

How to Keep Staff Motivated over Christmas

With the Christmas period almost upon us, many employees will be thinking of winding down. In fact, Office for National Statistics (ONS) research has shown that last year (2015), productivity reduced during the last quarter.

But for SMEs with tight budgets and a compact workforce, finding inexpensive ways to maintain employee enthusiasm and output is key in the run up to the holidays.

Here, the small business experts at AXA PPP healthcare reveal the top seven ways employers can help staff stay motivated and engaged right up to the big day:

- **Say thanks** – Saying thank you is important, but for some SMEs it can be tricky to know what how.

Research has found that 57% of employees would rather a bonus than a Christmas party while on the other hand, 43% think negligible-cost rewards are important at Christmas. In addition, by not putting on a Christmas event, SMEs risk damaging staff morale. With so many options, it's important to involve your team in the decision making around celebrating the year gone by, so why not put it to vote or alternatively give a budget to each team so they can spend how they best see fit.

- **Look after their health** – People are more prone to falling ill during winter months. Encourage staff to keep active and take part in sporting activities to benefit their health and reduce stress levels. When employees do fall sick, be mindful not to force them back into work until they are fully recovered. According to a survey by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), organisations that noticed an increase in presenteeism are nearly twice as likely to report an increase in stress-related absence.
- **Offer flexible working where possible**- This is perhaps the most cost effective solution to motivate staff. A survey by YouGov found that 70% of office workers said that it is important for businesses to allow them to work remotely. Do your staff have end of year targets to hit? Consider allowing them to focus at home, away from the noise and distractions of the office.
- **Be family friendly** – Many SMEs are family run, but if you're one that's not, make sure you're family friendly. Avoid resentment by letting employees attend any special family moments that come with the season. Employees will appreciate that you care about their personal lives and be less likely to let their productivity drop or 'pull a sickie'. Are their children due to be in a school play? Think about the benefits to the business of letting them to leave early to capture the moment.
- **Focus on goals** – More than two thirds (69%) of employees' workloads increase in the run up to Christmas. Make sure you and your workforce prioritise by delivering the time-sensitive tasks that really count so everyone, including you, can relax and spend time with their loved ones over Christmas and start the New Year re-energised.
- **Lead by example** – Whilst it's vital for SMEs not to totally power down during the whole month of December, it's important for bosses to set an example and strike a work-life balance. If your SME is

shutting down over Christmas, make sure you stay off emails and remember that this is a time for everyone to relax – including you.

- **Measure what matters** – Finally, remember to ask for feedback from your employees on the year. Feedback is important to understanding your employees and what makes them tick. You could try an anonymous survey but informal 1-2-1 chats also work well.