

# **Employee Involvement: An Antidote to Turnover**

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"Psychologically Healthy Offices Attractive To New Recruits"*

In today's tight job market, a current and common complaint among businesses is their inability to retain quality personnel.

The surge in baby boomer retirements together with increasing competition for talented employees is making it hard to keep good people.

What appears to give employers an edge is promoting a workplace that's psychologically healthy. Such workplaces are attractive to new recruits and also promote staff loyalty and commitment, which are key components in retaining good workers.

A psychologically healthy workplace is one in which strong values such as integrity and respect guide workplace relations. These organizations promote accountability across all levels of the company for maintaining positive working relationships. At the same time, these companies have embedded respectful workplace relations in their business strategy, recognizing that psychological health influences productivity and profitability.

The American Psychological Association outlines five elements to creating a psychologically healthy workplace: ensuring employee involvement, supporting work/family balance, recognizing employees for their contribution, promoting employee growth and development and encouraging healthy, safe practices at work and at home.

We will feature a detailed description of each of these elements over the next few weeks.

## **Employee Involvement**

Encouraging employee involvement means creating programs and policies that harness employee engagement as well as developing practices that include staff, solicit their thoughts, provide them with feedback and help them have influence over their work and, to some extent, the organization.

### **Provide An Opportunity For Staff Feedback**

Organizations that give staff the means to provide feedback to each other, management and the company are psychologically healthy. Offering staff a chance to provide their opinions about work flow and volume, the company and management practices also tend to be psychologically healthy. Companies with

open feedback channels have the ability to incorporate employee comments, criticisms and desires for improvement into their processes and systems. As a result, these companies become more competitive as staff, who may observe the need for important changes, are offered an opportunity to see their ideas put into action. The danger is that companies obtain constructive staff feedback and do nothing with the information. Psychologically healthy companies ensure that they collect useful, specific feedback - and use it productively.

### **Encourage Staff Decision-Making**

It is important for staff to participate in decision-making. This can mean having some influence over how work gets done or assigned, as well as how projects are planned and executed. Having a degree of autonomy over one's work leads to a sense of greater control and influence. Being able to take part in problem-solving is important too. If a situation arises at work that needs a remedy, it is helpful to have some say over how the issue gets resolved.

Forcing solutions to workplace problems denies staff the opportunity to create their own resolution and robs the company of potentially unique and profitable approaches.

Being able to influence organizational development is important. Companies that do this well are adept at tapping their staff's ability to engage in business planning and strategy. This does not mean that employees are responsible for guiding the business in the long term. It means they're viewed as strategists in their areas of expertise. Involving staff in strategy by asking for their opinions about how best to run aspects of the business and about future opportunities can net productive results. Plus, staff can have some influence over the direction of the company. When their thoughts are elicited, personnel experience increased involvement at work and in the operating of the business. And that helps productivity.

### **Help Staff Engage in Timely Conflict Resolution**

A key aspect of ensuring employee involvement at work includes having them participate in conflict management. Having the skills to deal with workplace tensions are extremely important aspects of a psychologically healthy workplace. On-the-job conflict is inevitable. Rather than allowing it to fester, it is important to resolve issues quickly. Being sure to find common ground and keeping in mind that the issue is more a problem to be solved, than a personal attack is key.

### **Share the Credit**

Being able to share one's ideas and innovations and receive credit for them is important in a psychologically healthy workplace. Discovering someone has received credit for your idea or that the company is not interested in new or original ideas can cause low morale and a lack of interest in the well-being of the

company and other employees. If staff feel taken for granted or taken advantage of, they burn out or disengage.

### **Offer Feedback**

Part of feeling involved in the company and feeling committed to the job is to be able to benefit from feedback about one's performance. This can mean engaging in collaborative performance reviews in which a person is asked about her own performance. That view is discussed along with the manager's observations. Performance reviews should not come as a surprise to employees because feedback should be ongoing. Positives and negatives of performance must be discussed as they arise. Waiting until the annual performance review to reveal poor performance reviews to an employee shows a lack of respect for the employee.

Psychologically healthy companies benefit when staff are happy and enjoying their work. They reap the benefits in increased performance, productivity and profitability as well as retaining and attracting the best employees.

*Over the next few weeks, you may recognize your company in the description of the five elements of a psychologically healthy workplace in this column. If this is the case, please consider nominating your organization for British Columbia and American Psychological Association, Psychologically Healthy Workplace Award to be given in June 2007. The deadline for applications is January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2007. Contact us for more details and an application.*

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