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## Staff Matters: Holiday Celebrations that Engage and Appreciate Employees

Jodi Schafer SPHR, SHRM-SCP  
HRM Services, jodischafer@hrmservices.biz

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# Holiday Celebrations that Engage and Appreciate Employees



By Jodi Schafer, SPHR, SHRM-SCP  
HRM Services

**Q**uestion: I am at a loss for how to celebrate the end-of-the-year holidays with my staff. It seems like the things I have tried in the past have fallen

flat. I want to show them how much we appreciate them, but also do something that helps them feel more connected with each other and our practice. I'm also not sure of everyone's religious practices and I have a sense that not everyone celebrates Christian holidays. What suggestions do you have?

**Answer:** As the calendar winds down, taking time in November or December to pause and celebrate together is important for morale. Making a dedicated effort to gather informally helps build relationships, with the goal of increasing trust and respect amongst the team. As team leaders you can also take this opportunity to show appreciation for the work everyone has done during the year. These moments, if done well over time, have a huge impact on staff satisfaction and retention.

Here are a few ideas to break you out of your holiday rut. If your office has a sweet tooth, consider swapping out the break room smorgasbord for a themed recipe exchange, where every team member shares the recipe and a related personal memory. They can then choose to bake one of the items and eat some of the goodies together during an office happy hour. The real fun with this idea is learning more about each employee through the stories they tell.

If camaraderie is the goal, consider group activities that can be done safely and that everyone can participate in. If your team likes the great outdoors, perhaps you could host a bonfire with a hot chocolate bar, or go sledding as a group (assuming there is snow, and your staff is adventurous). If this season is a chance for your office to give back, you can organize a collection for families in need and close the office for a few hours while you wrap the presents and enjoy a catered-in meal. If you like this idea, but don't want to ask your employees to buy

gifts for others, you could instead use the time to write holiday cards for soldiers serving overseas.

I don't know about you, but I'm not the most creative person. This means I'm likely not the best person to come up with creative party ideas. If this is you, or even if you don't have time to plan the details, it's smart to include staff in the planning of the event. Often you have some staff who have a real skill for planning these types of gatherings and who might also have great ideas for games, activities, etc. One word of caution though — make sure to provide some initial guidance regarding your goals for the gathering. If you don't provide some parameters, staff may come up with ideas that are too expensive, don't meet your goals for building camaraderie, or may even be inappropriate. So, as a first step, identify a couple of staff to help with planning. Meet with them to share your goals, the budget, and any other parameters they need to be aware of. Ask them to come up with a few ideas to bring back to you for approval. That way, you can still have some control, but you are also using their creativity.

No matter what activities you choose for celebration, you are right to remember that not all employees recognize the same religious holidays. Unless you are a religious-based organization, you should be cautious about recognizing one religious holiday over another. If your practice is already engaged in diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts, this may be an opportunity to allow time for employees to share their holiday traditions. Sharing should not be required, but instead open to anyone interested in sharing.

While it may seem a bit overwhelming, don't skip the time to gather and celebrate the end of the year. It's these types of gatherings, with laughter and fun, that help employees remember why they enjoy working for your practice. They provide momentum for the work as you move into the new year. ●

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*Jodi Schafer's newly-revised Most-Asked Human Resources Questions is now available at [store.michigandental.org](http://store.michigandental.org) for free download.*