



Crystal D CEO Chuck Dalghren has found that engaging employees in charity is worth the effort.

THE CHARITABLE CHALLENGE

Volunteering drives employee engagement and growth

BY JOHN P. PALEN | PHOTO BY EMILY J. DAVIS

Employee engagement is closely tied to nine performance outcomes, according to the Gallup organization. And yet, only 32% of U.S. employees reported being engaged at work in 2015. As a recognition awards and promotional products supplier, Crystal D viscerally understands the ways that acknowledgement can drive engagement. When they went a step further to create a company-wide volunteering program, they were surprised by both the challenges and the rewards.

Crystal D always wanted to give back to the community. In previous years, they held one corporate event, which created 22,000 meals for Feed Our Starving Children. CEO Chuck Dalghren and his management team decided that 2016 was the year to be more committed and intentional in the company's efforts to give back. They set a goal of 1,000 community outreach hours. If each employee volunteered for 16

hours, they would reach the 1,000-hour goal.

They decided to offer to pay each employee for eight hours of volunteer work if they'd also donate eight hours unpaid. The idea was well received in January but due to logistics wasn't rolled out across the company until May.

"We learned a lot," Dalghren said. "It wasn't as easy as we expected. Most people who work here had never thought about volunteering; it was hard to get people to sign up and go out to do that. Plus we discovered there were a lot of different definitions about what qualified as community outreach."

Initially, Crystal D defined the outreach as volunteering for disadvantaged groups or fundraising. But questions quickly arose, such as: did reading books for your grandchild's classroom count? They realized they had to present employees with events they could participate in—and this required a facilitator

BIZ BRIEFING

CRYSTAL D

LOCATION: St. Paul

REVENUE: Undisclosed

INCEPTION: 1994

EMPLOYEES: 65

LEADERSHIP: Chuck Dalghren, CEO; Mike Irvine, VP of operations

DESCRIPTION: A supplier of recognition awards to the promotional products industry.

WEB: crystal-d.com

calling agencies in the Twin Cities to ask about opportunities and find out how many people were needed.

The next challenge they had to deal with was employees who signed up for a volunteer shift but didn't go. "We're a task-focused company," said Mike Irvine, VP of operations,

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VOLUNTEER PROGRAM TIPS

1. People may not sign up right away
2. Give managers power to support it.
3. Be clear about what you want employees to do.
4. Use a facilitator to create opportunities employees can sign up for.
5. Make sure people know the good work their co-workers are doing.
6. State that volunteering is part of your company culture.

“We work hard and take our jobs seriously. Everyone has a role to play and we’re careful not to let each other down. The idea of taking a half day to go volunteer is a completely new concept and wasn’t part of our culture.”

The leadership team thought the 1000-hour mark would be slam dunk for the year, but at the end of 2016 the company had logged around 730 hours of time. However, the impact is having a ripple effect through the organization as employees learn that their co-workers are out volunteering. In addition to serving meals, employee groups helped building playground equipment, volunteered for Toys for Tots, and supported a family fun day event for Ronald McDonald House.

“For some it’s been extremely emotional and humbling,” Dahlgren said. “One man who has worked for me for seventeen years volunteered serving breakfast at the St. Paul Salvation Army. He told me that once he was homeless himself and now here he is serving food to these people. He said, ‘It takes me back to those days when I had nothing and how far I’ve come.’”

For 2017, Crystal D will form a committee to address questions about volunteering. Their model will focus on getting the work done and gives managers more responsibility for motivating employees to volunteer.

“Organizations can count on us now to fill spots and be there,” Dahlgren said. “We went from having good intentions to being intentional. Talk is cheap. This is a change in mindset and commitment, from me and Crystal D.”



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