

5 Ways to Get Your Employees Outside in the Sun

By Kathryn Tuggle; June 11, 2014

New York (TheStreet) -- No small-business owner wants their employees lazing in the park all week, but a little sunshine during the workday can be a boost to energy and productivity. If you want to offer your workers a few outdoor escapes this summer, here's how to do it right.

Take lunch meetings outside

If your employees have a lunch meeting to attend, suggest a restaurant with outdoor seating, says Steven Raz, co-founder and managing partner at executive search firm Cornerstone Search Group. "If it's a really nice day out, there's no point being stuck inside at a dark restaurant or ordering in sandwiches to a conference room," Raz says. "Get out and spend that hour or hour and a half in the sun."

For businesses that have a common area or courtyard onsite, look into doing a cookout if there is a grill, or doing a picnic or potluck lunch, says Paul Millard, co-founder and managing partner of executive search firm The Millard Group.

"Do it during the lunch hour when your employees would be having downtime anyway. It's good for people to get away from their desks for a brief period," he says. "When they go back in, they are more energized than if they worked straight through lunch or spent 15 minutes in the car driving to get lunch."

A team lunch is also something your employees appreciate, Millard says.

"When they see you slaving over a hot grill, it's something that goes noted," he says.

Encourage roaming around the office park

One of the best investments Millard says his company ever made: wireless headsets for long-range phone conversations.

"They have a range of 100 feet outside the building, and at any given time you'll see four to six people outside, roaming around, talking on headsets and trying to close deals," he says. "Having that freedom to walk around and get out and enjoy the sun really makes all the difference in the workday."

Once his employees began roaming, Millard's company also invested in lawn furniture.

Now people take lunch out there in addition to having important conversations with clients," he says. "They love it."

Employees should also be encouraged to hold one-on-one meetings with one another while outside or taking a walk, says Ron Lawrence, vice president of organizational development for VF Corp.

"A powerful conversation can happen anywhere, and the fact is, changing one's surroundings stimulates a person in all kinds of good ways, so giving yourself the gift of getting outside during the workday is a fun and easy energy-booster," he says.

Schedule meetings outside during the morning or afternoon

If outdoor areas near your office are crowded during lunch, schedule meetings outside around 10 a.m. or after 1:30 p.m., suggests Katie McSorley, president of the mid-Atlantic offices of Havas PR in Pittsburgh.

"You gotta get out there early," she says. "Why not take a meeting outside, just to mix things up? It can spur on creativity and rejuvenate everyone. It's a change of pace."

Companies that have the same weekly meeting in the same conference room 52 weeks a year are really missing out, she says.

"It's the same old, same old inside the office. But go outside and it's like you're in a different world. It's the chance of scenery that can lighten the day."

She says productivity issues with outdoor meetings shouldn't be a concern. In fact, employees may actually be more productive when working outdoors. The only thing to worry about when working in nature is whether the sun will prevent you seeing the laptop screen.

"You don't have to be your most productive at your desk. Whoever said work only happens in an office environment was wrong," she says.

Of course employees don't have to work outside all day to see the benefits -- just one to one and a half hours spent working outside can make the difference.

"It just perks you up. It's like having a cup of coffee. You come back into the office a little happier, a little more willing to go back to work."

Do a team-building or volunteer activity together

If your company does a team-building exercise a few times a year, try to schedule at least two of those during summer months, Raz encourages.

"It's so much nicer to do those events when it's nice out. If you're close enough to the beach or the mountains, look to do your events there. Otherwise a park is a great option. Embrace the summer, wherever you are," he says.

At Credit Karma, vice president of talent Ragini Parmar says beach clean-ups and building homes for Habitat for Humanity are out-of-office activities her team enjoys that also give back to the community.

"These sorts of events are great, because the entire company can participate if they choose, and it's a tangible way to support our community with immediate impact," she says.

If you just want to get your team out of the office for some fun, Millard recommends that small companies look into renting a bus or van and taking a real field trip.

"We rented a bus and went into New York City to the 9/11 memorial. We toured, we paid our respects, we went to lunch and then had a cocktail party on the bus ride home. That's the kind of stuff you can do for your team after a good quarter or to celebrate a win," he says.

Not only is this kind of activity good for employee morale, it helps to recruit talent eager to work for a company that cares, Millard says.

"After an outing, people go back to work more refreshed and more energized. When they talk to friends and say, 'Yeah, I was at the beach with my firm on Friday,' it creates good buzz in your local market. It's a recruiting tool as well as a retention tool."

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