

## 25 LOW COST, CREATIVE IDEAS TO IMPROVE MORALE, ENHANCE PRODUCTIVITY, AND MAKE YOUR WORKPLACE MORE FUN!

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Study after study has shown that what workers want from their jobs is not better benefits or more money. Rather, it is the small things that make workers feel commitment to an organization. One study shows the top three things workers want are interesting work, full appreciation for the work they do, and a feeling of being in on things. Baxter Labs recently did a global study in which they asked their employees worldwide what they could do to make things better for them. The resounding answer was that employees wanted to be “respected as whole human beings with a life outside of work.”

What seems critical, then, in workplaces today is for leaders to respond to workers as HUMAN BEINGS and to foster an atmosphere that is inclusive, caring, creative, appreciative and joyful. People are looking for a deeper sense of meaning and purpose in their work, and above all, they want to be respected and valued. This will not only lead to more loyal employees, but it will also ultimately create more loyal customers.



In my books *180 Ways to Spread Contagious Enthusiasm* (Walk the Talk 2006), *Handle with CARE –Motivating & Retaining Employees* (McGraw Hill 2002) and *CARE Packages for the Workplace—Dozens of Little Things You Can Do to Regenerate Spirit at Work* (McGraw-Hill 1996), I have used the acronym CARE as the elements of a spirited workplace:

C = Creative Communication

A = Atmosphere and Appreciation for All

R = Respect and Reason for Being

E = Empathy and Enthusiasm

In each of the chapters I have included dozens of mostly no-cost or low cost ideas which can be implemented almost immediately in today’s

workplaces to engender a new spirit of commitment and joy.

Let's look at 25 of my favorite ideas, ideas which any department can adapt and introduce in their organizations to make an immediate difference in spirit. Common sense, as well as much current research, tells us that happy employees are more productive employees, so implementing even a few of these ideas will not only boost morale but will certainly impact productivity and profit.

1. **Does everyone in your organization have business cards?** If not, that is one of the fastest ways to boost morale. They can be made on the computer for little or no cost, and what a meaningful way to tell an employee how valued and important he or she is. If you already have a business card, look at it for a moment. We use business cards to network and create relationships. However, most business cards I see are boring, there is nothing memorable about the individual, and the back is blank! Ask yourself these questions about your card: Does it have anything distinctive about it? Is there anything that represents you as a unique human being? If not, turn it over and add something on the Human level such as a quotation, a personal motto, or a graphic or picture of something you love. Not only will you make a distinctive

impression but people will have a way to connect with you on a deeper level when they learn something important about you, the human being. That is the beginning of a relationship.

2. **Have a contest with employees** -- "If my company/ department were a T-shirt, this is what it would say. . ." Then have them actually design the shirt, either on a real T-shirt or an paper. Photograph, post, or videotape the results. You will learn amazing things about the way people feel about your organization, you will be encouraging them to get their creative juices going, and you will have fun in the process. Company legends are created from experiences like these!

3. **Collect drawings from employee's children or grandchildren of "What my Mom/Dad/Grandma/Grandpa/Aunt/Uncle does at work all day."** Compile these into a company booklet or display them for customers to enjoy. You are helping to blend work and family by involving workers' family members, and you are also creating a memory. If possible, display the drawings where employees can bring their children in to view them as well. That will add a sense of involvement and pride in the organization from the whole family!

4. **Send a handwritten note to at least one customer and one co-worker a week.** These can be as simple as small post-it notes or even a printed card where you add a handwritten sentence at the end. This will not only dazzle your external customers but will also build loyalty internally. We are all desperate to be appreciated in our world today. You may need a strategy to remember to do this, so pick one day of the week and do not leave the office on that day until you have completed your notes.

5. **Keep a bulletin board in your office of pictures of repeat customers and their families.** This will not only help build relationships as you collect the pictures, but it will also remind everyone in the organization of WHY they have a job! Send birthday cards to them on their special day and congratulations cards when they achieve either a personal or a business success. We spend so much time finding new customers that we often forget the good, loyal customers we already have. Celebrate them and keep your relationships focused on both the business and the human levels. Have another board where you post pictures of employees' families, weddings, graduations, vacations, new grandchildren, and other successes. Thus, you will be celebrating their loyalty as well!

6. When people in your organization first turn on their computers, **have a message of the day** such as a quotation on customer service, personal growth, something humorous, or even the birthdays of employees during that week. If a day begins with inspiration, it will help lift the level of interaction in your workplace. However, if you start doing this, be prepared to continue or it will be a negative experience when employees expect this encouragement and some days it is not there.

7. **Put a specially wrapped package of M & M's** (or any other candy which might represent your company) **in every package you ship out** with a note saying, "We're glad you're our customer." It will surprise and delight the receivers, and be assured that your packages from that point on will NEVER sit on the loading dock!

8. For an all-company celebration, **in small groups creatively dramatize significant events from the year or from the company's history, or even a company legend.** These can be presented either live or videotaped. This experience will bring out talent and creativity that you didn't even know you had, and it will also be a teambuilding experience for everyone. The pride that comes from celebrating one's

organization is long lasting and creates a special kind of employee loyalty.

**9. Collect company legends and success stories on video or audiotape.** If possible, interview the employee or the customer to whom they happened. These tapes become a source of pride for current employees and a wonderful addition to orientation for new hires. You will be recording and celebrating the moments of peak performance in your organizational culture.

**10. Once a month encourage the senior managers to do something creative for all employees** or for employees in their divisions: cook them breakfast, bring around an ice cream cart, serve them doughnuts and coffee, wash the windshields of their cars as they arrive at work, or even take them all to lunch. These small acts of appreciation will be remembered and talked about for weeks!

**11. Add a personal signature to your work** to differentiate yourself from all the others who do the same work as you. An HR manager keeps a basket of Beanie Babies in her office to encourage visitors to relax. She asks them to choose their favorite to hold as they talk. A United Airlines Captain on each of his flights

writes handwritten thank you notes to several passengers whom he picks at random from the computer, thanking them for choosing his airline and offering his help in any way they might need. A grocery store bagger always puts a "Thought for the Day" in each person's groceries he bags. As employees begin to find ways to express themselves in their work by adding a personal signature, your workplace will become more caring, creative, and much more fun!

**12. Have a company poster party** for all frustrated / aspiring artists to create signs and posters that demonstrate the company's values. Use quotations, graphics, and bright colors. Display them in clear plastic frames throughout the building and move them once a week so that everyone can see all of them. Not only will you find talent you did not know existed, but you will also be creating an atmosphere of inspiration and delight. Tom Peters says if your hallways are boring, chances are everything your organization does is boring!

**13. Purchase a "Red Plate" for your organization or department** which says "You are SPECIAL today." This can be passed around as an affirmation to anyone in the company. It is amazing how such a small thing can make a huge difference in morale. You

may want to also keep a record of who gets the plate and why—another way to celebrate one another.

14. **Add a quotation, graphic, cartoon, or seasonal reminder to memos and fax cover sheets.** Make them fun and interesting! Most fax cover sheets I see are extremely boring, and the organization has missed a wonderful opportunity to make an impression, differentiate itself, and communicate their ideas and values.

15. As an organization, **give out buttons that say something like "Kindness is Contagious. Catch it!"** when someone does a kind deed for you. Then ask that person to pass the button on to someone else. You may do this either internally or sponsor a campaign in your city or state. The Stop Violence Coalition in the city of Kansas City began this campaign citywide several years ago, and the results have been overwhelming. Just encouraging others to think about being kind creates an amazing difference!

16. **Create a company mascot** which goes along with the spirit of the company. For example, Rosenbluth Travel uses a salmon because they're always "swimming upstream!" They give their clients stuffed salmon, chocolate salmon, and a salmon pin is their highest

internal award. Another client of mine has a Marketing Department mascot, a green frog. The company has had lots of fun by other departments "kidnapping" the frog and then sending ransom notes.

17. **Have a "Laugh a Day" bulletin board** where you display appropriate cartoons and humorous writings. You may also want to keep a fishbowl of cartoons and jokes in the reception area of your organization so that visitors, too, can have a smile while they are waiting. Research has shown that the most productive workplaces have about 10 minutes of laughter every hour. Is your workplace a place where people are enjoying themselves?

18. **Designate one room as the company "Whine Cellar,"** the place for anyone to go who is having a bad day or wants to gripe. Put a sign on the door and have fun decorating it (in black?). You may bring in stress toys, stuffed animals, cartoon books, and perhaps even treats. When someone is grumpy, suggest they spend some time there. It will probably become everyone's favorite place to go.

19. **Take a look at your office -- what does it say about your Human level?** Always display in your office one or two reminders of things

you really love. Not only will it be more comfortable for you because it reminds you of the really important things in your life, but it will also help others to connect with you more quickly.

**20. Create a service guarantee for your work unit.** For example, a suburban hospital says, "If you're not seen in our emergency room by a professional in 15 minutes, your visit is free!" An Accounting Department says, "If you find an error in our work, lunch is on us." This guarantee will differentiate you to your clients and will also help build teamwork and pride as every employee commits to personally upholding the guarantee.

**21. Have a Four A's jar (Acknowledge, Appreciate, Affirm, Assure).** Keep it filled with wonderful, uplifting thoughts for anyone who needs one. You may also give these jars as gifts to your employees and/or customers with one positive thought for every day of the year.

**22. Purchase pieces of clear acrylic for blotters on each employee's desk.** Have the employee create a collage under the blotter which contains creative reminders and examples of the company's values, such as photos, quotations, cartoons, mission statements,

customer service models, slogans or signs. This encourages creativity, creates anchors to remember what is important, and provides a delightful way to share as employees spend time seeing what others have done.

**23. Post "Street" signs to name hallways in your building.** Choose names which communicate your company's mission or values or relate to your core business. You may also want to name hallways after valued employees. By making these values visible daily, employees will constantly be reminded of the organization's foundation and reason for being.

**24. Plan a "Bring your family to work" day for your organization.** Be sure to include different activities for different age groups. Younger children will love sending a fax to someone, helping stuff envelopes, copying things, and running errands while older children will want to learn more about the actual business of the organization. You may even want to have them role play their parent's job to help them gain more empathy for what a parent or relative does all day. Use pieces from your new hire orientation, tours, and even special treats in the cafeteria to help make families feel a part of the organization. Make this day a fun celebration for everyone. If an employee has the full support of his or her family, especially

during high stress times at work, they will certainly be more productive on the job.

**25. Think of something creative you could offer your customers as a "free" sample.** The Savings Bank of Rockford, CT, gives its customers a dime taped on a foldover card that says, "Who says we don't give free samples?" Everyone loves giveaways, and these can also become powerful marketing tools.

Remember that it truly is the little things that really count. You may decide to try one new idea a month, or form a Spirit Committee and have them design a plan to incorporate some of these things into your culture, or simply use these ideas to get your own creative juices going to come up with other ideas that your employees will enjoy. Often we get so bogged down in the business (paperwork, meetings, legal requirements) that we forget people. Help create an atmosphere that produces peak performers and committed, joyful workers and as a result, creates more loyal customers. Have fun and keep CARE-ing!

## **BARBARA GLANZ BIO**

For free articles you can use in your company newsletters and an archive of dozens of immediately applicable "Ideas of the Month," go to

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