

## March Madness: Employers Use Events to Improve Employee Engagement

Nothing engages an avid sports fan more than an important game. But big sporting events, like this month's NCAA March Madness basketball tournament can bring out the sports fan in anyone. Some employers are turning the passion and energy of sports fans to their advantage and are using these events to build a stronger sense of community and pride among their staffs.

[<<Click here>>](#) for **March Madness Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**.

Rather than focusing on the negative impacts that these sporting events could potentially have (absenteeism, lower productivity, etc.), employers can use them as an opportunity to concentrate on making their place of business a fun place to work. The excitement around this type of event adds to creating a fun atmosphere where people *want* to come to work.

The energy and enthusiasm surrounding an event like March Madness is something that employers can tap into and use to help build stronger bonds between co-workers, according to John Challenger, president and CEO of Chicago-based outplacement consulting group Challenger, Gray and Challenger.

"Improving employment engagement is a hot-button issue right now, and employers are always looking for ways to better engage their workforce," Challenger said. "So an organization's management could be passing up a great opportunity if they choose to ignore or worse yet keep employees from talking about the games."

Getting employees together in a social setting during the games is another way to channel that energy and enthusiasm. Several sources say it's a great way to have employees meet and talk about the games. An employer-sponsored gathering with light breakfast foods and coffee could provide the perfect setting to socialize and have a positive impact on morale and employee engagement.

"People get distracted, they like to talk about the sports and current events, so why not provide them an outlet?" Challenger said. "In the days leading up to March Madness, many probably spent some time reading about the game on the Internet, while others might be setting up office betting pools. So a breakfast hour gives them a chance to talk and have some fun."

Wagering pools can give employers headaches. A 2010 survey by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that one-third of companies have an office pools/gambling policy. In many states, pool organizers could be violating the law, which can create liability issues for employers—especially if the activity is known about and condoned. Even though gambling is illegal in most states, some states make exceptions for "social gambling." The definition of social gambling varies, but social gambling usually takes place when pool participants know each other beforehand and no profit is made.

In order to avoid gambling and remain within company policies, some employers have used the opportunity to create contests and give away prizes to employees. Attorneys familiar with the issue say

- more -

**Page Two - March Madness: Employers Use Events to Improve Employment Engagement**

that contests should be open to all employees and that employees should not be required to pay or risk any of their own money. It is recommended that employers take the time to review their policies and rules regarding office pools.

*To learn how to improve employee engagement within your organization or for assistance in reviewing your workplace policies and practices, please contact PROXUS Principal **Jeff Green**, at **215-654-9140**, ext. **102** or [jgreen@proxushr.com](mailto:jgreen@proxushr.com).*

**Adapted from:** SHRM article - *Super Bowl-Opportunity to Engage Employees* by Bill Leonard - 1/30/13  
<http://www.shrm.org/publications/hrnews/pages/super-bowl-engage-employees.aspx>

#####

March 22, 2013