensive and gives specific information on how they can improve.

Document Everything

If you're faced with having to reprimand an employee or even let them go, you're going to need documentation of behavior that provides grounds for disciplinary action. In addition to writing down detailed accounts of incidents that happened, you'll need specific dates, times and names of people that were witness to the behavior as well. While you might feel like you're being too negative about an employee by writing everything down, you have to realize it's the prudent thing to do.

Listen

If you're frustrated with someone you manage it's easy to lose sight of what's really going on. You might find yourself blinded by irritation, the seemingly hopeless state of the situation and the thoughts you already have in your head about the person.

When the time comes to sit down with this employee it's vitally important to be in a space where you're able to see things through their eyes. The reality is that your only chance of finding a solution is having a clear understanding of situation in its totality; that includes the perspective of the employee.

When you actively listen to someone, you'll often be surprised about what you can learn. Maybe the employee is having problems outside the office and you can recommend a place to go get help. Maybe you were unaware of some legitimate concerns they have that need to be addressed. Perhaps all this employee needed was just a chance to be heard and voice their opinion.

Be Clear and Consistent

You should create a plan of action for the employee to correct their issues and also ask for their input on what they are willing to do to fix it. This will get better cooperation from the employee if they have a say in the plan. When you set expectations make sure they are ones you can stick to as well. If you expect someone to perform a certain task by a certain time you have to hold them to it. If you hold employees to expectations sometimes and other times you let things slide, you send mixed signals and the results can be devastating for your team or organization.

Don't Be Afraid to Set Consequences

If you've worked through the proper channels of trying to be proactive and nothing seems to have changed, it might be time to make some consequences known. The conversation might be something like the following.

Manager: "We identified (issue) a while back and but we haven't seen much improvement. I still believe you can turn this around, but we are at a point that if things aren't better by (specific date) than we won't have a choice but to (write you up, cut your hours, let you go, etc.)."

When people are faced with tangible consequences that could affect them negatively it's often the motivation they need to change. If not, as a manager you can rest assured you gave this person a fair chance.

Stay Professional

When you're frustrated with an employee it's human nature to think negatively of them. You're going to be tempted to gossip or vent to your colleagues but that's the worst thing you can do. When you disrespect people behind their back you

foster an environment of distrust and pollute other peoples' perception of the troubling employee. Simply put, avoid this type of behavior at all costs.

Be Courageous

As a manager, you've assumed the responsibility of making tough decisions. There's nothing fun about having to fire someone but sometimes you're left with no other option. When you get to this point, don't put it off, don't make someone else do it and make sure you do it as professionally you can. Even though you're sure to feel bad, you have to remember you're doing the right thing and your team or organization will be better off.

No one is going to deny that dealing with difficult employees isn't any fun. As a manager though, this is part of your job. How you handle these tough situations is what makes all the difference. If you do nothing and continue let problems persist, you'll be causing yourself undue stress and you risk sabotaging your teams' morale and productivity too. You may even lose your best employees if the problem is allowed to persist. Instead, if you employ some of the strategies listed above, you'll set yourself up to handle these situations proactively and professionally in a way that is best for everyone involved.

How Transparent Should You Be With Your Employees?

At some point in your career you've probably worked for a boss that always made you feel like you're constantly walking on egg shells. You never knew where you stood with this person. They rarely provided feedback, instruction or guidance on how to do your job or what they expected of you. You always were left wondering if the work you were doing was exceptional or didn't make the grade. The closed-door meetings you were left out of caused you undue stress and no matter how hard you tried you never received the praise you thought you deserved. At work the word used to describe the culture was fear.

Having learned from your own past experiences, you make it a point to be transparent with your employees. Such begs the question though, how transparent is too transparent?

Being Transparent Has Its Benefits

There is no denying that being transparent has its benefits. Perhaps the most obvious positive is that being transparent builds trust. By being transparent as a team lead or manager, you make clear what the expectations are for everyone in the organization. When transparency is present at the top, roles are clearly defined and people are free to do their jobs without having to wonder if they are meeting expectations.

Another benefit of being transparent is that it makes employees feel valued because they are more likely to be involved in the decision-making process. When employees feel like the job they do is important and they are valued as people, you're organization will experience far less turnover and everyone will be much better positioned to maximize productivity and efficiency.

Avoiding Information Overload

While it's beneficial for everyone when transparency exists, the fact remains that employees don't need to know absolutely everything to do their jobs. For junior employees who aren't charged with the responsibility of a C-suite executive, there's no need to give them information they don't need. In fact, overloading people with unnecessary information can create a sense of anxiousness and stress. When this happens, people have a hard time focusing and their productivity suffers as a result.

Should You Make Salaries Public Information?

It is becoming more and more a trend for companies to make public the salaries of all employees. While this is considered risky business by some, the practice has some potential benefits. Those that employ it believe it demonstrates openness and equality. The policy takes many of the unknowns out of the hiring process, makes expectations clear amongst team members and leaves plenty of room for people to grow within their respective roles.

The Importance of Maintaining an Open-Door Policy

There's no worse feeling for someone than wondering if they fit into an organization. When employees feel that they can comfortably come to you and ask even difficult questions, trust is created and you make it clear to everyone that open lines of communication exist. By keeping an open-door policy you foster a culture of inclusion and openness that can only be a benefit.

Working as a Team

When transparency exists within an organization, space is created for individuals to come together, share ideas, openly communicate and work as a team toward a shared goal. If everyone is on the same page and can get behind the vision and mission set forth by people in positions of leadership, the sky is the limit for how successful an organization can become.

Creating Transparency

If your company is in its infancy or you simply feel greater transparency is needed, it's a process that has to start from the top and be implemented at every level clear to the bottom and back up again. In order for it to work, transparency is something that has to be embraced by everyone in the entire company. Information and expectations need to be clearly stated in order for habits to change. If more open communication is what you're after, you may have to make

an investment in new technology or infrastructure that makes the sharing of information easier.

You'd be hard pressed to find someone in business that says transparency is a bad thing. The truth is no one likes to feel like they are walking on egg shells, not valued enough to be included in the decision-making process or left wondering if they are meeting expectations. Transparency has many positive characteristics that can help organizations grow and become more cohesive. It's important to make sure you are transparent in the right ways however. The last thing you want to do is give people so much information that they become crippled. If implemented in ways that create a cultural of inclusion, open lines of communication and trust, your organization will be in a position to flourish.

Interested in learning more about a productive workplace? Contact Jeff King with RQ Focus. He is a Regulatory and Quality Recruiter in the Bay Area.

How to Increase Your Team's Productivity

Leading a team of people in the workplace is a monumental responsibility. Not only are you charged with maximizing productivity and efficiency, but it's your job to keep morale high, have an open door and make sure expectations are clearly communicated. If you're in a position of leadership you're sure to encounter difficult situations that hamper the productivity of your team. How you handle these challenges can be the deciding factor in whether your team is successful or

not. Below we discuss our best strategies for managing your team effectively and making sure productivity is maximized.

Communication is Essential

At some point in your career, you've probably had a manager that constantly made you feel like you were walking on egg shells. You never knew whether you were exceeding expectations or failing miserably. Simply put, this individual didn't communicate and trying to do so with them was difficult at best.

If you're team is going to succeed, it's paramount that you not only clearly communicate with each member of your team, but make clear the expectations of up-front professional communication to everyone involved. If communication happens through appropriate channels in a safe space, job responsibilities are clearly defined and people feel empowered to ask questions or seek help, cohesiveness can thrive.

Know Strengths and Weaknesses

Whether you want to admit it or not, as a leader you have strengths and weaknesses. While being aware of your own skills and shortcomings is essential, knowing those of each team member is vital as well.

Maybe someone on your team is great with analyzing raw data and numbers. You probably don't want to employ this individual to strategize a creative presentation. Leave that to the outgoing creative person that thinks outside the box.

When you create an environment that allows everyone to stay in their lane and utilize their innate abilities, you foster a freedom that allows everyone to feed off of each other and be excited about the work they are doing.

Environment is Key

It has been widely documented that the physical environment in which people work greatly affects how they feel. Does your team function best in an environment where everyone has their own office and a door they can close or is a

shared space that welcomes creativity and sharing of ideas better? Whatever your team's work environment is, it should reflect the culture of the organization and allow people to comfortably go about their tasks in the most efficient manner possible.

While the physical environment in which people work is key, having the necessary infrastructure in place is equally important. Making sure that your internet connection is solid, that IT help is readily available and that all systems are functioning properly and up to date allows team members to do their job with limited interruptions.

Incentives

There is nothing more motivating than incentives in the workplace. While monetary bonuses and rewards are always popular, there are plenty of other ways to motivate your team with minimal cost. If a deadline is on the horizon or a sales goal needs to be met, incentivizing your team with things like paid time off, a catered lunch or skipping out of the office early on a Friday for happy hour can do wonders. Frequent rewards for a job well done keep everyone's spirits high, are motivating, and make people feel like they are working toward something greater than themselves.

Stay Out of the Way

One of the struggles for almost every leader is striking a balance between managing and giving people the freedom to do their job. While it's important that you make sure each person on your team is performing as expected, creating the space for individuals to fully utilize their skills is important as well. When you build trust within your team and allow individuals the autonomy to do their best work, they do so with tremendous pride and your team can flourish as a result. This is also a key to keeping your best performers from looking for challenges elsewhere.

Mutual Feedback

It's human nature to want to know how you're performing. Consistent feedback is crucial so that everyone is on the same page and expectations are met.

Scheduling frequent reviews with each team member is a must.

During these reviews, it's important that the conversation be an open discussion about performance and anything that might be missing. This can go both ways however. As the manager of a team you need to have a conversation about a team members' performance, but taking it a step further and asking for feedback about the job you're doing as a leader as well can provide important insight. Ask them what you can do to help them be more effective in their job. You may learn about issues you hadn't even thought of. When professional back-and-forth dialogue exists that is helpful for all parties involved, your team only stands to benefit.

It's no mystery that leaders are needed in every organization. Without leaders to provide direction, motivation and oversight, most companies would perish. Some leaders are better than others though. If you find yourself in a position of managing a team or department, utilizing some of the tactics above can mean the world for your teams' productivity and set you apart as someone who is both respected and effective.

Do you want to learn more? Contact me, Jeff King, owner of RQ Focus. I help business owners match with the right employee for their job opening in the life science industries.

Should You Take that Promotion?

From the moment you finish your formal education, it's ingrained in your mind that you should always be looking to move up in whatever company you go to

work for. The idea that if you show up early, stay late and consistently go the extra mile to set yourself apart is the key to getting promoted is what we are taught to believe. While getting promoted is usually equated with higher pay, more responsibility and a clear sign that your hard work has finally been noticed, there are a host of factors to consider before you sign on the dotted line.

Are you 100% ready to take the promotion? The obvious answer for most people is "absolutely". Even though getting the news that you're being promoted is sure to bring about feelings of elation in the immediacy, it's important to look at the opportunity from every angle as accepting could be life-changing. Below are some questions to consider with a clear head before you take the plunge.

Do You Have the Necessary Experience?

Maybe you've been in your current role for a while and have proven time and again that you have what it takes to do your job. With your pending promotion however, do you have the skills and experience that will be required to meet the demands of the new post? For example, maybe you've been working in a role that doesn't require management skills and now you'll be charged with overseeing an entire team or department. If you plan on "figuring it out as you go," you may want to seriously consider the impact taking the promotion might have on you, the organization and your team.

Will You Receive the Necessary Training and Support?

The truth is that not everyone who gives a promotion does so with consideration for what life will be like for the person in the new role. More often than you might think, managers don't have the clearest idea about what it takes to do the job effectively on a daily basis. This can result in a lack of necessary training and support which can not only make your life more stressful, but have devastating effects for the morale and productivity of the organization. So, before you dive in head first, make certain that you'll have access to the training, resources and support you need.

Is the Promotion Aligned with Your Goals?

You have probably given some serious thought to the things you want to accomplish both professionally and personally. Maybe you want to become an influential leader but need more time to sharpen your skills or want to spend more time with your young family but the demands of the new job will have you spending your weekends at the office. While prestige and more money are alluring, your best bet is to carefully consider the implications the promotion will have on life as you know it before you make a decision.

Does the Promotion Fit with Your Strengths and Passions?

Taking inventory of what you are good at and truly enjoy is a crucial step in deciding whether or not to take a promotion. Maybe you love working one-on-one with customers and colleagues and enjoy seeing the tangible difference you make, but your new job all but eliminates the opportunity for you to utilize your skills in a way you enjoy. What if you'll be chained to a desk away from the day-to-day or have to travel more than you'd like? Once again, it's easy to get excited about the benefits the job could bring in the short-term, but failing to realize the effects it might have on your core values in the long-term is a mistake you don't want to make.

Have You Asked the Right Questions?

Just because you're up for promotion doesn't mean it's always your best option. Before you take on added responsibility, make sure you do some thorough research and ask the right questions. Was the previous person in the role fired? Is your promotion part of a reorganization? Does the new position see excessive turnover? What do your trusted colleagues, family and friends think about the opportunity? If you take the time to examine all the different dynamics of why you're being promoted, you might find some red flags that cause you to think twice.

Getting promoted is exciting, there's no doubt about it. It's a sign that your hard work has paid off and managers feel like you have the skills to take on more

responsibility. Not to mention you're going to be compensated accordingly. While it all seems wonderful in the short-term, it's essential that you consider every implication taking a new job will have before you make a commitment. If you take the time to look at the entire picture as objectively as possible, you'll be in a better place to make a decision that is best for you and everyone involved.

If you do decide the promotion is not right for you, let your manager know you really appreciate being offered the new position and explain what you like about the opportunity, and what your concerns are. This discussion will let your manager know you've seriously considered the opportunity and may help determine a training plan moving forward.

The Do's and Don'ts of E-mail Etiquette

If you're like most people, email plays a major in your life. Maybe it's the first thing you look at when you wake up in the morning and the last thing you check before you go to bed. While personal emails between you and your buddies might not require much decorum, such is not the case when communicating electronically with colleagues, clients or anyone work-related. Even though you may not like it, how and when you communicate via email for professional purposes can have a tremendous and lasting effect on your reputation. To ensure you send emails that are not only professional, but set you apart from your colleagues, we've compiled our best list of Do's and Don'ts below.

Introduction

If you're emailing someone for the first time, it's imperative to get your introduction right as it can make or break the entire conversation. Using a proper salutation such as "Good Morning" or even "Hello" is better than "Hey" or "Hi". From here, get right to the point of who you are and why you're reaching out. The tone of introductory emails should always be upbeat and courteous while remaining highly professional.

Subject Line

You probably receive dozens of emails every day. Chances are you probably skip over the ones that aren't flagged as important or whose subject lines don't catch your eye. The same goes for emails you send as well. Using subject lines like "FYI," "Circling Back," and "Hi" ensures that your emails won't be read either. Your subject line should be concise and effectively communicate what your email is about. Subject lines like "Board Meeting Minutes" and "Time Off Request" directly communicate to the recipient what your message is about and are more likely to be read.

Speaking of Concise

Professional emails aren't for sharing your thoughts and feelings in most cases. Instead, they are intended to communicate necessary information in an orderly, easy-to-read fashion. If you have several items to discuss in your note, use headings, short sentences and bullet points. Avoid using too many adjectives and excessive flowery language. Remember, your message is one of many that is going to be read so get to the point.

Don't Hit Reply-All

Sometimes you'll get emails from C-Suite Executives or Administrative Assistants addressed to 10 or people asking for your availability to volunteer for a community event or something similar. When responding, make sure you reply ONLY to the original sender. The entire thread doesn't need to know that you're committed to your kids' soccer game and can't make it.

Why Are You Forwarding This to Me?

The forward option in email is a great way to share ideas and gather input quickly. Whether it's something you're passing along to another department, HR or a colleague, take the time to write a sentence or two explaining the reason you're forwarding the message. Failing to take this simple step will leave your recipient either clueless or guessing at the intent of your forward.

The Power of One

As we've discussed, email is a form of communication that is meant to exchange information quickly and efficiently. While being concise is paramount, limiting the subjects you cover to one per message avoids confusion and makes organization easier for everyone involved. If you find yourself sending a message with multiple topics, make them brief and list them out in bullet point fashion.

Emojis

When you're sending a professional e-mail, you're not telling your boo how much you miss them. At all costs, avoid using emojis. Though you might think you're being funny or playful, all you're really doing is causing people to question your competency.

Why are You Sending Me This?

Make sure that the intended recipients are in the right fields before you hit send. There are plenty of stories of people that sent an email to the wrong person and the consequences can be devastating. Even if you're sure your message is bullet-proof, take the necessary time to give it a second look.

Grammar Police

While you might not care if someone uses "u" instead "you," others might. And even if they don't, you're always better off being safe than sorry on this one. Taking the time to use the right "there" or "their," commas and semicolons goes a long way in avoiding confusion and conveys intelligence to your reader. Though

the occasional grammar mistake is forgivable, repeated or blatant offenses can damage your credibility.

All Caps

Writing in ALL CAPS is something you should never do in an email. To your reader, it seems like you're shouting. Can you imagine reading a line in an email that says "NEVER BE LATE AGAIN"? Using all caps communicates unrest and is seen as confrontational. If you need to make a point, do it professionally and avoid language that incites anger or fear.

Read Receipts

When you send important emails, you want to make sure they are read. Utilizing the read receipt option lets you know that your message has not only been seen, but read as well. This eliminates any potential breakdown in communication.

Before You Hit Send...

Once you hit send whatever you've typed is gone forever. There are no do-overs. Before you hit send, take the time to thoroughly read what you've written to make sure that you are communicating the right message. Did you answer all the questions the original sender asked you? Were your directions clear?

Whether you hate e-mail or love it, it's not going away anytime soon. Being unprofessional or lazy in your electronic communication can prove costly. On the other hand, taking time to make sure your messages are professionally written, intended for the right recipient and communicate necessary information in a concise manner will set you apart from those that fail to make the effort.

How-To Delegate Effectively at Work

Many business leaders hesitate when delegating tasks. After all, they can get the job done right, the first time (or so they think). However, delegating can bring in new valuable perspectives and an increased productivity for the company.

Delegation in the workplace today is largely lacking and the result is insufficient communication and a general absence of positive morale. If you find yourself in a position of leadership or management, delegating work to others not only reduces your workload, but does wonders for your colleagues and the company as well.

The Foundation

If you're going to effectively delegate work and responsibilities to others, there are some key dynamics that must be present in an organization to begin with. If any of the following are absent, effective delegation doesn't stand a chance.

Communication

Every employee on a team or in an organization must clearly understand what is expected and what the objectives are. It rests on your shoulders to make sure that core values, policies and expectations are clearly understood by everyone involved.

Trust

If you don't fully trust your co-workers or they don't trust you, you're in for an uphill battle. While trust takes time to build, it's hard to win back once it's broken. In order to achieve maximum productivity while maintaining high morale, trust is a must.

Honesty and Respect

The relationships between everyone involved must be built on honesty and respect. We all are prone to mistakes occasionally, but if those mistakes are dealt with in an honest and respectful manner, everybody wins. You're in trouble though if there is deceit or lack of respect.

If you feel your work environment is healthy for everyone involved, you're in a fortunate spot where delegating can really do wonders. Now it's up to you to get to work. Below are some tangible benefits that proper delegation brings to all parties.

The Opportunity to Train and Grow

As a leader, it's your job to identify opportunities for everyone on your team to learn and become better. If you're actively seeking out these opportunities there will be tasks and responsibilities that you can delegate to others. With the right encouragement and training along the way, most employees will jump at the opportunity to make a greater contribution. This can also help to retain your employees since they are feeling challenged.

Weaknesses Become Strengths and Strengths Become Stronger

You're probably already doing a great job of identifying the strengths of your employees. And maybe you've already given them added responsibilities that align with those strengths. Some of the greatest opportunities for growth though, come from identifying weaknesses and giving an individual added responsibility where they need growth. This might seem terrifying to both you and the employee

at first, but with the proper guidance and feedback along the way, the employee and your organization can experience tremendous growth and empowerment.

Delegate Toward a Goal

Delegating the occasional task here and there is great. For a short time, you feel relieved and the person you delegated to feels appreciated. But if you take this a step further and align delegated tasks with a greater goal or objective, everyone can be committed to the process. When everyone works together on a project from its infancy to the final product, the sense of accomplishment is infectious. If this process of delegation becomes a regular occurrence, your employees are sure to remain hungry and keep coming back for more.

Never Lose Your Identity

Successful companies all have core values that govern everything they do. Delegating is the perfect time to not only reinforce core values, but to demonstrate how each and every task at hand reflects and promotes what you're about. When everyone can see your "WHY" in the work they do, it reinforces that they are part of something bigger than themselves.

Cross-Delegation

Different departments within organizations see things differently. The classic case is the rift between sales and production where there is often disconnect and misunderstanding. A great way to bridge the gap between any subsets in a team or company is to delegate tasks that require collaboration. While there is sure to be some angst, it's up to everyone to find a way to get the job done. Collaboration provides broad insights that garner respect and understanding between departments that don't necessarily work alongside each other on a daily basis.

Always Celebrate Success

When an important project is finished and meets or exceeds goals, is profitable, aligns people around shared values and creates momentum, it deserves to be recognized and celebrated. Whether it's a simple catered lunch on the company

dime or a trip to a sunny destination, recognizing the hard work and success of the people that made it all happen is essential and sets you up for continued success in the future.

If you are a business leader and find yourself overwhelmed, it might be worth taking a step back and evaluating the foundation of communication, trust, honesty and respect. It very well could be that there are some fundamental issues that can be resolved with collective input and discussion. If all the dynamics are in sync, you're in a great spot to spread responsibility, help each individual grow and realize success that you never thought was attainable. It's at this point that the hard work becomes fun for everyone.

How-To Manage Your Employee's Time Off

If you're like most hard-working Americans, chances are you laugh at the idea of working 40 hours a week. The reality is that you probably are the first one to the office in the morning and the last to leave in the evening. You probably even show up on the occasional Saturday morning or Sunday evening because you have no other choice. "Time off" is probably laughable to you but it's vitally important. Not just for you, but your employees as well.

Your company is only as good as the people on the ground and in the trenches.

Your expectations are high and your employees take pride in the job they do for their own sake and that of the company. You probably have great relationships with most of them and your culture is one of teamwork and inclusion focused on a greater goal. Even if all this holds true, the number one complaint from employees across the board is not having appropriate time off to recharge so they are able to maximize productivity and efficiency while at work. Such begs the question, how do you balance maximizing productivity while making sure your employees can be at their best each and every day they come to work?

Be Upfront About Paid Time Off Policies

In the modern workplace, employees see paid time off and benefits just as important as a competitive salary. If your competitors offer more attractive PTO perks, you'll struggle to hire and retain qualified people. It's paramount to make sure all employees know and understand PTO policies immediately during the hiring process. These policies should be clearly stated in the employee handbook and readily available for access upon request.

Forecast and Plan Ahead

If you've been in business for any length of time, you likely have a good idea of when your busy and slow times are. This should directly affect how you manage PTO requests. If your busy time is the winter holiday season and all hands on deck are needed, your PTO policies and labor budgets should reflect that trend. Effectively writing, communicating and implementing these policies up front lets employees plan their time off in a manner that is best for them and also aligns with company needs and objectives.

Set Deadlines for PTO Requests and Approval

While time off is essential for every employee's well-being, it's important that they communicate their requests well in advance so managers can aptly plan for their absence. Communicating these deadlines to all employees at once creates transparency and ensures fairness.

If many PTO requests are made at one time, it's imperative to have a policy in place for the priority in which those requests are processed. Whether your policy is first-come-first serve, based on seniority or some other metric, it needs to be made clear to all employees so that everything is black and white.

Incentivize Employees During Peak Times

It's widely known that employees are tremendously more motivated by incentives than they are reprimand. Budgeting and forecasting for incentives like holiday pay and bonuses is a great way to offer a win-win for your employees without sacrificing productivity. For those that want to take time off, the deadlines and policies have been clearly laid out. For those that are motivated to make extra pay, times like these are a great opportunity to cash in. The key once again is effective planning, policy setting and communication.

Make Your Schedule Rotational

I'll say it again, transparency and communication are your best friends. Not everyone works Monday through Friday 9:00-5:00 on your team or in your organization. No one wants to be "on call" on a Friday night when they could be at happy hour or at their child's soccer game. This time is fleeting and spreading that responsibility equally and fairly amongst your employees ensures that everyone is on a level playing field.

Be Flexible

Any reasonable employer makes time for deaths in the family or illness. That only goes so far however. Circumstances come up in your life. It's unrealistic to expect every single one of your employees to stick to a regimented rotational schedule without any room for variance. Allowing employees to reasonably switch days or shifts goes a long way in building morale within your team knowing that you've got their back and the favor will be returned someday.

It's important that these schedule requests be approved by a superior however. Having an open and balanced conversation with your employees about last minute schedule requests is essential for the health and productivity of the entire organization.

Everyone in the modern-day workforce wants to feel valued for the job they do and compensated accordingly. While higher wages are great, managing time off in a favorable, but efficient manner shows those that work for you that you care on a human level. With proper planning, policy setting and communication, accommodating PTO requests can make everyone of your employees feel valued and empowered. Good news for everyone involved.