

The Gift of Workforce Goodwill

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Almost anyone you talk to will confirm it - people like to be asked their opinions. It is part of the fabric of humanity that we believe we are important enough to be asked. There is a heavy burden associated with asking someone his or her thoughts. People also like to believe that you will take their advice or at least let them know what happened with their "gift." It is after all far better to give than to receive.

Of those organizations that applied to be among the Best Places to Work in Hampton Roads, 80% use some formal data collection technique - surveys, multi-source feedback, interviews, or active team information gathering opportunities. From those statistics alone it seems obvious that the collection effort is worthwhile. The 20% who do not use these types of data gathering processes, instead rely on the payroll records. If employees are staying with their organization, "That's proof enough that we're doing the right things!" some employers contend. More later.

The best organizations are, by far, the ones that engender a sense of nearly unlimited willingness to donate discretionary ideas that improve performance. When members of the workforce become engaged as problem finders and solvers, everyone wins! So how do we get to the kind of vibrant, high capacity workforce we want?

Goodwill and high capacity are, in part, developed by asking for opinions often, taking the advice of those who are in the know, and recognizing the gift for the value it holds in some meaningful way. Repeat this process often to grow goodwill and capacity.

Certainly the improvements that result are worth the effort, but there is a more important benefit - the workforce gets accustomed to giving their opinions about important things and recognizes tangible benefits. Soon, it may not be necessary to formally ask as often and still reap the benefit of habitual suggestions that result in improvements. Eventually, an important element of workforce goodwill has fueled the continuous improvement engine.

There is one footnote worth exploring. Just because an employee stays on the payroll doesn't necessarily translate into high-level satisfaction. This is especially true if pay and benefits are above average. The financial incentive to stick around is potentially far greater than any incentive to move on to greater challenges. On the surface, a stable workforce has both advantages and pitfalls.

Ask for opinions often and do something with the results that are visible and appreciated. Employees really do want to help. Make it easy for them to get into the habit of making a solid contribution to the value of their organization by asking for their opinions and following through. The only downside to collecting data from employees is that answers to tough questions would not measure up to expected results. Viewed another way - the upside to collecting data from employees is the opportunity to breath life into the challenge of exceeding expectations. The second view prevails among those who are The Best Places to Work in Hampton Roads.

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