For a florist in West Chester, Pa., improving workplace culture includes breaking bread.

Before the recession, Matlack Florist had a history of gathering the staff together at least once a year for a celebratory dinner at a local restaurant. However, when the economy took a hit and the owners, Bern Ebersole and Jen Matlack, understandably looked for costs to cut, that perk (and other nonessential shop traditions) fell by the wayside.

Last year, however, the dinner came back . . . to the delight of everyone at Matlack.

As part of a larger effort to improve communication among departments and enhance employees’ sense of on-the-job empowerment, the 37-year-old business reinstituted the annual dinner this spring, hosting a celebratory evening just for staff members (no spouses or family members) at a popular and historic inn.

“We went a couple of years without the dinner, and I think we [as a team] felt it,” said Kate Delaney, director of operations.

The purpose of the evening is simple: to connect with coworkers, including those you don’t work with on a daily basis, and recognize outstanding accomplishments in an atmosphere unrelated to work (with some seriously gourmet food). That’s why the dinner is limited to the shop’s 30 full- and part-time team members, Delaney said.

“It’s a night to celebrate each other, and what we’ve done, without any pressure to entertain other people (e.g. spouses and dates),” she said. “It’s fun to see each other out of the shop, and it’s a nice excuse to get dressed up.”

This year’s dinner was held in April, but the date isn’t fixed. In the past, it’s been held in January or during other relatively slow periods. At a different point in the year, the shop also hosts an outdoor picnic, to which families and partners are enthusiastically invited.

(Read more on how Matlack Florist has improved workplace culture, including an effort to institute open forum meetings that encourage communication across departments, in a future issue of Floral Management.)
THE HR FIX
TIME SUCK OR TIME WELL SPENT?

Q: My manager wants to start holding weekly all-staff meetings. I hate meetings! We’re a flower shop, not some huge corporation. Do we really need to take the time (and spend the money on wages) to meet weekly?

A: I can’t answer how often you should meet, but I can point out something else that’s important and missing from your perspective: These meetings are not about you! Instead, they’re about your employees and your responsibility to keep them informed and, most important, engaged. Business owners ask me all the time about hiring tips — questions to ask, ways to find the best candidates — but I wish more people would think seriously about existing employee engagement. It’s not about getting good employees in the door; it’s about getting them in the door every single day. Good all-staff meetings (more on that distinction in a second) can help, but so can small acts of recognition, like birthday cards and work anniversary notes, or a simple, personal question (“Hey! How is your mom doing?”). These things take time, sure, but make that effort, and you’ll start to bridge the employee-employer gap. As for all-staff meetings, they don’t have to be grand or button-down affairs. Keep them short, stick to an agenda (populated with items you’ve solicited from staff) and align them with your culture (throw in a contest occasionally or use the opportunity to publicly acknowledge wins to show your team members you notice and appreciate them).

The Fixer: Gienna Hecht is president and founder of Humanistic Consulting and is a featured speaker at SAF Amelia Island 2015 safnow.org/annual-convention.

SOCIAL MEDIA
REEL IN THE GRADS

> During the run-up to Mother’s Day and summer weddings, don’t forget another potential floral event, centered on a generation that just loves online sharing. Last year, Rick Rivers of A Floral Boutique in Ormond Beach, Fla., decided to capitalize on high school graduation season. On Facebook, Rivers held a drawing for the chance to win a free beach trip for the Fourth of July weekend (a covetable award he purchased at wholesale cost, around $79, from a friend in the vacation business). To enter, grads had to submit a photo showing themselves in a cap and gown and holding flowers from the shop.

This year, Rivers is expanding the grad promotion by starting earlier (around May 20 instead of May 30), paying to promote the Facebook post and marketing it to both college and high school students. He’s also changing the prize to a gift card from a local clothing store, which may be more attractive to the young audience.

“The prize is key,” said Rivers, who tries to have a drawing or contest for each major holiday during the year and justifies the cost of buying a prize (usually an investment of $25 to $100) by pointing to his average cost of acquiring a new customer: $100. “I’ve given away cruises, gift cards to other businesses. It’s not hard to find a deal when you start asking around.”

BENCHMARK
GO BEYOND THE TIE FOR FATHER’S DAY

> Poor Dad! Father’s Day spending pales in comparison to Mother’s Day gifting: The National Retail Federation reported last year that total spending for Father’s Day was $12.5 billion — $7.4 million less than consumers spent on Mother’s Day.

Nonetheless, when you break down Father’s Day spending — $113.80 per person, on average — the holiday looks more attractive, particularly if you can tie your promotion efforts to another local business. That shouldn’t be hard: Popular gifts for pops include experiences such as sporting events or dinner (43 percent of respondents) and apparel items (42 percent), along with items you already have in store. (Get those Father’s Day cards out front now for the 64 percent of consumers who plan to spring for a heartfelt card, spending a total of $1.8 billion.)

This year, why not promote custom gift baskets featuring popular gift items —including the additional options shown in the graph? Customers (especially moms desperate to find something kids can give to dads) will appreciate the ready-to-go choices.

Source: NRF’s 2014 Father’s Day Spending Survey, conducted by Prosper Insights & Analytics

Electronic gifts
Tools or appliances
Sporting goods or items
Home improvement
Personal care items
Books or CDs
Automotive accessories

$1.6 BILLION
$632 MILLION
$663 MILLION
$645 MILLION
$520 MILLION
$641 MILLION
$555 MILLION
$641 MILLION

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$632 MILLION
$663 MILLION
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