

Pandemic-Era Employee Engagement: Mouse in the House

South Carolina State Housing Finance and Development Authority
Management Innovation: Human Resources

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Entry Title: Pandemic-Era Employee Engagement: Mouse in the House

Entry Category and Subcategory: Management Innovation – Human Resources

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An Unprecedented Challenge

The COVID-19 pandemic presented SC Housing's Human Resources Office (HR) with tremendous challenges; chief among these was our ability to engage with our employees.

While we worked diligently to keep our staff updated on COVID related issues, something that was repeatedly voiced by our employees was how disconnected they felt from the agency and their peers while working from home. Even our essential employees that were required to come into the office echoed this sentiment.

The culture of our agency, prior to the pandemic, was one rooted in fellowship and fostered by various events. These events, be they employee run or sponsored by the agency, created an environment of inclusion and engagement. Potlucks, friendly competitions, holiday parties, and fundraisers (for local charities and for employee event funds) were a routine and much loved tradition. The lack of these events were (and still are) very much felt.

An Innovative Response

Upon hearing this feedback from our employees, our HR office took great pains to raise employee morale and engagement in a way that was themed with housing in mind, could be run regardless of how many employees were in-office, and would still allow for social distancing.

“Mouse in the House” is a virtual game created by HR to improve morale and employee engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. The game consists of a storyline in which an anthropomorphic mouse breaks into the agency to wreak havoc. The mouse is “caught on camera” each night. The resulting images are sent via email to agency employees to enlist their help in locating where the mouse was last pictured. The objective of the game is to “catch” the mouse, with prizes offered to the first three employees to guess the correct location. See example images at the end of the presentation.

An Effective Use of Resources and Benefits that Outweigh Costs

When pitching ideas for employee engagement during the pandemic, we had to keep these resources in mind: the amount of time needed to facilitate/participate in the game, the monetary cost, and the ability to reach all employees (whether working from home or in-office).

The initial set-up for this game takes very little time from HR's schedule. All pictures can be taken on the same day, after most employees have left the office. Only about 10 minutes per day is spent facilitating the game, including sending the email, monitoring the email for responses, and sending out information about winners. The amount of time spent by employees to participate is also negligible, with most employees responding within 2-5 minutes.

Monetarily, this has been one of our most cost-effective engagement strategies. The mouse cost less than \$10 and has been used several times. The only real monetary cost is the prizes, which average about \$3 per item. Three prizes per day are distributed; meaning the total cost per day to run this game is approximately \$9. The total cost per game depends on the number of days the game runs. Prizes can be small seasonal/holiday treats or agency branded merchandise.

Replicable Process, Achievable Results

“Mouse in the House” is very easily replicable. The only tools needed are:

- 1) a phone with a camera
- 2) email
- 3) a mouse (or other animal of your choosing) toy or figurine
- 4) 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place prizes for each day of the competition

While our HR office used a photo editing software to create holiday or seasonal themed borders around the picture, this is not necessary.

This initiative has been tremendously successful in reaching all employees, regardless of whether they were teleworking or working in-office. Nearly every person in the agency has participated, from interns to upper level management. Since the responses are sent via email, we can easily pull data to determine and focus our attention on those areas that are less engaged.

Since winners are publicly announced, employees are able to see who wins on a daily basis. This is important as it shows that there buy-in from management and has empowered our employees to participate fully not only in the “Mouse in the House” initiative, but in other employee engagement and recognition activities conducted by the agency without fear of reprisal or judgment.

Mouse in the House

Not a creature was stirring, except for this mouse!



Do you know where the mouse was last spotted?
First person to email [_HR](#) the correct answer gets a prize!



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