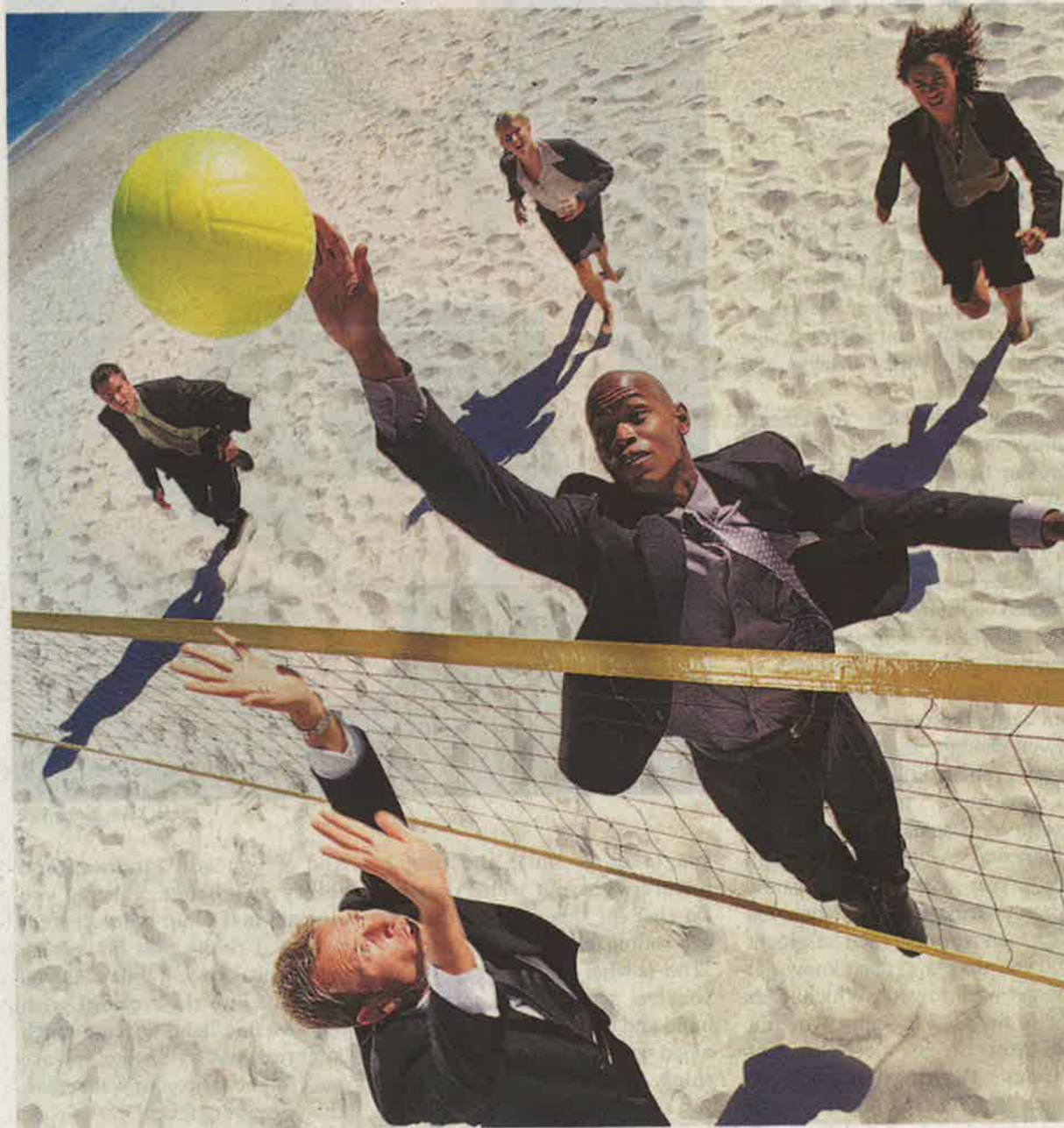


All in an off day's work

There are benefits to taking a corporate work day off



Many employers in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) shy away from taking a day off and going off on a corporate retreat or group training event for their staff.

They do not believe in shuttering their office for one day because it means money: salaries will have to be paid, but production and productivity ceases for the eight hours that everyone is away.

Even if companies do shut down and go off for the day, there is a tendency for it to end up being one big annual general meeting (AGM), or a massive gossip session that reinforces negative group-think among the various cliques in the office.

However, in this time of labour crunch and high wages, there are still hidden benefits for a well-organised and focused day off with your staff.

Firstly, you can use this opportunity to motivate your staff and also add value, albeit minimal, to their work. The other more subtle benefit is that by doing so, you would be able to get to know your staff's strengths better. In the long run, you will see a more productive and motivated workforce.

In addition, there are also psychological benefits for having a day off. The most obvious one is that the overall atmosphere in the office would be improved, as employees look forward to a short work week. The other would be that you may see an increase in productivity, as many staff would be eager to clear their work because they will be out of the office for one day in that week.

Understandably, budget will always be an issue when it comes to spending on extras like corporate training. One suggestion for SMEs is to use this opportunity to kill two birds with one stone.

It would be good for companies to combine training with a management retreat. The first half of the day, or even first two hours of the retreat, could be spent

sharing the company's vision with the staff and perhaps praising employees who have shown marked improvement.

Of course, employers have to go beyond general statements about the vision and mission of the company. They can try sharing simple things like the organisation's plans for the next six months in broad terms.

It would be good for all staff to see their purpose in the organisation. They might realise that their boss is not just some remote being, who has little or no interest in what they do.

This is also a good opportunity to single out staff who may need a little bit of encouragement to do well or better.

In addition, companies can think about providing their employees with useful training in skills such as business communication, or combining some fun activities with study sessions so that the day becomes educational as well entertaining.

What is more important about these sessions is that they give you a chance to expand the work range of your staff and also see the aptitude of your staff. A training session that lasts six to eight hours may seem short to you, but it allows employees to learn the importance of professional customer service and good business communication.

After all, everyone needs to learn how to communicate effectively. It may seem trivial, but these add-ons that employees bring to the office can make a huge difference to your company.

For example, what impression do you get when you receive a work e-mail with a smiley emoticon or a sign-off with a huge and colourful font? This will be an opportunity to let your staff understand the importance of professional business communication, and in turn add to the positive customer experience that people have when dealing with you.

Executive Appointments

You can also seize the chance to spot talent. Observe how an employee being considered for a promotion behaves outside his or her comfort zone as it can reveal a lot about the soft skills of that person.

Sometimes, a person who is good at his or her work could have poor people skills. While promoting him or her based on his work capability may seem like a good idea initially, his or her lack of soft skills and people skills could be the undoing of your organisation.

Observing the potential candidate on this occasion would either reaffirm your decision or allow you to reconsider the qualities that the candidate possesses.

Above all, be involved as much as you can when it comes to the planning of your company's day off. It will show commitment on your part as a business owner, and in turn lead your staff to feel and understand the importance of this day.

It will also show them how committed you are in their welfare. This is a win-win situation for all.

Article by Luenne Angela Choa, the co-founder of Hornbills Concepts and Communications, a start-up focused on effective communication, skills training and empowerment for SMEs and their staff.

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