

A Smart Approach to Living up to Company Values Why Gorilla Glue Partnered with Workforce Connection to Help Their Employees Balance Work and Life

Like many smart companies, Cincinnati-based Gorilla Glue pays very close attention to what their employees do on a daily basis. To be successful in the competitive manufacturing industry, the leadership team knows they need to have clear insight into how time is being spent and uncover opportunities to become more efficient. As they analyzed the data, a surprising statistic jumped off the page.

Resources personnel and frontline managers were spending 30–35% of their time working with employees to resolve personal financial stability issues impacting their ability to come to work and to be engaged with their jobs.

The team found that employees who struggled to make ends meet were experiencing challenges with transportation, childcare, unexpected medical expenses and other situations. These challenges at home were creating instability for those employees at work.

GORILLA GLUE HAS A STRONG CULTURE BUILT ON THESE CORE VALUES:

1. Have fun, be passionate and show it.
2. Act with integrity and respect in all relationships.
3. Communicate openly and appreciate the efforts of others.
4. Embrace knowledge, growth and change.

In living those values, Gorilla Glue managers and HR resources were spending hours of their time trying to help find solutions for their colleagues to address their challenges. The passion and compassion were great to see, but in many cases those individuals, despite their efforts, were not in a position to help in a systematic way.

Workforce Connection brought their expertise to the table to close that gap. Launched in 2017, Workforce Connection is a division of Cincinnati Works. Building on 21 years of experience around one-on-one coaching and resource navigation that Cincinnati Works provides to the community, Workforce Connection is bringing those resources directly to the workplace in partnership with employers, to meet financially vulnerable people where they are.

A CHANGING WORKFORCE

If this were a case study written for business school students, we'd turn now to talk about how this program reduces turnover and discuss the measurable ROI of workplace interventions. For Gorilla Glue, those metrics are essential in evaluating the impact of this program. But underlying the visible economics of this program lies a larger trend, and a change in how employers are responding to the needs of the workforce.

Organizations have, in the last decade, become increasingly aware of a shift in how we view work and life. The outdated model of employer/employee relationships maintained that work and life were separate. While work created income, financing a home and family life, the expectation was that employees would be 100% focused on work during business hours, and then leave work behind to focus on home. The age of the smartphone has changed that dynamic for much of the workforce. Home and work have blended together, as people are increasingly available to communicate through technology at any hour and from any location.

For frontline workers, this blend of work and life takes on a slightly different slant. While a line worker at a manufacturing facility doesn't necessarily bring work home with them, their life circumstances can, and often do, impact them during working hours. A call from school to say that a child is sick might cause an otherwise engaged, productive employee to walk off the job unexpectedly. An unreliable car may make a frontline worker chronically late.

Employers can choose to put the burden for those unexpected situations squarely on the shoulders of their workers, and many do. But forward-thinking organizations have increasingly begun to take a different approach. They have, with the guidance of organizations such as Workforce Connection, begun to restructure their benefits packages to reflect new insights into how the lives of each individual impact their ability to be successful at work.

AN EMERGING SOLUTION FOR LONG TERM WORKFORCE SUSTAINABILITY

In 2017, Workforce Connection became part of a cohort of organizations partnering to increase the impact of the Sustainable Workforce Model, which was created and piloted by the four founding members of WorkLab Innovations. This model is an employer-funded solution that provides resources in the form of workplace navigators to help frontline workers leverage resources to create more stability and resilience in their lives.

In the case of Gorilla Glue, this takes the form of an onsite coach (the title Workforce Connection gives its workplace navigators) who is at the workplace one and a half days every

week. As employees are made aware of the program, either through their onboarding or by referral, they meet one-on-one with the coach to create an individualized plan based on an evaluation of the core challenges that they are facing in their financial and personal lives. This might take the form of personal finance training, so the employee can better understand and implement a budgeting process. Or in some cases, the coach can help them understand existing benefits such as an EAP (Employee Assistance Plan) or short-term disability insurance that they were not aware could help them.

The expertise of a workplace navigator, both in understanding the challenges that financially vulnerable employees face, and in understanding the resources available to them from a variety of sources, helps each employee, on a personalized basis, find the solutions they need. Far more efficient and effective than the ad-hoc efforts of frontline managers and HR resources, the navigator is a direct connection to individualized support.

A PARTNERSHIP WITH MANY BENEFITS

The Sustainable Workforce Model creates a positive impact in several different areas. First, by stabilizing the vulnerable population in the workplace, it creates a more reliable, less costly workforce for employers. In addition, it has a direct impact on the lives of at-risk employees, by helping them regain control over their situation and develop themselves in their careers. And finally, it has a lasting impact on the community by increasing the number of financial stable households.

As Gorilla Glue measures the outcome of this program, they will take a look at several key metrics. While overall their turnover statistics are below industry averages, they should see that number decline even further. But the most valuable measure of success will be the time that HR and frontline managers gain back to focus on their primary roles. Another area of focus will be progression—are people meeting their goals and is this program helping them become more successful?

While Workforce Connection has only been in the marketplace for a year, they are building on the success of Cincinnati Works, and joining the learning community of WorkLab Innovations to bring this model to more communities. With a strong foundation and a proven model to leverage, there is every reason to believe that Gorilla Glue's decision to invest in their frontline workers will be a success.