Employee Benefits

Don't Let Gimmicky Perks Overwhelm Your Employer Brand

There's nothing wrong with fun employee perks like Ping-Pong tables, but don't let them drown out your true employer value to employees, HR professionals say.

"Your total rewards philosophy should be aligned on how to attract and retain the employees you want," Emily Holland Hull told Bloomberg BNA Jan. 12. Hull is senior director of talent and culture at Optoro, a Washington-based company that specializes in returned and excess inventory from online retailers.

"To create a meaningful culture and benefits package, avoid jumping on the bandwagon to offer the newest and most unique perks, and instead, think about which benefits are the most relevant to your company's core mission, values, and competencies," Susan Vitale, chief marketing officer for iCIMS told Bloomberg BNA in a Jan. 12 e-mail. That starts with who you hire, she said: "Your company's culture should be showcased on your career site, LinkedIn profile and social media pages to attract new employees who share the same values." iCIMS is a talent acquisition software provider based in Matawan, N.J.

"Employers should also consider including their company culture in all onboarding materials for new employees to help drive retention," Vitale said. "Employers can even consider rewarding and celebrating employees who adopt and demonstrate certain values or competencies as an added perk."

"At Optoro, our drivers of retention are culture, empowerment and development, and we want to make sure all the perks we offer tie back to these drivers," Hull said. Although the company does offer employees innovative perks such as a Ping-Pong table, video games, board games, office yoga classes, a meditation room and gyms, "it's intentional because we want our employees to be well and balanced."

The success of the company in linking such benefits to core values is demonstrated by the fact that Optoro was able to fill 19 of 48 open positions over the past year internally, she said.

Another aspect of good perk design is being aware of what stage of life your employees are in, Vitale said.

"For example, if you have a lot of millennials in your company, they may be more interested in tuition reimbursement options, more maternity/paternity leave and flexible work schedules as they plan to have children, but if you have a more experienced employee base, you may want to invest in your retirement plan options, 401(k) contributions and health insurance."

'Don't Get Rid of Pizza Day!' Ottawa-based Halogen Software, which specializes in cloud-based HR programs, has been revamping its culture of employee benefits over the past 12 months, in an ongoing project, Dominique Jones, chief people officer, told Bloomberg BNA Jan. 12. "We have always been very intentional about our culture. At other companies, culture is the sum of all behaviors that are tolerated," she said.

But an internal survey found some Halogen employees "think culture is 'stuff.' " A common response to the survey was employees begging HR, "don't get rid of pizza day," which was instituted—and has continued—to give employees from different departments who wouldn't ordinarily meet up a chance to talk and collaborate, Jones said.

But more fundamentally, she said, "it's about an experience. Do people feel energized to come to work because of the environment? It's not about stuff; we can have all the stuff in the world and people don't want to get out of bed and come to work."

The values Jones stressed as the basis for Halogen's benefits are "trust, transparency and collaboration. Are we open, honest and respectful? Do we support development? Do we apologize when we mess up? Do we encourage people to speak out?"

Thus, Halogen's HR department has been examining "what are the behaviors we should be seeing around these attributes" and providing training for them, including through two-day workshops, she said. As a measure of success, she pointed to Halogen having received more than 10,000 pieces of feedback through its software system in 2016 from its workforce of under 500, "including saying thank you to each other."

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