

what's working the power of giving



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by | **Robbie Hartman, CEBS**

Three local nonprofit organizations in Banff, Alberta are singing the praises of an employee-led wellness initiative that harnesses the power of giving. In 2017, an employee of Banff Hospitality Collective went to leadership with the idea of using the holiday spirit to help raise money for local nonprofits. Three years later, colleagues have come a-leaping to the “12 Days of Giving” initiative to the tune of \$12,000 of their own money—and counting.

“For a period of 12 days, employees are encouraged to donate to three amazing local charities—Bow Valley SPCA, YWCA Banff or KidSport,” said Heather Leier-Murray, human resources manager for Banff Hospitality Collective, a company that owns and operates 11 restaurants in Banff, Alberta. “Employees choose which charity receives their donation, and Banff Hospitality Collective matches 100% of all funds donated by staff.” To date, the amount donated by employees and the collective totals \$24,000.

A System of Anonymous Envelopes

Each restaurant within Banff Hospitality Collective promotes the 12 Days of Giving to its staff, but donations are completely voluntary. “Employee participation varies year to year, and that’s part of the beauty of the program,” Leier-Murray said. “It’s an opportunity for giving and making a difference in the local community, but it is 100% voluntary and there is no pressure to participate.”

To reduce internal and external pressure on employees and to facilitate donations of any amount, the restaurants use a system of anonymous envelopes. “The anonymous envelopes are used to encourage participation,” Leier-Murray said. “With the envelope system, we don’t know who donated or the amount—Nobody can see if someone donated \$1 or \$100.”

Employees mark the envelopes to select the charity of their choice, and each venue gathers all of the envelopes at the end of the 12 days. The head office collects the envelopes and then tallies the amount for each charity in order to arrange the matching funds from the collective.

Part of a Larger Goal

The 12 Days of Giving campaign fits into the larger goals of the Collective Community Commitment (CCC), a committee of Banff Hospitality Collective employees who volunteer their time to give back to the community. According to Leier-Murray, CCC sets goals in three categories—donations of time, donations of money and environmental responsibility—all of which support the company’s commitment to helping staff thrive in the community and helping the community to thrive.

Since December 2017, CCC has tallied 531 volunteer hours and \$83,526 in donations to local organizations. The 12 Days of Giving campaign plays a big role in this community outreach, but it is just one of many ways for employees to make a positive impact in Banff.

As one example, Banff Hospitality Collective closes all of its venues on the day of the staff holiday party. That day, on top of the party, employees can use their time off to participate in the Bow Valley SPCA Volunteer Day. A recent year saw 23 employees volunteer for a joint total of 135 hours in a single day.

In addition to the 12 Days of Giving and volunteer opportunities, the third prong of CCC’s community goals is environmental stewardship. Toward this end, Banff Hospitality Collective has eliminated plastic straws from all venues and educated staff and guests on the importance of reducing plastic. It also aims to divert organic waste from landfills to Banff’s centralized com-

posting facility through a composting program. And once a month, employees organize a two-hour cleanup that targets a different area of town to help keep Banff clean. “This initiative has seen overwhelming staff participation, with some employees bringing parents and children to help with the cleanup,” Leier-Murray said.

Key Takeaways and Organizational Benefits

Organizations looking to offer an initiative similar to the 12 Days of Giving should keep it simple and accessible, Leier-Murray said. It’s also important to tailor initiatives to the needs and abilities of employees. “We choose to use the anonymous envelopes because it allows employees to give what they can and because cash is the easiest way for our staff to donate,” she said.

This initiative is able to accomplish its goals without a separate budget, Leier-Murray noted. The people and culture coordinator for Banff Hospitality Collective administers the program and works closely with restaurant managers to promote the initiative, collect the donation envelopes and demonstrate gratitude to the staff for their donations.

The 12 Days of Giving campaign is communicated to employees in multiple ways, including via posters, team meet-

ings, word of mouth and scheduling software that has direct messaging capabilities.

Leier-Murray also noted the importance of having employees help with the initial setup as a way to make the initiative more meaningful. When employees provide their input into the process from the beginning, it can help to improve participation. “When the CCC was first being formed, employees helped to identify the local charities that we would consistently support, and those charities continue to resonate with employees, so they are more likely to donate and support the 12 Days of Giving initiative,” she said.

Employers that use initiatives like the 12 Days of Giving to tap into their employees’ spirit of giving can find their voice as an organization that makes a difference within its walls and in the broader community—and that will likely be music to the ears of any organization.

“We definitely hear from staff how much they appreciate the opportunities that Banff Hospitality Collective provides to get involved in the community, build community with each other and demonstrate the importance of environmental ambassadorship. Many people are attracted to work with us because of the commitment we have to building community.”

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