



Celebrating Life-Affirming Moments

A GUIDE TO CREATING COMMUNITY, CONNECTION,
AND BELONGING WITH LIFE EVENTS

workhuman*

"The best places to work provide people with life satisfaction as opposed to job satisfaction alone."

MICHAEL O'MALLEY, PH.D., Managing Director, Pearl Meyer

COVID-19 accelerated the need to move from work-life balance to work-life harmony by celebrating life milestones in the workplace in a truly meaningful way. While some organizations are phasing in a return to the office, others are waiting longer – or never requiring their employees to physically come back. This reshuffling of work-life balance brings profound new meaning in the idea that work should be an integral, enriching component rather than separate from "real" life.

Forging connections and belonging: a comprehensive approach to life events

In the Harvard Business Review article quoted at the beginning, Dr. O'Malley notes that the best places to work have an unwavering focus on life satisfaction rather than job satisfaction alone: "Almost all of the corporate founders and CEOs we spoke with told us that they built their companies with people in mind. To them, a healthy culture is as important as a healthy balance sheet." This perspective becomes even more important during these times, as evidenced by the actions of visionary companies such as fellow Workhuman® customer DENSO, which is focused on helping employees stay "connected to the mission, the values, and their co-workers who they are used to seeing every day, but can't any longer," said Senior HR Generalist Sarah Fox.¹

Celebrating employees' life milestones can deliver the best of both worlds – a healthy culture **and** a healthy bottom line.

That's because a truly human culture is the cornerstone of an engaged workforce, and employee engagement² has a direct and measurable impact on your organization's financial success. Engaged employees are more productive. And they increase customer loyalty, sales, and profits.

According to a SHRM/Workhuman employee recognition report,³ employees who are very/somewhat satisfied with the celebration of life events are nearly 2x as likely to agree their company is a good place to work, and the organization is 95% more likely to have won awards for its culture. That's the kind of culture that carries organizations when a crisis like a pandemic arrives on the scene. Celebrating life events is an effective and inspiring way to create a community atmosphere⁴ – and it helps HR professionals differentiate the organization.

The move from work-life balance to work-life harmony

In his article, Dr. O'Malley notes that humans inherently celebrate, sympathize, uplift, comfort, and help each other in their personal lives. Shouldn't it be the same in the workplace? Especially now? "Like good families, good organizations have the same responsibility. If they want to create a real sense of community among their teams, they also need to create shared experiences."

He admits that he and his team were unprepared for the impact celebrating life milestones can have on an organization: "Before beginning this project, we considered life events, rituals, and rites of passage – such as marriages, birthdays, and anniversaries – as trivial to



the work environment. But the companies that we visited gave us a new perspective. In fact, they made a big deal out of significant dates. Why? Because it is the human, or considerate thing to do.”

In a traditional office setting, celebrating life milestones is often a transitory ritual. Employees pass around a greeting card to commemorate a birthday, new baby, wedding, or home purchase. There’s cake and a brief gathering. But the moment soon passes and everyone returns to their to-do list for the day.

Such celebrations can (and should) be more memorable, enduring, and personalized. It should be easy for peers to share in the joy by sending a reward that the recipient will cherish and remember, and perhaps even make a charitable contribution in their name. That’s why many world-class organizations – especially those already familiar with Social Recognition® – are turning to Life Events®, another part of Workhuman® Cloud.⁵

Life Events enables organizations to make the shift from work-life balance to work-life harmony with key features such as:

Personalized experience: Colleagues can share moments that matter in a truly personal way as they contribute stories, pictures, and videos that make each celebration unique.

Crowdsourced approach: Life Events taps into the people who know your employees best – their colleagues and friends. That means congratulatory messages resonate in a way that would otherwise not be possible.

Tailored rewards: Why not commemorate your employees’ life events with rewards they actually care about, such as gift cards, merchandise, or charity contributions?

Congratulations timeline: Because it lives online, the Life Events timeline extends the lifespan and impact of the traditional signed greeting card.

Administrative ease: Rather than leaving the task solely to managers, Life Events automatically invites your employees’ peers – the people who really know them – to create an award and join in the celebration.

Open invitations: With many employees still working from home, everyone can be part of Life Events celebrations.

Why a comprehensive approach to life events is so important

Celebrating life events is a critical component in creating a culture of celebration. Such cultures are built on a foundation of belonging, support, and social exchange, and they offer the following benefits:

Higher engagement and connectedness: Social support from co-workers is a job resource that has been shown to significantly impact engagement.⁶

Higher productivity: Employees who feel they are part of a group working toward shared goals report increased motivation, positivity, and overall productivity.

Reduced conflict and improved relationships: Social exchange has benefits that include “reduced conflict,

improved performance, enhanced knowledge sharing among peer employees, increased affinity for employees, greater understanding of employee interests and values, which leads to more pleasant and efficient pattern of exchanges, and increased trust and tolerance of imbalance in exchange relationships.”⁷

Higher levels of learning and performance: A culture of psychological safety and inclusion leads to better learning and performance outcomes.

Reduced stress: When co-workers provide social support, it can ameliorate the impact of a large workload and thereby buffer the impact of burnout.⁸

Increased resilience and trust: A consistent flow of relational exchanges raises levels of commitment, concern for the reputation of oneself and others, and levels of trust and resilience.⁹

Better health: When belonging has been established, it contributes to improvements of the physical body system. Likewise, those who are deprived of it may experience both psychological and biological illness effects¹⁰ and a weakened immune system.¹¹

Happier, more productive employees: According to one study, “participants stated that organizational celebrations made them happier in their job, improved diversity and workplace knowledge, reduced isolation, and cultivated relationships, which all contributed to their desire to be more productive in their job.”¹²

Greater affective commitment: Reward and perceived social support are direct contributors to affective commitment (and boost an employee’s intent to stay).

Life Events is a critical pillar to creating cultures rooted in gratitude and connectedness because it’s powered by employees focusing on the goodness in each other’s lives. This builds and maintains vital connections, especially while remote work remains a staple in organizations. Teams need space to bond, and celebrations from the crowd help cure isolation¹³ and generate the positivity that calls people to greatness. If you want to go beyond peer-to-peer employee recognition to create a more human work culture for your people, it only makes sense to help them share in each other’s happy moments.

Sources

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