

Getting More from Your Employees

Most companies and organizations are asking their employees to accomplish more with the same, or less resources and incentives than ever before. The reasons vary, from cutbacks in spending and changing markets to increased or shifting capability through technology. Employees are being asked to learn new technologies, think in new ways and be flexible in accepting new and modified job responsibilities.

Encouraging employees to be more productive is a goal many employers are trying to accomplish, with varying levels of success. The question of how to motivate employees has been the subject of much research and many experiments; some of the more notable include Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Herzberg's Two-Factor theory.

What Do Employees Want From Their Jobs?

The following results adapted from a 2008 APCO Institute publication on employee retention speaks volumes about the difference in perspective about what motivates employees and creates job satisfaction. The results in the table below have been repeated with similar results several times over the last seven decades and clearly point out the difference between what employees want and what management thinks they want. Employers and employees were asked to rate the factors that contribute to job satisfaction from 1 (most important) to 10 (least important):

FACTORS	MANAGERS	EMPLOYEES
Full Appreciation for Work Done	8	1
Good Wages	1	5
Good Working Conditions	4	9
Interesting Work	5	6
Job Security	2	4
Promotion/Growth Opportunities	3	7
Personal Loyalty to Workers	6	8
Feeling "In" on Things	10	2
Sympathetic Help on Personal Problems	9	3
Tactful Disciplining	7	10

Sources: Foreman Facts, Labor Relations Institute of NY (1946); Lawrence Lindahl, Personnel Magazine (1949)

Repeated with similar results: Ken Kovach (1980); Valerie Wilson, Achievers International (1988)
Bob Nelson, Blanchard Training & Development (1991)
Sheryl & Don Grimme, GHR Training Solutions (1997-2001)

Notice how managers believe that the most important factors for employees are wages, job security, and promotional opportunities. Yet, employees report that full appreciation for work done, feeling "in" on things, and having sympathetic help on personal problems (workplace flexibility) are the most important factors for job satisfaction and higher productivity.

Showing Appreciation and Sharing Information

There are things companies can do to increase employee engagement and morale. One is to recognize employees for good work both spontaneously and through structured recognition programs. The recommended ratio of positive reinforcement to corrective suggestions is 4:1. Another way is to share information with employees more freely, creating a sense of mutual trust and thereby increasing productivity and problem-solving capabilities.

Workplace Flexibility in Manufacturing Companies

In a recent report entitled, *Workplace Flexibility in Manufacturing Companies* it was found that employees in manufacturing have less flexibility at work than other industries.

The report defines workplace flexibility as “enabling employees to exercise some measure of control over when, where, and how much they work.” Additionally, flexibility includes a broader view of work entry, exit, and re-entry over the course of employees’ careers. This can be difficult for manufacturing companies that need “all hands on deck” in many situations, but in those situations when flexibility can be offered it makes sense to do so. The opportunity lies in the problem:

“Although manufacturing employees tend to have significantly less access to flexibility at work, when their employers provide this flexibility, they respond just as positively as employees in other industries. ... the likelihood of remaining with one’s current employer is significantly higher for both manufacturing and other employees when their employers offer more workplace flexibility. Importantly, although manufacturing employees tend to be less satisfied and engaged with their jobs, we find that having greater flexibility on the job substantially reduces these differences between manufacturing and other employees.”

(<http://familiesandwork.org/site/research/reports/WorkFlexAndManufacturing.pdf>)

Manufacturing employees tend to be less satisfied and engaged with their jobs and the opportunity to retain and motivate them lies at least in part, by offering increased workplace flexibility. This is a win-win solution because most companies can accommodate some increased workplace flexibility. It’s also one of the best ways to show employees that you value their contributions and understand that their needs outside of work are important too.

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