

# Small to Medium Business



## Low Cost Employee Benefits on the Small Business Budget

By Dan Rice, PrintingForLess.com

**T**he perfect storm has arrived for employers in our country. A new generation of workers has arrived that need, want, and demand things to be different from the past. Our technology company located in a small town in southwest Montana realized that high wages alone would not attract and retain the 15-plus per quarter new hires it needed. Through research, employee surveys and lots of trial and error, we have found some low-cost but high-value benefits that make a difference.

### More to Life than Spreadsheets and E-mail

Work-life balance has become not only a buzz word but a demand for the current generation of employees. No longer are employees content to get a paycheck and a career; employees are now asking companies to help them achieve a balance between their interests and their work. Unfortunately, there is nowhere a business can go to buy “life balance insurance.” We decided to try the novel approach of asking our employees what was important to them. The answer was not that surprising. In a part of the country where a dog accompanying its owner to the bank or to the corner bar is not uncommon, canine companions are a part of everyday life. At our company, for example, over 75 percent of the employees own a dog and consider it an important member of their family. As a result, we implemented a dog friendly work place and have seen employee satisfaction and retention increase dramatically.

### Teach them Well

Many companies claim to hire knowledge workers but then don't give them opportunities to gain additional knowledge while on the job. Even in companies with initial training

programs, many forget the importance of increasing employee skills through ongoing learning opportunities. “Everyone agrees that a learning organization wins, so why don't companies keep their employees learning?” says Andrew Field, president of PrintingForLess.com. To that end, we have found that offering regularly scheduled training sessions on a variety of business topics and working with employees to define what they would like to have more information about has increased overall employee engagement.

### Give Employees a Career GPS

Employees in today's world want to know how to move forward with their careers. Having a roadmap for your employees' career path takes away the temptation to “leave for a better opportunity.” Therefore, every manager in our company is responsible for developing individual development plans for their employees that focus not only on skill development but on assisting them to move forward in their careers. The war for talent is not won once, but on an ongoing basis. We have found that by clearly defining where people are going with their careers, our employees are more satisfied and likely to stay with the company for the long term.

### The No Jerks Rule

Finally, the most important benefit we have found to give our employees is what we call the “no jerks rule.” Basically, when someone is hired at our company, we make one promise and that is you will not have to work with jerks. This takes the form of hiring only the best and acting quickly on low performers. Consequently, in our annual employee satisfaction surveys, our employees rank enjoyment of and respect for their co-workers higher than any other category.

So, next time you are struggling with coming up with new benefits to attract and retain the best and brightest, try something simple – ask your employees what is really important. You may be surprised to find that what they really want is some attention to their individual career and personal needs and the occasional pat on the back!

### About the Author

Dan Rice (drice@printingforless.com) is vice president, Corporate Affairs for PrintingForLess.com, the leader in the online, commercial printing industry, and its 195 employees who balance work and life in Livingston, Montana. Rice serves as legal counsel, IT manager, accounting manager, community relations manager and works extensively with the company's Human Resources department. He gained his HR experience running the daily operations of a multi-state staffing company and has interviewed over 10,000 job applicants in his career.