

fooda

# Guide to Experiential Food Programs





# “Sticky” Experiences and Why they Matter

Think about your entire working career leading up until this point and remember the best moments with your co-workers. When did you feel that you most belonged to a team and what were you doing in those situations?

Maybe you were finalizing a month’s long collaborative project or celebrating its completion. Or feeling the positive energy in the room while smart, synced coworkers came up with creative ideas together. Certainly plenty of those memories centered around the work itself. But what about those moments that took place while the laptop screens were closed, the machines turned off, or a break in the shift? For many, those are the times we remember the most fondly.

These recollections are unique for each organization. At Fooda, among many such events, our coworkers remember chilly afternoons in November when we actually roasted turkey inside our office, with Thanksgiving decorations hanging everywhere. Each of us in our sweaters, bringing in a side dish. In many cases, we learned new recipes from our co-workers that have since made it onto our own Thanksgiving tables at home. We also think about Saint Patrick’s Day, with everyone and everything decked out in green, and all of us lining up for a healthy serving of mouth-watering corned beef, made by Maggie, our very own VP of



Operations. These are the moments that none of us will ever forget. They are ingrained in our collective memory and have shaped the way we have grown closer as a team. Sure, from the outside this all may sound a bit cheesy (what bonding experiences don't, when relayed to someone who wasn't there?).

There is no denying the importance of these moments. They stick with us forever and they add meaningful depth to our sense of belonging as a group. These experiences are what we tell our friends and family about when they ask us about our co-workers. They are what we enthusiastically bring up during the recruiting process when we're convincing a candidate to join our team. And they can become a very good reason to encourage teams onsite in today's current climate.

Sticky experiences almost always revolve around food. Almost always, an element of adornment or decoration is involved to take us out of the ordinary and activate our imaginations. In a work setting, these experiences loosen us up and help us shed hierarchical rigidities for a moment, so we can connect as humans. A great example - a Fortune 500 CEO once told us that conversations with junior employees are markedly more comfortable while standing in line for lunch at a visiting restaurant Popup.



**In this guide we explore how your organization can create memorable experiential events for your teams in an occupational climate in which stickiness at work is needed more than ever before. We hope you find the content useful and we thank you not only for taking the time to dig deeper with us into this topic, but also for caring about your employees (because researching this subject is proof that you do!).**

# The Experiential Food at Work Trend

Whether it be a fascination with new things, or perhaps a desire to stand out from others, employees today are always on the lookout for new experiences. After two years of being locked up, employees are now craving connection and experiences with their teams more than ever. As a result, companies are beginning to offer novel, fun and memorable meals through experiential food at work programs.

Think of an experiential restaurant you've attended in the past. Maybe a hibachi steakhouse where the chef entertains you with food right before your eyes, or perhaps a build your own pizza night where you get to handpick your sauce, cheese, and toppings. Now picture that in your office. Through these experiential food programs, employees become part of a participatory audience, and you have an opportunity to immerse them in highly engaging events.

By incorporating an experiential aspect into their food programs, companies are seeing an increasing number of onsite employees, higher retention and recruitment rates, and more employee engagement through the communal aspect of shared experiences.

With so much success, the trend has taken off and is here to stay. In fact, 83% of professionals believe that live onsite experiential events will become more popular in workplaces in the near future.

**But to really understand the experiential food at work trend, it's important to take a step back and understand why these programs came into existence in the first place.**



# 83%

**of professionals  
believe that live onsite  
experiential events will  
become more popular**

*\*Data from a 2022 survey of office workers across the US*

# The Lasting Effects of COVID-19 on Employee Engagement

For anyone with responsibilities related to employee engagement, the workplace experience, or managing people in any way, the post-pandemic world presents unique opportunities to make meaningful change.

The anxiety-inducing years of COVID-19 have greatly impacted job satisfaction and have left many in an ongoing state of burnout. Job satisfaction is at the top of every HR department's priority list as it not only impacts an employee's job performance but also can make a lasting impact on an employee's emotional connection to the company and desire for professional growth.



a staggering  
**89%**  
of professionals are  
experiencing burnout

Wall Street Journal, 2021

As companies make an effort to combat the effects COVID-19 has had on their workforce, food is a big consideration. Providing food to your employees has been shown to increase return to office numbers, employee engagement, and the overall workplace experience - see for yourself in our recently published [guide to 2022](#)! But even with lunch provided, many professionals have found comfort in the remote work environment and it will take more than food to bring them back - it will take an experience.

**But how does immersing them in an experience impact job satisfaction? The simple answer - employee engagement.**

# Employee Engagement

Defined as the “emotional commitment an employee has to their organization and its employees” (Deloitte, 2021), employee engagement is key to solving today’s challenges around job satisfaction.

When employees are engaged at work, the benefits extend to every aspect of the business. Workers are more productive, eager for career development, and motivated to help others (Gallup, 2012). Finding ways to increase employee engagement is always top of mind - and while we could list different ways to help, **one solution we know that works for sure - experiential food programs.**







# 81%

**agree that food options in and around the workplace impact their enthusiasm about being onsite**

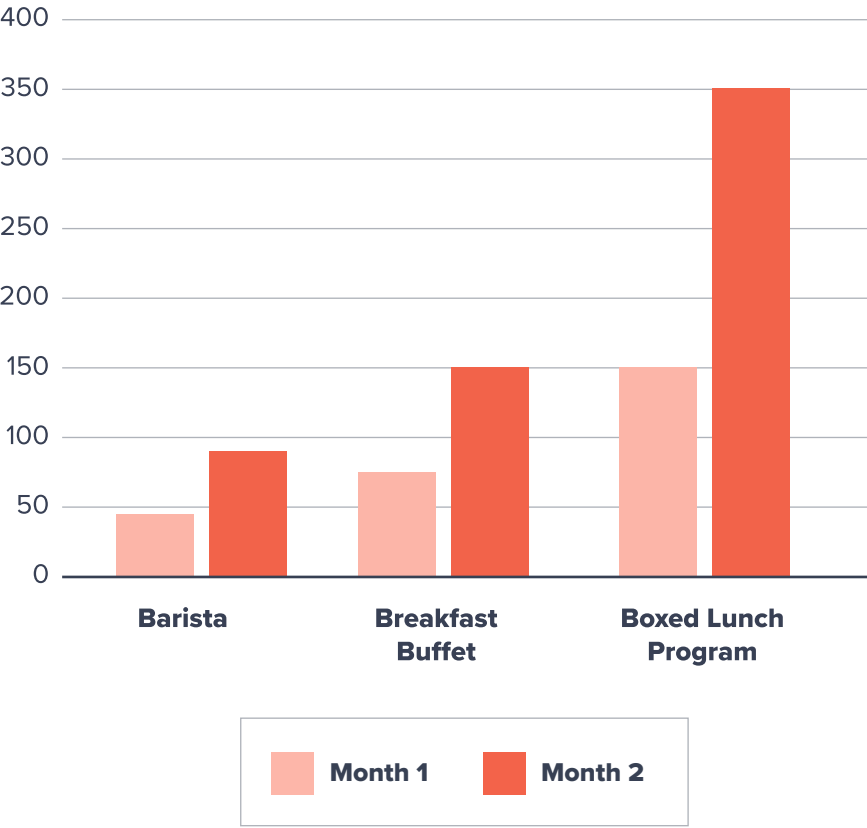
## Increasing Onsite Employees with Unique Food Experiences

Employees are constantly surrounded by food options, whether it be leftovers in the fridge or takeout from a nearby restaurant, so making a food program that stands out is essential. Similar to a happy hour or a company event, experiential food programs give a sense of exclusivity and a feeling of urgency - employees feel the need to attend or they might experience FOMO (Fear of Missing Out).

Adding a food at work program can greatly impact an employee's desire to return to the office, especially when there is a unique experience connected to it. 81% agree that food options in and around the workplace impact enthusiasm about being onsite. Employees not only view this as a perk but also as a commitment from their employer to provide them with a better onsite experience.

Bill.com, for example, was looking for a way to encourage their teams back into the office. Food at work wasn't working as much as they hoped and leadership decided to take the next step - experiential food at work programs. The team brought in a Barista on Mondays, a Breakfast buffet on Wednesdays, and a Boxed Lunch program on Thursdays. After a week, their onsite team members nearly tripped.

### Bill.com Experiential Program Participation







# Keeping Great Employees with Really Good Food

Experiential food programs have become a popular way for companies to bond with their employees. By providing an interactive food event, employees are invited to engage with the experience and participate with co-workers, thereby creating a tangible experience that is unique and tied to your company. Creating a truly memorable personal experience for your employees leaves a lasting impression that can be difficult to replicate at other jobs.

When your employees form an emotional connection with your company, it's likely to progress to a longer-term employee relationship. A study from [Oxford University's Saïd Business School](#) shows that employees are 13% more productive and engaged when they are happy with their company, resulting in a greater emotional connection to their workplace.



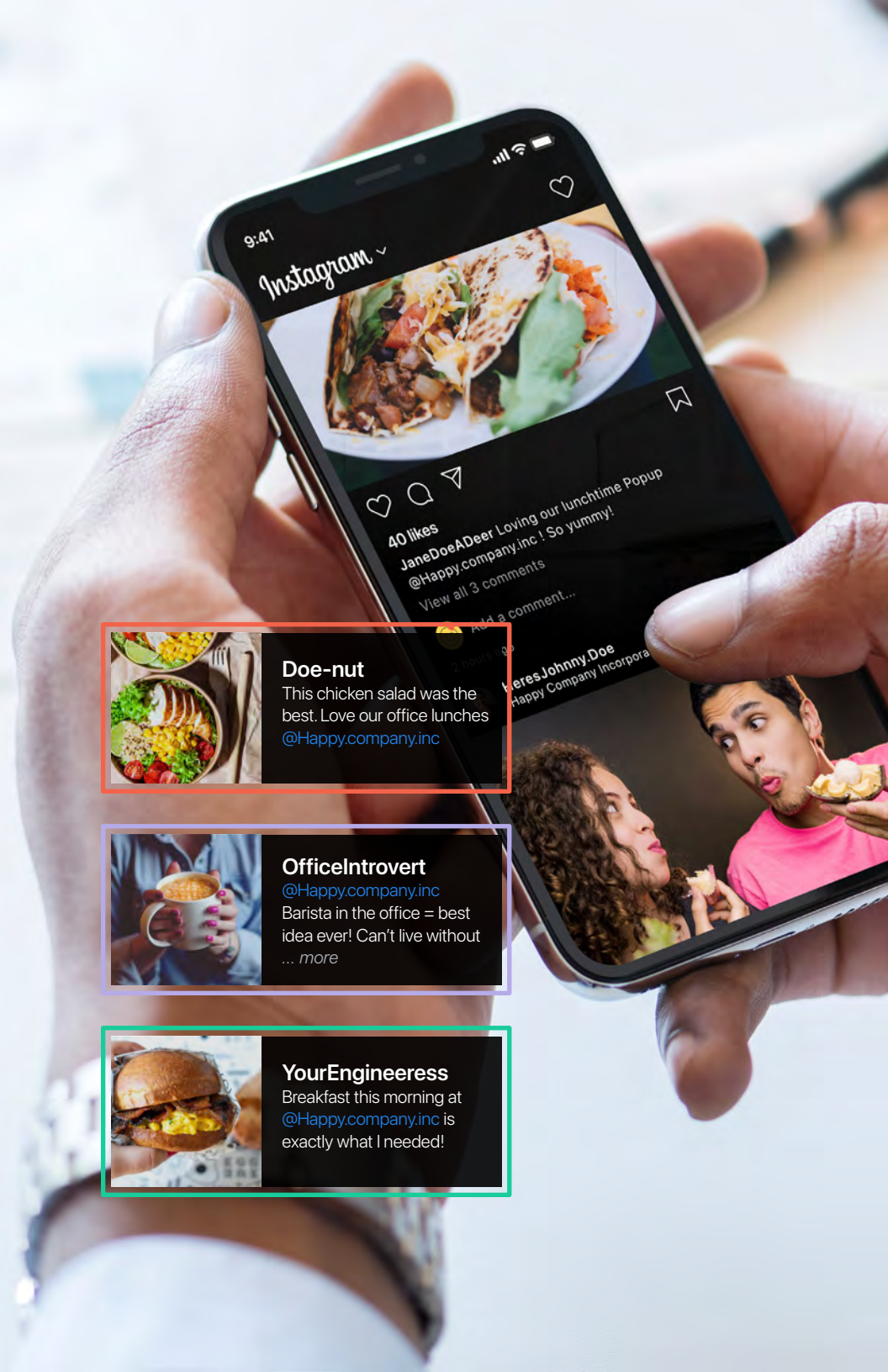
# The Ultimate Marketing and Recruitment Opportunity

Thanks to the foodie culture that has taken off over the past few years, what employees eat at work is often just as important as the overall job. It's something they can look forward to each day and provides a space to connect with one another over a shared meal. For this reason, many consider food at work to be an important employee benefit when looking for a new position.

## Spread the Word on Social Media

Social media can be a helpful way to not only track your experiential food program's performance but to promote your organization's food program to interested prospects.

In today's world of instant publicity through social media outlets, companies should expect to see some mention of their events through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. When your employees share their food experiences and tag your company's handle, you can then re-share to your company page to create an authentic organic company feed. It is the ultimate marketing and recruitment opportunity.





## Communal Aspect

Most people say they go to events because they enjoy the communal aspect and the interaction with other people. Experiential food events are no different. Today's employees not only want to connect with their friends, but also enjoy the spontaneity of making new work relationships with people they otherwise wouldn't talk to. 82% of professionals agree that sharing meals together helps them feel more engaged. We've always believed in the power of breaking bread with a colleague and the data tells us that most tend to agree.



# 82%

**of professionals believe  
that sharing meals with a  
coworker helps them feel  
more engaged at work**

## Virtual Engagement is Good But Not Great

Although virtual happy hours were a fun way to engage office employees in the beginning months of the pandemic, the allure quickly faded. After countless hours on video calls and group meetings, the last thing employees want to do is jump on a virtual happy hour when they could be interacting with coworkers through an experiential team event. 81% of professionals believe that live, in-person events are more effective in engaging employees than virtual events. This proves that the social element of experiential food at work programs cannot be understated.

*\*Data from a November 2021 survey of office workers across the US*

**Whether it be a one-time food station, a last-minute food surprise, or one-on-one time with a chef from a local restaurant, experiential food at work programs offer the space to build meaningful connections, all built around a shared experience.**





# Experiential Food Programs Impact the Greater Good

The social movement to support local restaurants has never been stronger than it is today. 92% of office workers believe it is important to support local restaurants right now. Communities are empathetic to the fact that restaurants have gone through extended periods with empty dining rooms.

A great way to help restore local restaurants is to provide the opportunity for them to serve your team. Employers that open their doors to local restaurants are proactively creating positive changes that represent wins for multiple stakeholders. By making restaurants part of their meal program, employers spark a connection with the local community. Restaurants in turn, bring not only delicious food, but also authenticity and diversity to today's workplace.



# 92%

of office workers believe it is important to **support local restaurants** right now

*\*Data from a 2021 survey of 1100 office workers across the US*





# The completely customizable food at work experience is a trend that is here to stay

As we've presented in this guide, experiential food at work programs spans from Popup restaurants to chef demonstrations, to afternoon dessert trays, and in-office personalized baristas. These programs offer a way for companies to bond with their employees through truly memorable and tangible experiences.

As someone who has taken the time to read this guide, you have already taken an important step in rethinking how employee meals can make a meaningful impact within your workplace community.

**We encourage you to learn more and we'd love to talk about specific options for your organization.**







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Fooda to Your Workplace?**

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