

Invitation to Success:

by Joanne L. Smikle

Success comes by invitation only. It arrives at the door of companies who have devised systems in which they can flourish. Companies can send more invitations for enduring success when they learn how to party hearty.

Beginning with the invitation to success...inviting employees to succeed requires four tricks of the event planning trade. Inviting success is actually very much like preparing for a party or celebration. Using the party planning metaphor, let's explore how to create a triumphant fete.

Trick #1: Party preparation begins with a theme. What is your corporate theme? It is dictated by your mission and values. Are you a company that is driven by the desire to provide exemplary service to customers? Are you revenue-driven? Or, are you a company that is without a guiding mission...just floating along?

That theme, or mission, determines who should be invited to your party. Mission should define every recruitment effort. It is important to hire people who will be fun at the party. That doesn't mean that you have to hire a homogeneous pool of drones. Rather, you need to seek a diverse pool of potential new hires who can live your mission. There may be a few party crashers. These are the people you let slide in. They may be suitable for the party. Or, they may not. Pay attention to every hire so that you can see how they are behaving at your invitation only event. As party host, you have the right to escort nonconformists to the door.

Be careful that, those invited to leave are only the nonconformists who don't conform to the standards put forth in the mission. Divergent thinkers should be welcome at the event. They bring fresh ideas. Think of them as the folks who first introduced "The Electric Slide" at a party where everyone was stuck to their

chairs. It's a collaborative dance that anyone and everyone can do. No partners are required, just a desire to shake your rump. And once these nonconformists got people out of their chairs, the energy in the room changed. That is why we want eclectic mission supporters in the company. They bring approaches we wouldn't get if they had not been invited to the party.

Trick #2: Once you have finished working on your invitation list, a list consistent with the party's theme, it is time to move to the menu. This is my favorite part! What are you going to serve your honored guests? Are they a chips and dip crowd or are they more high brow, expecting gourmet hors d'oeuvres? You must plan your menu accordingly (or everyone will go home hungry.)

Think of the menu as what you serve managers and staff every day. Do you provide them with learning opportunities that will fill their hungry minds? Are there sufficient developmental paths to satisfy their needs for growth? Do your party guests have access to learning libraries? These resources allow them to stimulate and satiate their individual intellectual curiosity.

If you let guests go hungry they will find another party. Do you wonder why you sometimes see the best and

Tricks for Transformation



brightest defecting to your competitors? They may not be getting their appetite satisfied at your party. Your menu may be lacking. Require managers and human resource people to collaborate on improving the menu. Encourage staff to take advantage of learning opportunities in your professional associations. Bring in talented teachers from colleges and universities that are willing to create customized learning for your people.

OK, now their tummies are full. Guests can be more productive. Mental hunger is satisfied. You can now decide on the entertainment; that's **Trick #3**. Every successful party has entertainment. Are you having jugglers, a dj, a stripper? Your entertainment must also reflect your theme. If you tout your ethics and integrity, a stripper will be an inconsistent form of entertainment.

Workplace entertainment is the fun. Yep, good old fashioned fun! It can be leader-led fun or staff-promoted fun; it just has to be FUN. Fun allows people to decompress. It allows them to connect on a level deeper than work, tasks, and deadlines. Fun helps staff and managers see each other as more than their positions. They get to see each other as creative, interesting people; as moms and dads, artists, and activists. It is through these revelations that people are

able to work more collaboratively. They are more inclined to cooperate and support colleagues that they have gotten to know. This is especially important in companies that espouse a commitment to team work. Teamwork cannot happen when the entertainment does not encourage connectedness.

So, what kinds of things can you do to create fun? It depends on your guests. Consider their interests very carefully. Is this a crew that will enjoy forming a bowling league? Would they like annual picnics in the park? Or, would they be more inclined towards informal happy hours? And don't think that because you are the manager you have to create all of the fun. Encourage other people to take ownership for fun-finding.

Many of my clients have informal fun committees drawn from different departments. A long-term care facility in Florida used an all staff luncheon to promote respect for diversity. The staff planned a potluck where people brought dishes from their countries. In addition to bridging cultural differences, it was exciting to try new foods and different cuisines. Another client has informal ice cream socials in a huge conference room. They offer make-it-yourself sundaes, have a hired scooper on hand to make colossal cones, and have fifties music playing.

It's quite a fun event; the room is decorated like an old fashioned ice cream parlor. Employees from all departments come down and socialize over sweets. Out of consideration for people with special dietary needs, they also offer sugar-free ice cream, frozen fat-free yogurt, and sorbet. Smart thinking! Now every party guest feels welcome.

The invitations have been sent, the theme has been created, and the entertainment has been arranged...it's time for **Trick #4**. This is another of my favorite aspects of event planning. It's when you get to have the party. Yes, this is when all of that preparation gets implemented. This is the night of 1,000 stars. Every one of those stars is a part of your company. These are the very special guests that you have hand selected to both share in and contribute to the affair. And what an affair it will be! The party will never end!

Keeping the party alive, energetic, and festive is everyone's job. This happens with endless meeting and greeting. It happens when everyone works the room, meets the other stars, and facilitates introductions between new stars and established ones. As a manager you have a special role in this part of the event. Lead the charge by socializing with everyone you can find. Meet new people. Talk to everyone from the CEO to copy clerks to directors to janitors to frontline service people. Talk. Listen. Learn.

This is the best part of the party! Circulating throughout the organization is what you should be doing everyday. Keeping the party alive requires you to get out of your office. It requires you to go talk to people instead of relying on e-mail. Party perpetuation calls for an endless commitment to connecting on a human level. Once you model this behavior, it becomes much easier for the people who report to you. This butterfly effect keeps the environment alive, inspiring, and ever-inviting.

The Tricks as Transformers

These four tricks of the event planning trade can transform your organization. Think about it...if you hire the right people and make them feel welcome, you create a positive first impression. If you make a few hiring mistakes and can't get these folks to embrace the mission, they can (and should) be escorted to the door. Everyone doesn't get to stay and enjoy the festivities. But, that does not mean that you turn away people who are different. These are the guests who teach new ways of supporting the mission and fulfilling corporate objectives.

Everyone knows that guests come to eat. I hate going to parties where the food is unappealing. It's even worse when the host runs out of food. That food, the learning, education, and developmental opportunities, is what keeps guests wanting to be engaged in the celebration. The hunger for learning has to be satisfied or employees will find a company that will feed them well. Starved employees will get weak and deliver lackluster performance. So, it's vital that you plan a really good menu that offers something for everyone. Pay close attention to what people partake in. This will tell you which developmental opportunities quench your employees hunger for learning.

If the invitation and the food are what gets them, it's the fun that keeps them. Who do you know who doesn't like a good time? Make sure that you plan lots of fun for your party. That fun should vary so that it meets the needs of the assorted people at the party. Work is not supposed to be drudgery. Assume responsibility for sparking fun. It doesn't have to be expensive; it just has to be FUN! And the funny thing about fun—it's contagious. People begin to let their guard down and bring their own ideas for fun.

You also create fun when you allow employees to author their own work. As the manager, you are responsible for providing general direction and parameters. But that does not mean micromanaging every detail. Step back. Chill out. Allow people to exercise their imaginative abilities. It is the incorporation of imagination that makes the work more fun.

Each and every day is the party. That does not mean every day is Mardi Gras. It does mean that the workplace is alive with energy and enthusiasm. Your efforts and never-ending meeting and greeting pays off because you are establishing a pattern for meaningful human connections. This is not to say that the workplace will be conflict-free, rather that the conflict will be healthy and not destructive. It is the party, the daily manifestation of a satisfying corporate environment that makes you the employer of choice. Let's get this party started!



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