

Transforming Employee Engagement and Retention with Bucketlist Rewards



About Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital

Located in the rural Arrowhead region of northeastern Minnesota, Ely-Bloomenson Community Hospital (EBCH) is a 21-bed critical access hospital that serves a five-zip-code area and over 100,000 annual tourists as the gateway to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. With 135 employees, EBCH is the largest employer in the area and plays a crucial role in the community's health and economic stability.

The Challenge: Low Engagement and High Stakes

In 2018, EBCH conducted its first comprehensive employee engagement survey and was shocked to find that engagement ranked in the 16th percentile. Despite sporadic recognition efforts like annual anniversary banquets and Positive Thursdays, employees did not perceive these initiatives as impactful or comprehensive. The lack of a formal, structured recognition program created disengagement and siloed team dynamics—posing risks to the hospital's mission and long-term sustainability.

“Without Bucketlist, engagement and retention levels would drop drastically. This program created the foundation for long-term stability.” – Jody Martin, Marketing and Communications Team Leader at EBCH

Solution: Comprehensive, Tailored Recognition with Bucketlist Rewards

EBCH initially attempted to create a manual recognition system, but it proved time-consuming and unsustainable. After extensive research, the hospital selected Bucketlist Rewards for its ability to

provide an automated, scalable platform that addressed their unique challenges, including:

- Tailored solutions to fit budget constraints and small organizational needs.
- Easy integration with existing HR initiatives.
- Tools to build a compelling case for senior leadership buy-in.

“Partnering with Bucketlist was the right decision. We built a comprehensive recognition program that employees understand and value. To move from the 16th percentile to the 96th in engagement—that says it all,” - Jody Martin, Marketing and Communications Team Leader at EBCH.

Implementation Journey

With Bucketlist Rewards, EBCH consolidated scattered recognition efforts into one streamlined program. Key features included:

- Automating milestone events like work anniversaries, birthdays, and holiday celebrations.
- Offering a rewards catalog tailored to local businesses, fostering community support.
- Empowering peer-to-peer recognition to break down departmental silos.
- Ongoing support from Bucketlist’s implementation team to ensure smooth adoption.

“We’re proud to say that registered nurses drive past multiple larger hospitals to work here. That speaks volumes about what we’ve built with Bucketlist,” said Martin.

Results: A Remarkable Turnaround

1. **Employee Engagement:** Engagement scores soared from the 16th percentile in 2018 to the 96th percentile by 2023.
2. **Employee Retention:** Minimal turnover—many months reporting zero voluntary departures. Turnover that did occur was typically due to retirements.

“Our voluntary turnover rates are minimal—many months, it’s zero. When we do have turnover, it’s typically retirement-related,” said Martin. “Having this kind of stability during a nationwide healthcare staffing crisis is remarkable.”

1. **Employer of Choice:** EBCH became a sought-after workplace, with registered nurses bypassing larger hospitals to work there.
2. **Operational Efficiency:** Reduced administrative workload—managing recognition initiatives now takes less than an hour per week.
3. **Improved Patient Satisfaction:** Higher engagement contributed to increased patient satisfaction, with likelihood-to-recommend scores consistently above the 95th percentile.

A Standout Moment: Annual Awards Banquet

In December 2022, EBCH held its first red-carpet-style awards banquet. Employees received certificates, recognition, and awards in front of their peers, celebrating achievements in a memorable and meaningful way. Photos and event coverage were shared across newsletters and local media, amplifying the impact on the hospital's community reputation.

"The awards banquet was a turning point for many employees. They finally felt their hard work was celebrated in a public, meaningful way," Martin added. "Moments like that reinforce why this program is so valuable."

Sustaining Success

EBCH continues to evolve its recognition program by gathering employee feedback and adapting to changing needs. The hospital regularly surveys staff to ensure Bucketlist remains effective and relevant. With minimal turnover, high engagement, and ongoing success, EBCH has created a sustainable culture of recognition and appreciation.

Key Takeaways

- **Holistic Engagement:** Tailored, comprehensive programs can drive major engagement improvements.
- **Operational Efficiency:** Automating recognition efforts saves time and resources while maximizing impact.
- **Unified Culture:** Recognition programs that break down silos foster teamwork and collaboration.

Advice to Others

"To any business considering a comprehensive recognition platform, I'd say start with an initial call. Bucketlist worked within our budget and helped us achieve incredible outcomes. Their honesty and partnership made all the difference." – Jody Martin, Marketing and Communications Team Leader at EBCH

Ready to transform your workplace culture like Ely-Bloomenson? [Schedule a demo with Bucketlist Rewards today.](#)