

# Employee Satisfaction: Retain the Best

**Q** With such high unemployment, why worry about employee satisfaction?

**A** The recent down economy and high unemployment in essence served as a retention strategy – employees stayed because there was nowhere else to go. As times continue to improve, however, employers are likely to find many employees ready to jump ship, and replacing them may be more difficult than ever. The competition for highly skilled talent is always intense and will be even more so as the economy improves. Employee satisfaction predicts profitability, retention, and customer loyalty. Know who your most valuable employees are and take steps now to retain them.

**Q** How can we improve employee satisfaction when we cannot afford to increase pay rates or offer more benefits?

**A** There is little doubt that wages and benefits are important, but they alone do not determine employee satisfaction. In fact, our employee satisfaction surveys have proven time and time again that the best way to enhance employee satisfaction is to create a great place to work – by



sharing information, valuing input, providing the tools and support necessary to do the job, and recognizing achievement and excellence.

**Q** How do we know if employees are satisfied?

**A** The best way – ask them. Employee satisfaction surveys are an effective means of gathering detailed information about what is and what is not working from the employees' perspective.

If your survey, like ours, includes actionable items, you can make strategic change to improve satisfaction, retention, and ultimately the bottom line. Surveys allow your employees to give you candid feedback – feedback you can use to improve working conditions, and satisfaction, before it is too late.

**Q** Our employees complete one survey after another. Is another one really necessary/wise?

**A** An important concern. Employee satisfaction is, however, critical – and a survey is the best way to measure it. If surveys in your organization have become routine and border on bothersome, consider:

1. Reviewing the surveys being administered. Are all necessary? If so, are all focused – that is, is each question meaningful and providing unique information? Is the survey providing you the information that you need? If not, eliminate surveys you no longer need and/or tailor the content to more closely reflect what you need to know.
2. Changing the way the surveys are administered. For example, in some organizations, pulse surveys work best where the number of items is kept very small, the content very focused, and some but not all employees participate. For other organizations, a once-a-year, broad-based survey works best in terms of scheduling, efficiency, and practice.

Regardless, it is important to develop a reputation for acting on the feedback. Once employees see that you listen to what they have to say, they will value having the opportunity to say it.

**Q** Once we have administered an employee satisfaction survey, how can we best use the information?

**A** By sharing it. Often times, employee satisfaction survey results are reviewed solely by corporate executives or HR professionals. Yet, there is little doubt that 40 to 70 percent of the reasons given by employees for leaving are directly attributable to the local management team. The most satisfied employees are those who see their manager as effective at managing – operations, profits, personnel, and execution. The best managers share performance expectations, provide the tools and resources necessary for success, objectively enforce rules and regulations, and offer developmental opportunities. If survey items are actionable by local management, managers can in turn quickly impact employee satisfaction and ultimately retention – but only if they know the results! Share the feedback with all members of the management team. Ensure each manager knows what he/she is doing well and where improvements can be made. Use benchmarking (across departments, regions, companies, and/or even industries) to help managers understand how effective they currently are as well as how effective they can be. The impact of an employee satisfaction survey is perhaps best maximized by using the results to give managers specific feedback on their effectiveness and impact. Managers can then identify interventions and strategies that will improve morale – and ultimately retention, customer loyalty, and profitability – what could be better?