



BEYOND THE HEADSET

25 HINTS, TIPS, AND TECHNIQUES FOR ENGAGING THE CALL CENTER FRONTLINE

VOLUME 1

by Gary Jensen

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SHARING IS CARING

Please feel free to post this eBook on your blog, share it with friends, or e-mail it to anyone you believe would benefit from reading it.

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WARNING!

Implementing ideas from this eBook may result in a happier and more productive workforce.

OVERVIEW

If you downloaded this eBook with hopes of finding quantitative research and case studies on employee engagement, I'm sorry; ***Beyond the Headset*** is not that type of eBook. As a former call center manager, I wrote this eBook in response to the countless conversations that I have had with fellow supervisors and managers over the years on the subject of creating a more fun, positive, exciting, empowering, challenging, rewarding, and meaningful place for employees to work. If that is why you downloaded this eBook, then congratulations—you're in the right place!

Companies have invested much time and energy in their attempts to understand employee engagement and dissect the forces that drive it. Of the research and studies that I have reviewed, the drivers which I most closely identify with are those presented in Towers Perrin's 2007—2008 Global Workforce Study, *Closing the Engagement Gap: A Roadmap For Driving Superior Business Performance*. These engagement drivers include:

1. MANAGEMENT SHOWING SINCERE INTEREST IN EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING.
2. ABILITY TO CONTINUOUSLY IMPROVE SKILLS AND CAPABILITIES.
3. ORGANIZATION'S REPUTATION FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY.
4. INPUT INTO DEPARTMENTAL DECISION MAKING.
5. QUICK RESOLUTION OF CUSTOMER CONCERNS.
6. SETTING HIGH PERSONAL STANDARDS.
7. EXCELLENT CAREER ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITIES.
8. CHALLENGING WORK ASSIGNMENTS THAT BROADEN SKILLS.
9. GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH SUPERVISOR.
10. EMPLOYER ENCOURAGES INNOVATIVE THINKING.

If you were challenged with making a list of 25 ideas for strengthening employee engagement based on the 10 drivers outlined above, what would that list look like? Go ahead, give it a try. What are you waiting for? Get out the pen and paper and start writing!

Well, how did you do? Did you make it to 25? If you're like most managers, you probably maxed out around 10 or so. If you managed to come up with more than 15, pat yourself on the back; If you came up with 25 or more, give yourself two pats—you're ahead of the curve.

When it comes to implementing and maintaining a well-rounded, structured approach to the engagement process there is no silver bullet. No magic wand. No out-of-the-box program. What increases engagement for one employee, may be of little or no value to other employees. Thankfully, however, there is an abundance of hints, tips, and techniques available. This eBook is the result of 25 such ideas that came to my mind when I completed the exercise mentioned above. It is intended to be a short and informal compilation of ideas to help get your creative juices flowing. Hopefully you can adopt or adapt at least one idea to the benefit of your company and your employees. Good luck!

1. INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETINGS AND INVOLVE EMPLOYEES WHEN POSSIBLE.

It's no secret: bad meetings suck. They drain energy and stifle creativity. A recent search on Amazon.com for *effective meetings* returned more than 8,500 results—proof that bad meetings are a big problem. Don't let bad meetings zap your team!

A Dozen Ways to Help Your Meetings Thrive



1. Prepare and distribute an agenda *ahead of time*; ask staff if they have anything to add.
2. Schedule meetings when employees are most alert. For most people, Monday mornings and Friday afternoons are a big no-no! When possible allow staff to choose the day and time.
3. Rotate meeting rooms from time to time in order to provide a change of scenery; consider holding meetings outdoors when weather permits.
4. Use specifics and refrain from delivering emotional or political messages. Facts and figures always work better than assumptions and guesstimations.
5. Seek feedback from staff prior, during, and after the meeting.
6. Invite guest speakers and spectators.
7. Allow employees the option of acting as facilitators.
8. Assign a team member to take and distribute meeting minutes.
9. Start meetings with a game or contest to build energy, excitement, and interest.
10. Get the audience laughing to capture (and hold) their attention.
11. Use flipcharts, slide presentations, props, quizzes, pictures, and exercises to keep things interesting.
12. Remember that you can never go wrong with food and beverages.

2. USE THE RECRUITING PROCESS TO INCREASE EMPLOYEE OWNERSHIP AND ENHANCE SKILLS.

Résumé Screening

Résumé screening is an opportunity for you to teach your staff what to look for in potential candidates as well as what red flags to avoid. As employees show competence, consider delegating the screening process to trusted team members in order to promote employee ownership—and free up your time!

Interview Shadowing and Group Interviews

You may not be in need of a permanent sidekick, but allowing employees to sit in on interviews provides you with yet another chance to help employees build their skill sets while increasing employee ownership. This, and even group interviews, tells employees that you put serious consideration into your hiring process and that you value their opinions.

Referral Bonus

Successful recruiters have long known that referrals are one of the top sources of quality candidates. Implementing an incentive program to reward and encourage employees to “spread the word” is an effective way to increase employee ownership and strengthen your hiring process. Employees are more likely to help new hires succeed when they have been part of the recruiting process. After all, no one likes to be known as the person who gave a bad referral!



3. SEEK “UPWARD FEEDBACK” FROM EMPLOYEES—IT MAY BE A REALITY CHECK.

Traditionally it is the manager who conducts their subordinates performance reviews, but do you have the guts to allow employees to give you a review? What about grading your performance and submitting the results anonymously to your superior *before* you get a chance to review the responses?

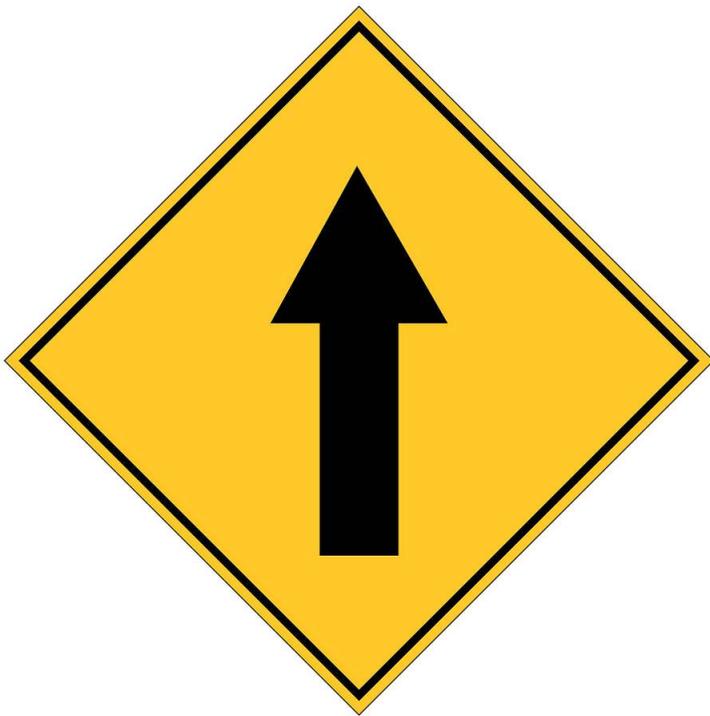
“Upward Feedback” not only increases employee engagement, but it also helps you identify other factors which may be contributing to lower levels of employee satisfaction and performance.

Six Steps for Effective Feedback

1. Create a short survey which measures important areas such as job satisfaction, training, recognition, leadership style, etc.
2. Meet with staff and explain the survey process. Be sure to stress the importance of *professional* and *honest* feedback.
3. Provide staff with the survey and permit them to submit it anonymously. Allowing them to turn it in directly to your superior works best.
4. Review the results and develop a plan of action.
5. Share the results and discuss your proposed plan of action with your team. Ask for their feedback and make any needed adjustments.
6. Work the plan, monitor progress and, a year later, do it all over again.

P.S.

Online survey companies such as Zoomerang (www.zoomerang.com) can automate the survey process and, depending on usage, you may qualify for free use.



4. REMEMBER THAT SOCIALIZING IS GOOD FOR TEAMWORK AND THAT TEAMWORK IS GOOD FOR BUSINESS.

Creating opportunities for employees to bond outside the office can make a significant difference in how well the employees bond inside the office. There are weeks when employees spend more time with their co-workers than they do with their own families, and the close confines of a cubicle environment can cause employees to get on each other's nerves as they race to hit goal, stay on budget, and meet deadline.

Getting together outside of work, for non-work-related reasons, can help relieve that pressure by providing the team with a chance to play together, laugh together, and get to know one another a little more. It's harder for employees to get mad at each other when they were cracking jokes and slapping high fives the night before.

Types of Groups

Team, department, division, company-wide, etc. Create chances for the employee's family to get involved too.

Types of Events

Baseball games, picnics, murder mysteries, bowling, zoos, fairs, laser tag, disc golf, concerts, cookouts, volunteer opportunities, dinner trains, mazes, etc. Be creative and ask your staff for ideas.

And Remember ...

Group events are best attended when held on the company's time and dollar. If you can't provide either, at least coordinate the event. Or better yet, create an employee-driven committee to plan the outings.



5. VOLUNTEER PROGRAMS BRING TEAMS TOGETHER, STRENGTHEN COMPANY BRAND, AND BUILD CHARACTER.

Employee Volunteer Programs, commonly referred to as EVPs, can have a positive impact on your business, your employees, and your community. In fact, a 2006 Deloitte/Points of Light Volunteer IMPACT Survey found that 63 percent of volunteers believed volunteering had a positive impact on their career.

While EVPs provide socializing opportunities for your staff, they also have two valuable side effects. First, they help enhance the public image of the company. But be careful—volunteer efforts should never be set up just to grab a quick headline; in fact doing so may backfire. Secondly, volunteer efforts teach staff the value of giving back to the community and those around them, which in turn can have a significant influence on an employee's character.

Whoa ... From the President?

Consider going all out with your EVP by becoming a certifying organization for the U.S. President's Volunteer Service Award. How do you think your employee would feel receiving an award directly from the White House?

Volunteer Resources and Links

Research and Articles: www.pointsoflight.org

President's Award: www.presidentialserviceawards.gov

Volunteer Opportunities: www.volunteermatch.org



6. AN “EMPLOYEE EYE” ON POLICIES AND PROCEDURES CAN BOOST BUY-IN AND PREVENT FUTURE HEADACHES.



Employees are much more likely to support policies and procedures when they have been given an opportunity to provide input. And, one way of encouraging staff to champion new policies and procedures is to allow employees to review proposed changes *before* the changes go live.

Employees Can ...

- Point out potential roadblocks and pitfalls.
- Comment on perceived team reaction.
- Identify resistance that a new policy might face.
- Find a better way of accomplishing the objective. Imagine that.

Occasionally the individuals drafting policies may not fully understand the impact the changes will have on the frontline, and getting staff input upfront can prevent numerous revisions and headaches. This is another area where an employee-driven committee can work wonders.

Take Time to Explain the “Why”

Some policies and procedures leave little room for negotiation. These are usually the “because it’s the law” variety. If you are dealing with a must-have policy, make sure to explain the “why.” Too many policies are implemented with a “because I said so” attitude which does little for employee buy-in and oftentimes leads to feelings of resentment from staff.

7. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE MANY BENEFITS HIDING IN THE JOB SHADOWS.

Up Shadowing

Groom employees for upward growth by allocating time for staff to shadow the people that they report to. Many workers probably wonder what their boss *really* does all day, and teaching them the importance of that monthly Widget Report may be a real eye-opener.

Down Shadowing

Take a break from the rigors of managerial life and camp out with staff for a day. Rotate from employee to employee to get a feel for life on the frontline. What challenges are they experiencing? How can the job be improved? This can give you a newfound appreciation for frontline work and will help build stronger relationships with staff. To truly win the respect of the team, get on phones and chip in. Can YOU do what you are asking them to do?

Cross Shadowing

Training employees on other positions in the department, or other positions within the company, can come in handy during periods of short staffing or rapid growth. It can also be a breath of fresh air for an employee who has been pounding the phone for two years straight. If an employee lists cross-training as one of his/her goals, be sure to take the comment seriously.

8. PROVIDING PROPER FEEDBACK IS CRITICAL TO EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT.

Employees need both positive and negative feedback in order to reach their true potential. For the sake of argument we'll call the positive feedback **PRAISE** and the negative feedback **CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM**. Unfortunately constructive criticism can have a devastating impact if communicated improperly, and many opportunities for praise often get overlooked.

Get Your Feedback a Thumbs-Up!

Be specific. Don't just say, "That call could have been better." Provide details. For example, "I think if you had used more open-ended questions you may have been able to better understand the customer's frustration."

Don't hide behind e-mail. Technology has created a breed of wimps. If you have something tough or even great to say, take time to meet face-to-face. E-mail communication leaves too much open to interpretation and is very impersonal.

Criticize in private. Criticism is best given behind closed doors. Confronting employees in the presence of their peers can be extremely embarrassing for you and the employee. In fact, doing so may cause the employee to focus more on who is listening than on what you are saying.

Praise in public. When an employee does a great job let everyone know. The team, the department, the company, the customers. If you walk by and observe an employee on a good call, stop right there and toot the horn!



9. ATTENTION FROM THE TOP-DOG CAN BE REWARDING, ENCOURAGING, AND APPRECIATED.

One of the most underutilized forms of motivation is recognition and attention directly from the top-dog. The CEO. The owner. The head honcho. The big kahuna.

Personalized Attention

Finding opportunities to get personalized attention for your department and employees can boost the confidence of staff and also increase their appreciation for the company. And it doesn't always have to be work related. Some CEOs take employees out to lunch to celebrate anniversaries, birthdays, and other special occasions, or for no special occasion at all. Many employees value this personalized time.

How Far Up the Ladder Can You Go?

In large companies it can be very difficult to get time with the top-dog, so if you can't get the CEO, go as high up the food chain as you can ... Vice President, Director, Regional Manager, etc.

Oh, and any time you can involve the Board, be sure to do so. You'll thank yourself later.



10. CONTINUOUS TRAINING IS IMPORTANT TO MAINTAINING AND RETAINING A HIGH-CALIBER WORKFORCE.

Ongoing training is critical to your employees' (and your company's) long-term success. Sadly, many companies overlook the value of having a training budget due to the mistaken belief that training is an unnecessary expense. Nothing could be further from the truth. Training is an investment in your employees, which in turn is an investment in your business. If you want your company to grow, your employees have to grow too.

Creating an ongoing training program doesn't have to break the bank. While some companies can afford to spend thousands of dollars creating internal universities and bringing in outside speakers, those on a shoestring budget may have to resort to more creative and inexpensive options.

Four Low-Cost Ways to Keep the Mind in Shape

Trade Publications. Chances are you already subscribe to several industry magazines and journals, but why let the publications collect dust when you're done reading them? Push them out to the floor! For extra-credit discuss articles with staff.

Newsletters. Many training companies, industry associations, and other professional firms publish *free* newsletters that contain a wealth of information. Sign up today!

Webinars and Teleseminars. These are a cost-effective way to train many employees at one time as you can often pay one fee for unlimited participants. Search the Internet to find freebies.

Blogs. Many professionals (lawyers, human resource gurus, industry experts, etc.) are using blogs and other social media tools to share their expertise. Once you come across a blog you like, share and discuss the insightful posts with staff.



11. MANAGING THE BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A JOB AND A CAREER CAN HELP EMPLOYEE AND EMPLOYER ALIKE.

People view employment one of two ways, either as a job or as a career. Jobs generally pay the bills and pass time and employees might not enjoy what they do. A career also pays bills and passes time, but it is normally something that the employees enjoy—it's their life's work. Their vocation.

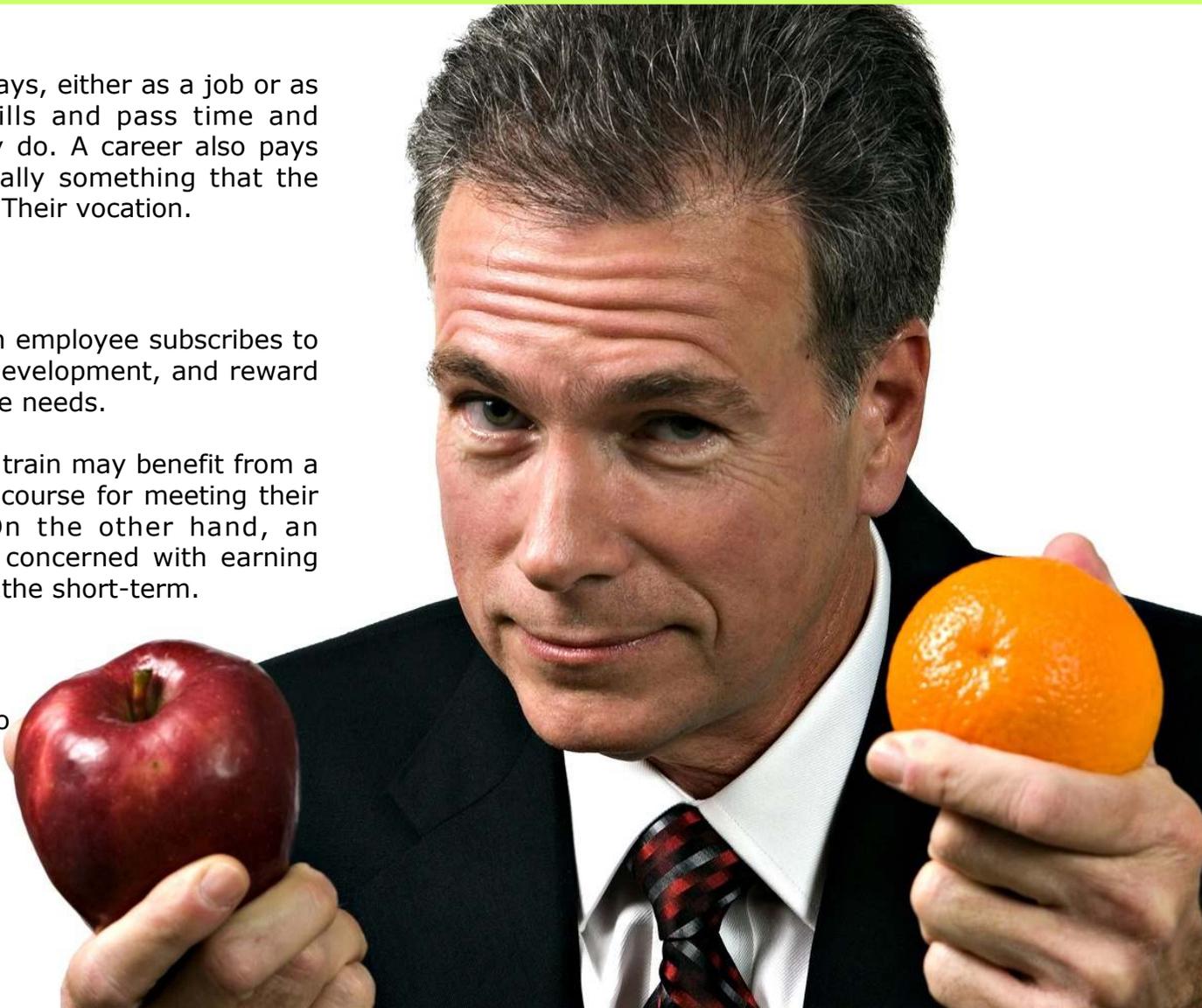
Apples and Oranges

Identifying the thought process that an employee subscribes to is important when gearing retention, development, and reward strategies based on individual employee needs.

For example, individuals on the career train may benefit from a career track that helps keep them on course for meeting their long-term goals and objectives. On the other hand, an employee in job-mode may be more concerned with earning additional time-off and extra money in the short-term.

Whoa!

Never assume that an employee who shows up for a job, won't stay for a career. Some employees have a change of heart after becoming successful at their "job."



12. BEING LINE-LEADER BOOSTS CONFIDENCE AND POINTS OUT POTENTIAL.

Leadership roles—no matter how minor—are highly valued chances to shine. In the call center we need to be on the lookout for chances to let our employees lead the line. How powerful do you think it would be for an employee to hear “you’re in charge” when the manager is stepping out for the afternoon?

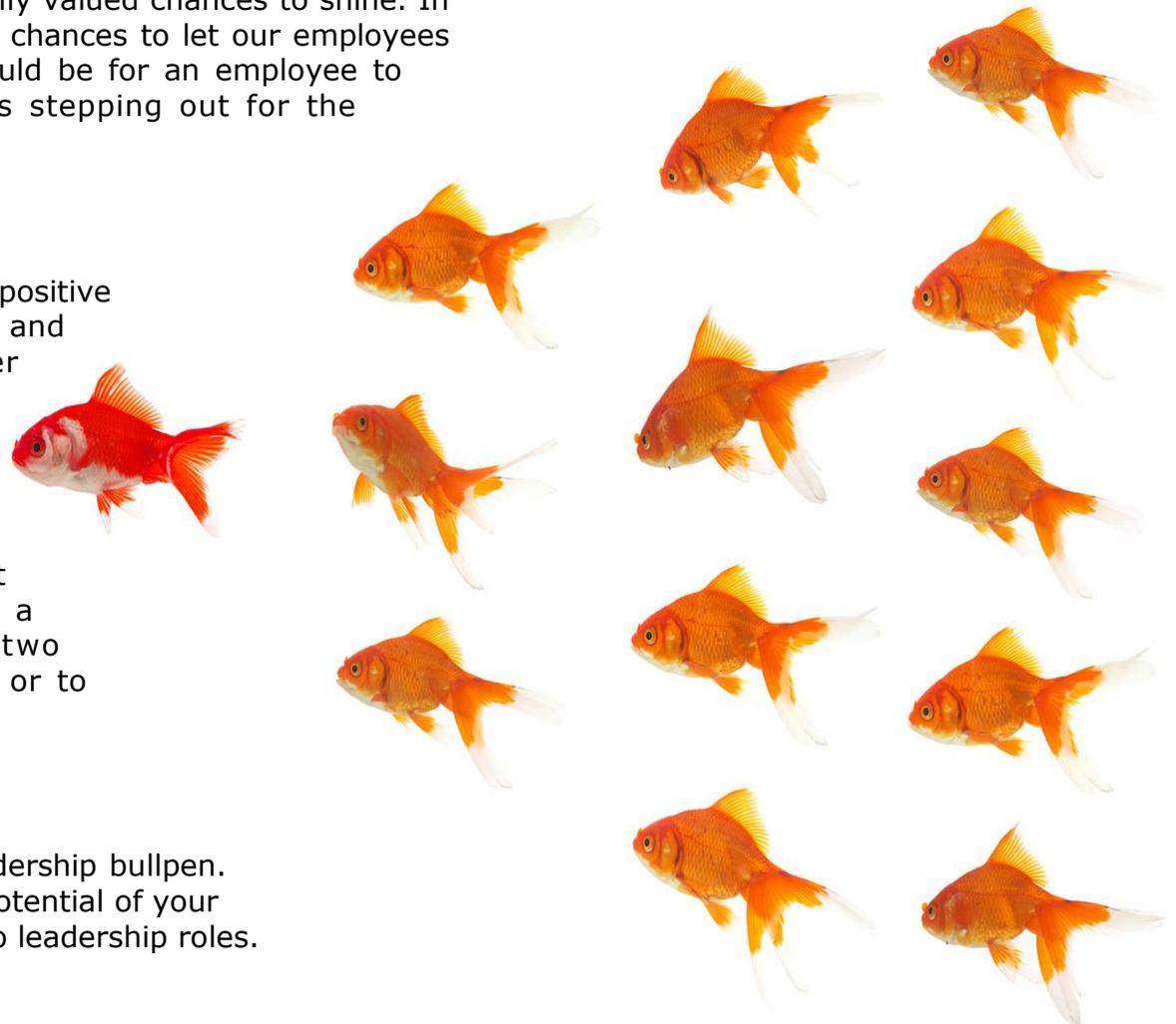
Remember Grade School

Even small leadership roles can have significant positive impact. Think back to 3rd grade for a minute and reflect on how great it felt when the teacher picked you to be line leader. Now help staff feel that same way!

For instance, instead of you representing the department during new hire orientations, why not ask a member of your staff? Or, what about assigning a member of your team to serve as a new hire’s mentor; as a liaison between two departments; to run a contest; to post stats; or to serve on an employee-driven committee?

Stock the Bullpen

Never overlook an opportunity to stock your leadership bullpen. You can gain a lot of insight into the leadership potential of your employees by observing how well they respond to leadership roles. Always be ready to groom the next team lead!



13. CREATIVE CONTESTS BRING FUN AND EXCITEMENT TO THE WORKPLACE.

Get Staff Involved!

Contests are an exciting way to add fun and laughter to the workday and one thing that employees tend to enjoy more than winning a contest, is participating in the planning and development process. You might be amazed at how creative staff can be when they aren't glued to a headset. Developing a contest committee or assigning employees to specific months are both excellent options for getting employees involved in the creation process.

Get Outside the Box!

Don't be afraid to hold a contest that has nothing to do with productivity. For instance, one of the more creative contests that I've witnessed had staff guessing "who's who" from the group's baby pictures. It certainly wasn't designed to boost calls per hour, but it produced a lot of laughs and brought excitement to an otherwise stressful day.

Get Off the Phone!

Contests that provide employees with a quick minute or two off of the phone are a great way to break up the daily grind. For example, you could have a "steal the balloon" contest where employees get up each time they close a deal and take the balloon from whoever currently has it. The person possessing the balloon at pre-defined times wins prizes.

Also try tic-tac-toe beanbag toss, putt-putt golf, dart boards, trashcan basketball, and anything else that you can think of that requires staff to get out of their seats.

14. CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STAFF TO PINCH-HIT—THEY MIGHT HIT A HOMERUN!

Many employees would welcome the opportunity to lend a helping hand, so don't be afraid to delegate one of your projects or tasks. Someone on your team might be a whiz at spicing up spreadsheets, reports, and presentations; or they might appreciate taking a break from the phones in order to run a package over to another department.

Too many managers are afraid to delegate, but doing so can truly help your staff (and you) grow. Delegation can be a one-time occurrence or an ongoing assignment. And don't worry about losing control, you're still responsible for the end result!

Four Tips for Effective Delegation

1. Be clear and concise when explaining your expectations and check the employee's understanding. Don't assume he/she knows.
2. Define the employee's responsibility and level of authority.
3. Ensure the employee understands the timeframe and monitor progress, but be careful not to micro-manage.
4. If the employee gets frustrated or is about to give up, step in and help him/her overcome the roadblock. Resist the temptation to take back the task, as doing so will only diminish the employee's confidence.



15. AWARD PROGRAMS GIVE CREDIT WHERE CREDIT IS DUE AND SHOW YOUR APPRECIATION.

A formal awards program not only rewards employees for a job well done, but it also increases their level of confidence. Employees who have their cubicles lined wall to wall with certificates and awards seem to be happier, more productive, and more appreciative of their job—not to mention more successful. “Employee of the Month” is by far the most common award, and in some companies the only award, but a well-rounded program works best.



Ideas to Help Your Awards Program Shine

Create a variety of awards. Find ways to recognize different skill sets, but don't diminish accomplishments and achievements by creating an award for everyone.

Use different types of awards. Certificates, plaques, trophies, ribbons, acrylics, medals, etc. Who has the “Employee of the Month” lava lamp on their desk this month?

Get beyond hard metrics. Try having staff vote for the “Cleanest Desk” or “Teammate of the Month.”

Vary timeframes. Monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, yearly, etc.

Recognize milestones and anniversaries. 5,000th call, 1,000th sale, 5-year anniversary, etc.

Don't be a cheapskate. Make certain your awards are something the employee will be proud of. For example, when using paper awards be sure to spring for the certificate paper.

Make awards a big deal. Formally present awards and do so with enthusiasm and applause; never just drop an award off in an employee's inbox. For added effect, secretly invite the employee's family when the occasion warrants it.

16. FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING OPTIONS HELP EMPLOYEES STRIKE A BETTER WORK/LIFE BALANCE.

Four Scheduling Tips for Improving Balance

1. Set Their Own Hours. If you can meet business needs while allowing employees to set their own schedule, why wouldn't you?

2. Have a Choice in Schedules. If you can't permit employees to set their own schedule, consider giving them a choice of schedules or shifts. For example starting at 8:30 a.m. (instead of 8:00 a.m.) may allow working parents to drop their child off at school in the morning.

3. Offer Compressed Workweeks. Instead of five 8-hour days, would four 10-hour days work better? The extra day off is a huge benefit to employees who can use the additional free day to run errands and schedule appointments. Allowing the extra day off to fall on a Monday or Friday can provide the added bonus of a three-day weekend. Compressed workweeks also save employees money (gas, dry cleaning, etc.) which will put more funds in their pocket—another win for the employee.

4. Consider Flextime. A flextime policy provides employees with the option of making up time rather than using vacation, sick time, or PTO. For instance, if an employee has a doctor appointment scheduled, perhaps he/she could make up the two hours by taking half-hour lunch breaks throughout the week. Doing so allows employees to save benefit time for real vacations. And, cashing in unused paid time off is another bonus. For you, which makes more sense when it comes to hitting goal—is your team more or less productive when an employee works 36 hours instead of 40 hours?



17. CHANGE THE TITLE OF THE POSITION AND CHANGE THE MINDSET OF THE EMPLOYEE.



Account
Analyst

Do titles matter? You bet they do! Want proof? Read each of the following out loud:

First ...

"I'm a customer service rep with ABC Company."

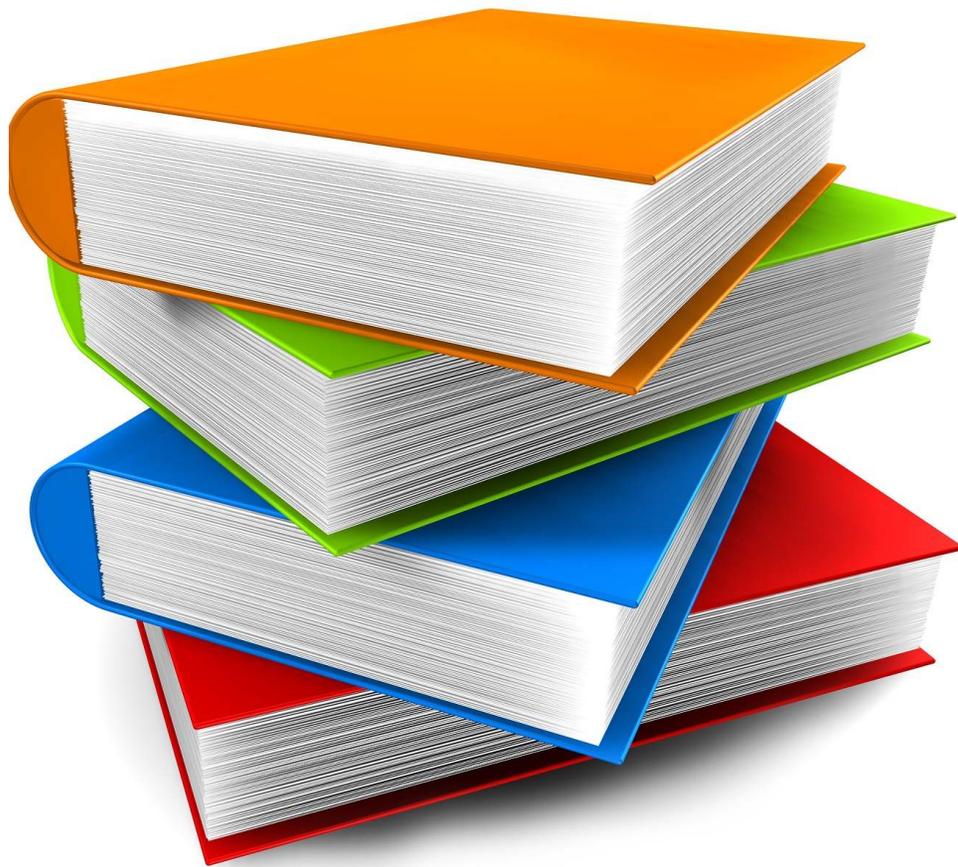
Then ...

"I'm an account analyst with ABC Company."

Now ask yourself, which one sounded more professional? More intriguing? If you had to tell a stranger what you did for a living, which would you prefer?

You don't have to turn a position into something that it's not, however a simple play on words can help your HELP WANTED ad stand out, change the way the position is viewed, and also help build your company's brand. After all, how you see your employees sets the stage for how they see themselves. Do you see *phone reps* or *account analysts*?

18. CREATE A LEARNING LIBRARY THAT ALLOWS EMPLOYEES TO GROW AT THEIR OWN PACE.



What would it mean to your company if each of your employees acquired a new skill every month? What would be the cumulative affect on the individual employee? I'm guessing good things for both. Most frontline employees will not purchase CDs, DVDs, and books on their own, but they may take advantage of materials if available.

Building on a Budget

If you think assembling a learning library is too expensive, it doesn't have to be. Companies such as Amazon and eBay offer excellent ways to purchase items at discount prices. You can also find great bargains at your local used bookstore or at rummage sales. I know one company that created a library of more than 100 quality books for less than \$100!

Increased Retention/Application

One amazing thing about self-paced learning is that because it is voluntary, the likelihood of application and retention increases exponentially because there is a true desire to acquire the knowledge. In fact, one of the greatest figures in history was largely known for his superb ability to self-educate: The 16th President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln.

Reward and Recognize Learners

Find creative ways to reward those who constantly strive to acquire new skills. For instance, you could create a "Skill Builder" award that recognizes employees each time they read five books.

19. A ROUND OF APPLAUSE CAN BOOST CONFIDENCE AND BRING A SMILE TO THE FACE.

Close Your Eyes and Imagine This ...

You're being presented an award in front of a thousand people. You gracefully make your way on stage and deliver a stellar acceptance speech. You finish, wait for the applause and ... nothing! Dead silence. {Gulp!}

Okay, Now This ...

You're being presented an award in front of a thousand people. You gracefully make your way on stage and deliver a stellar acceptance speech. You finish, wait for the applause and ... the crowd goes wild! {Whew!}

Your Preference?

Which made you feel better? Which increased your confidence? Which made you feel more proud of receiving the award? Don't leave your employee on stage without a thunderous round of applause!

If someone breaks a record, closes a big sale, or achieves a major milestone, rally the troops and put your hands together. There's no need to wait for the end-of-the-month team meeting after the feat has long been forgotten. With applause, timing is everything.

And remember, you don't need an award to put your hands together. I was in a restaurant once when a waitress dropped a glass on the floor. Her co-workers quickly gathered and began clapping. The waitress instantly smiled and the patrons began cheering too. Through a simple round of applause these workers had found a way to reduce the stress associated with making a minor mistake.



20. WORK ENVIRONMENTS GREATLY AFFECT ATTITUDE AND PRODUCTIVITY.

Positive work environments have a significant impact on how engaged employees are on the job—just ask the staff at Google. The lighting. The color. The smell. The feel. The sounds. The design. It all matters. Take time to create and manage a positive, productive, and inviting workplace, and you will reap the benefits of increased productivity and happier, healthier employees.

10 Ways to Maintain a Productive Work Environment

- Create cubicle etiquette guidelines and share with staff. (This is a great opportunity to get their input on a policy.)
- Add foliage to the office and permit employees to keep plants at their desks. Add a touch of humor with Chia Pets.
- Be mindful of color. There are warm and cold colors.
- Ensure workstations are ergonomically correct so that employees can work comfortably.
- Spice up cubicles with lava lamps, desk waterfalls, fish tanks, and framed posters.
- Provide training on workplace organization and teach your staff how to tame the piles of files!
- Allow employees to play music and rock out (while being mindful of those around them, of course).
- Let employees add a personal touch to their workspace by bringing in pictures and desk toys.
- Decorate for holidays, birthdays, sporting events, etc.
- See page **27** to really get things going.



21. GET TOGETHER AND SAY “CHEESE!”



People have an underlying human need to belong, and group photos literally show them that they do. Formal photos work well, but social, company, and volunteer events are also great opportunities to snap a few shots.

Ahh ... the Memories!

Consider organizing your company pictures in an electronic photo album so that staff can view them online, or keep a physical album on display in the breakroom. This can provide new hires with a peek into the past while allowing tenured employees a chance to reminisce. The laughs and conversations that come up when dusting off old memories are priceless.

The Web; The News

You can use photos in other ways too, such as on the company's website, in company newsletters, or even in your local paper. Don't be afraid to "show off" your work family!

22. HAVING EMPLOYEES DEFINE THEIR CONTRIBUTION COULD BE CRITICAL TO YOUR MISSION.



Mission statements have become little more than nicely framed décor hanging in the lobbies of most companies. The sad reality is that most managers and supervisors would be clueless if you asked them to recite their company's mission statement. C'mon, you know it's true!

If mission statements aren't that important, why have one? After all, isn't this the reason that the company exists? It's why you do what you do. It's your "thing." Help employees find purpose and meaning in their work by helping them understand and identify with the company's mission. Help them see the big picture.

You Could Try This ...

Review the company's mission statement during interviews and ask the candidates how they can help the company fulfill its mission. This sends the message that the company is passionate about its work and expects the same from its employees.

... or This!

Keep the mission on the minds of employees by asking staff members to write down on a piece of paper how they will contribute. Then, have their responses typed and framed so that each employee can display their "contribution" on their desk. Not only does it serve as a constant source of inspiration for the mission at hand, but it also makes for interesting conversation. And, if it's good enough for them, then it is good enough for you!

23. GAMES AND TOYS CAN REDUCE STRESS, INCREASE HAPPINESS, AND BE A WHOLE LOT OF FUN.

What does a bucket of Legos, Silly Putty, a pool table, and a checkerboard have in common? They are all tools that you can use to increase the level of fun employees are having at work. And let's face it, everyone loves to have fun—especially at work!

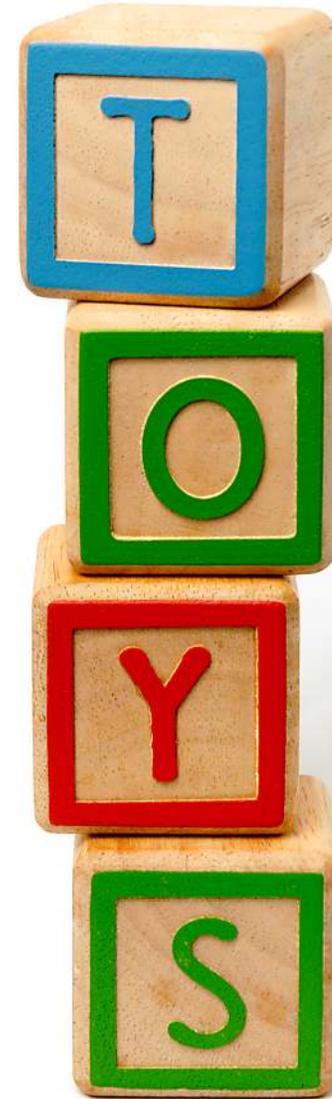
Where Are You Taking a Break?

You don't always need a contest to take advantage of the benefits that games and fun activities have to offer. For instance, where would you rather take a break—in the cold, sterile breakroom, or in the super-awesome breakroom with a ping pong table? And wouldn't it be neat if there were board games in the lunch room so that you and another employee could enjoy a game of Scrabble over the lunch hour?

Be creative! Some companies have designed game rooms complete with foosball, dartboards, beanbags, and video games. In other companies you may even see a piano in the lobby or a basketball hoop in the parking lot.

Laughing and Smiling Encouraged

By creating opportunities for employees to have fun, you benefit the company by creating a happier, less stressed, and more positive workforce. Communication will improve. Creativity will improve. Attendance will improve. Once employees start linking the workplace to positive feelings of fun, look out!



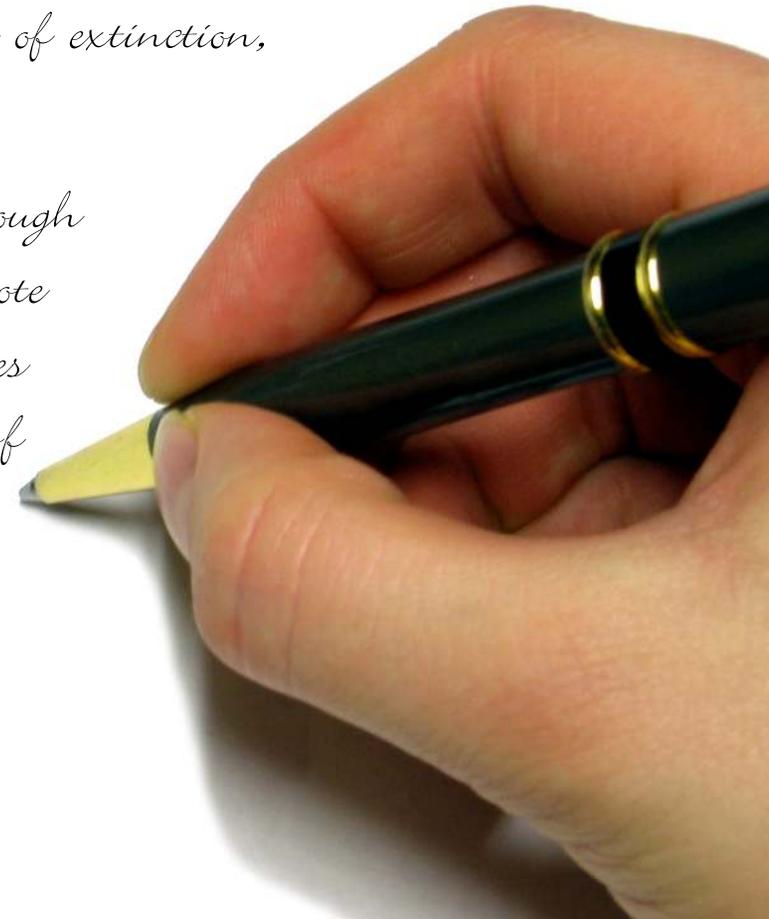
24. HANDWRITTEN NOTES ARE A RARE TREAT THAT WIELD A LOT OF POWER.

When Ray Tomlinson sent the first electronic communication from one computer to another in 1971, he became the father of what we commonly refer to today as e-mail. Ray probably never intended to push handwritten notes to the verge of extinction, but it's happening nonetheless.

In the workplace, managers are quick to send their praise through e-mail; however, taking the time to compose a handwritten note will be much more meaningful—and effective. Some employees find the handwritten sentiments to be a huge source of inspiration and motivation and will hold on to notes for years.

A Few Tips for Great Notes

- Keep them short—three to four sentences work fine.
- Practice your penmanship and write neatly.
- For extra impact use notecards imprinted with the company's logo.



25. EMPLOYEES LOVE GETTING THEIR HANDS ON COOL COMPANY MERCHANDISE.

Many companies stock a marketing vault with promotional goodies such as pens, shirts, hats, coffee mugs, and other branded items which are commonly used as giveaways for existing and prospective clients. But remember, employees also appreciate having something—anything—with their company's logo on it.

The Four-Year Wait

While conducting an employee satisfaction survey once, I asked employees if they would like to have company shirts. Nearly 80 percent of the employees answered "yes." One employee added, "I've been wanting one of those for four years!"

If your employees want company apparel, consider subsidizing the cost or at least take orders if the company can't foot the bill. Just think about the exposure you'll receive from the "walking" advertisements!

Hey, I Like Umbrellas!

Branded items also make good contest prizes. You may be shocked to learn that a snazzy umbrella can double calls for a day or that an imprinted leather padfolio can boost quality assurance scores.



Call to Action!

Do you have a hint, tip, or technique that you would like to share with others? If so, we want to hear from you!

To have your idea considered for publication in a future volume, please e-mail Skills World at info@skillsworld.org.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Gary Jensen is the founder and chief learning officer of Skills World. As a trainer, coach, and consultant, he has developed a sixth sense for helping others achieve their dreams and fulfill their potential.

Over the years Gary has worked for one of the world's largest banks, a leading accounts receivables management firm, a non-profit student loan lender, an international trade association, a small collection agency, and a financial services firm where he held such titles as collector, supervisor, trainer, instructor, manager, and director. He also draws from his earlier years which are laden with lessons from time spent as a grocery bagger, toothbrush assembler, vacuum cleaner salesman, insulation installer, butcher, landscaper, and warehouse worker.

Gary studied business at Hamilton College in Des Moines, Iowa where he received a degree in business management. To further enhance his skills he continuously trains in such disciplines as: performance improvement; customer relationship management; life and business coaching; teambuilding; branding; strategic planning; credit and collections; and management strategies, among others.

He has appeared as a guest speaker at events such as the *National Council for Higher Education Loan Program's Debt Management Conference*, *ACA International's Annual Convention and Exposition*, *ACA's Fall Form*, and *Credit and Collection Business Academy*. His articles have been featured in *Collector Magazine*, *Consumer Trends*, *Management Trends*, *Collect! Magazine*, and *see} Magazine*.

In addition to his successful business initiatives, Gary enjoys spending time with his family and friends, including his wife and two wonderful children. He is an avid runner who enjoys chasing down personal records and is a self-proclaimed fan of all things good.

You can find him ranting and raving on his popular blog www.ThePickleFork.com and follow his tweets on Twitter at www.twitter.com/gjens.

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