First Hand Account

Newsletter Helps Employees Read All About Company News

At Mellano & Company, an internal newsletter is helping to put team members on the same page, often literally, and boost their morale. Several years ago the company, which has several locations in California and an office in Nevada, launched its newsletter, “The Bloomin’ Review.” “We wanted people to feel more connected,” even if they didn’t work in the same office or department, explained Michelle Castellano Keeler, vice president of corporate affairs.

Before the newsletter, managers routinely met with employees, but it was hard to provide a larger picture, and Keeler worried that some employees felt isolated — or didn’t understand how their specific job affected and influenced others. Now, the monthly newsletter, available in print and electronic formats and in English and Spanish, helps each employee understand his or her role within the business and keeps everyone up to date on changes, new policies and products. (A college intern works on the Spanish translations, which are especially important for some of the company’s farm workers.)

In addition to a regular update from company president, the newsletter routinely profiles employees, lists staff birthdays and important floral holidays and includes tips from the HR, legal and IT departments (Keeler asks employees from various departments to contribute). The newsletter also focuses on company-wide initiatives, such as its wellness program modeled on the popular “The Biggest Loser” TV show, customer news and even candid discussions of management’s decision-making process — last spring, for instance, a story highlighted the company’s past efforts to improve sustainability and reported on ongoing experiments with higher efficiency LED lighting in hoop houses.

Still, “fun” is a big part of the newsletter (and the company atmosphere), too, Keeler said. “This summer we had an ice cream truck show up at each location and we ran pictures of that,” she said. And, of course, the newsletter also includes well, news. On the heels of SAF Marco Island 2014 (see p. 10), for instance, Keeler reported on the State of the Industry address, delivered by SAF CEO Peter Moran and SAF Chairman Robert Williams II, AAF, PFCI, vice president of Smithers-Oasis - North American Operations, along with another highlight from convention: Mellano’s red ribbon win at SAF’s Outstanding Varieties Competition.

“The newsletter really makes us all feel like we are part of Mellano & Company,” Keeler said.

Interested in learning more about the company newsletter? Email mwestbrook@safnow.org for information on how to contact Keeler for back copies.
Best Practices
Hire for Good

Prospective seasonal employees may only be around for a few weeks, but they should answer the same questions that a prospective fulltime employee would answer. That’s according to Glenna Hecht, president of Humanistic Consulting in Dallas, who was a featured speaker at SAF Marco Island 2014. Whether you’re hiring extra design room help for Christmas, sizing up delivery drivers for Valentine’s Day or eyeing a new manager, Hecht suggests asking potential hires these two questions:

1. “Tell me about the most extraordinary service experience you’ve ever provided a customer.” Watch the person’s body language as she answers. Is she smiling? You’re looking for people who thrive on helping others — that joy should come through. If her example is only ordinary or, heaven forbid, she can’t think of one, move along.

2. “If you were working in your location right now, what would you see that needs to be done?” The diplomatic “gee, looks nice to me,” might indicate the person isn’t proactive about straightening, sweeping, etc. Give the person permission to be candid. Look for candidates who point out the obvious, as well as those who spot defects, dust or funk even you hadn’t seen.

Social Media
Honor Thy Viewer

When Raul Marrero visited SAF’s Outstanding Varieties Competition, he brought along a camera. In a video posted to the company’s YouTube channel, the senior vice president of product development for Equiflor Corporation in Miami walks viewers through the competition, held during SAF Marco Island 2014, chatting amiably about new varieties. The video works, said SAF Chief Information Officer Renato Sogueco, who led a video workshop at SAF Marco Island 2014, because it follows some tried and true “online video commandments,” namely:

Thou shalt entertain. Far from a hard-selling promo, Sogueco said, Marrero’s laidback style makes the video fun to watch, and his humor often comes through, as when he stands before one entry and says, “If you want a hot pink with lots of show — ‘Pink Floyd!’ No not the band from the 70s, but ‘Pink Floyd’ the hot pink rose that’s now on the market.”

Thou shalt be brief. People aren’t coming to YouTube (or Facebook … or your website) for documentaries or epic infomercials, Sogueco said. Marrero’s video clocks in at just about seven minutes; many videos in the series are even shorter.

Thou shalt inform. Pink Floyd jokes aside, the video helps raise the curtain on the company — what they’re about, who they are, what their product is and why it’s special — and gives customers valuable information on new varieties, including design ideas, seasonality and unusual characteristics. Most importantly, it does so with “without sounding like an infomercial,” said Sogueco.

Read more about Outstanding Varieties on p. 22.