

2017 Totem Awards



Category: Internal communications

Entry Name: Get in the game! Employee survey participation drive

Project Statement/Background:

Every year, the Washington Office of Financial Management requires all agencies to survey their employees to gauge the level of employee engagement. Except for a few questions at the end, agencies are not allowed to customize the survey, so staff see largely the same survey year after year.

Combine the survey's predictability with general survey fatigue (employees are surveyed about other topics throughout the year), and we have an annual challenge: How do we entice employees to complete the survey?

Employment Security not only *wants* to know how engaged our employees are; it *needs* to know. The agency uses the results to make improvements and to set strategic goals, and the Governor's Office uses them to report progress on its "[Employer of Choice](#)" goal. Visibility is high.

Situation/Planning:

Employment Security has struggled to persuade its staff to participate in the annual survey. Over time, survey response rates have gradually climbed from 43 percent in 2011 to 53 percent in 2013 to 56 percent in 2014. In 2015, following layoffs and many agency changes, we made a concerted effort to encourage even greater participation to get as accurate a picture as possible of the engagement level of our employees.

The Communications Office created a series of emails from the commissioner, encouraging staff to complete the survey and offering gift cards as incentives, donated by agency leaders. The effort was a success and ESD's response rate of 77 percent was 5 points higher than that executive branch total and 21 points higher than the 56 percent response rate in 2014. In 2016, we incorporated a catchy theme and increased participation another seven points to 84 percent in 2016.

As the date of the 2017 survey neared, Employment Security's communications staff met and pondered how to overcome survey skepticism and build enthusiasm. Based on input from our Employee Engagement Advisory Team, we knew there were several reasons people might abstain from the survey—and three rose to the top:

- Fear their comments were not truly anonymous;
- Skepticism that their feedback was used in a meaningful way to improve agency culture; and
- A general sense it wasn't worth their time.

We had created and implemented a successful campaign the last two years and knew we needed to do something different to grab and hold employees' attention so we could continue to increase participation. We threw some ideas back and forth and finally landed one in the end zone: sports. We would capitalize on a sports-crazed staff to rouse some interest.

The survey opened at the beginning of October: football season. Perfect. We capitalized on the already-building frenzy. However, since not everyone is a football fan, we decided to make the campaign friendly to fans of all sports. Our motto: Get in the game!

For two prior years, Employment Security leaders donated gift cards employees could win in a drawing if they completed the survey. Staff reported that they liked the incentive, so we again asked our senior leaders to pony up some cash. They happily complied.

Employment Security has offices around the state, so we designed our campaign to reach and engage employees near and far. We asked them to send photos of themselves and their colleagues celebrating their favorite teams: wearing jerseys, attending office tailgate parties, etc. We promised to share the photos throughout the agency.

Goal:

Our goal was to beat ESD's 84 percent survey completion rate in 2016. While a goal of the survey itself is to get a high level of positive feedback, the goal of this campaign was to simply increase the completion rate since we will not receive engagement scores until mid-December 2017.

Implementation/Execution:

The survey was open for one month, and we stayed on the offense the entire time.

Email communications

We made our first pitch on Sept. 21 with an all-staff email from the employee engagement manager, Billie Wright. Billie holds classes for staff around the state, so she's well known and well liked. We composed the emails for her.

We kept the emails coming — one every week — including a "Last chance to get in the game!" email on the final day of the survey. We played the entire series: a total of seven emails. Once we started receiving photos from staff, we included one or two in each email and made sure to request more.

Each email also included a brief explanation of the survey, an assurance that it was 100 percent anonymous, and instructions for how to win a gift card. The first week's card was worth \$100, next \$75, then \$50 and finally \$25. We used a random generator to draw the names each week. The earlier you entered the more chances you had to win because you had a chance to win every week from the date you entered (previous week's winners and executive team excluded). Each week, we announced the winner from the previous week and thanked them for "Getting in the game!"

All emails came from Billie except for the second, which came from the agency commissioner: Dale Peinecke. We intentionally brought Dale off the sidelines so that he could link to a ["Commissioner's Cast" video](#) showing him "getting in the game!"

Video

So as not to offend any staff member, Dale wore an XBOX 360 jersey, remaining team neutral in the video. He described how we used survey results to improve the agency over the last several years and reminded staff how vital their feedback was to our future success.

"This year, let's go for the goal!" Dale said. "Hit it out of the park! Go for the three-pointer! Spike it over the net! Use whatever sports analogy you want – just get in the game!"

Rotating image on the intranet home page

When we published the Commissioner's Cast video on the intranet, we advertised it with a still-shot from the video on the home page. The image linked directly to the video and rotated automatically with images advertising other intranet content.

Readerboard slide

The agency recently purchased a television monitor for the foyer in its headquarters building. Communications Office staff maintain the PowerPoint slideshow content. We created a colorful and eye-catching slide advertising the survey and kept it up as long as the survey remained open.

Outcomes/Evaluation:

We slam-dunked it! We beat last year's completion rate by a full 2 percent for a final score of 86 percent. Out of 1,422 employees, 1,222 completed the survey. Several offices from various areas of the state scored 100 percent participation rates.