

MAKE YOUR COMPANY **A GREAT PLACE** TO WORK

As the economy struggles to gain traction, there is some good news for Directors of Human Resources. The workforce in most companies is fairly stable with very little voluntary turnover. It is tempting to assume that nervous employees, grateful for their jobs, will naturally push themselves to perform during this critical time. However, the best companies know that employees must be inspired to do their best work. You can energize your team with a few well-chosen workplace improvements. Here are some tips for getting started.

When a great company is also a great place to work, all good things are possible. That's why CEOs are getting serious about employee satisfaction. After all, people are one of a company's most precious resources—one of the most expensive too. Like any other investment, a workforce must be maintained. Unlike any other investment, the people inside a workforce have certain basic expectations for their surroundings. They will do a better job when their expectations are met. Employee satisfaction has become a business imperative. It might be time for a fresh perspective in your company.

STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION IS A GOAL for most companies because it is quite simply the right thing to do. However, it serves another important purpose. Employee satisfaction has a direct impact on a company's bottom line. This concept is sometimes referred to as the Service Value Chain. Simply stated, satisfied employees deliver great customer service. Great customer service leads to happy customers. Happy customers generate revenue. Revenue creates stakeholder value. Employee satisfaction is the critical first link in the chain. When you make your company a great place to work, everybody wins.

EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVES HAVE CHANGED in recent years and smart managers are changing too. Employees have become more transient and less loyal, the current employment market notwithstanding. Most employees see fewer opportunities for vertical movement in their company and therefore look for (and expect!) other forms of professional growth. Workplace culture also matters. The new generation of CEOs, led largely by the technology sector, has redefined the employee experience. Money alone won't buy employee loyalty. Today's employees want and need interesting work. They covet freedom, flexibility and fun in the workplace. These are new challenges, especially in conservative companies. Managers need to be a lot more creative in attracting and retaining best talent.

MOST-WANTED WORKPLACE IMPROVEMENTS

THE ONLY WAY to find out what your employees really want is to ask them. A formal method, usually an anonymous survey, works best. It is critically important to offer a safe environment in which

employee feedback is welcomed. Done well, this process can help you build strong professional relationships with your team members. Remember, though, if you ask your employees for their feedback, they will give it to you with the expectation that you will act. The worst mistake you could make—the worst mistake—would be to hint at the prospect of workplace improvements and then not deliver results. Failure to follow through is a sure-fire way to lose credibility with your employees. It can be hard to regain their trust after that. Listen to your employees and respond to their concerns. Make meaningful changes.

EMPLOYERS NEED TO DIG DEEP to find the issues that matter most to employees. There is some lift in creating a pleasant workspace with a few interesting amenities. Free food is always a hit. Professional development strategies will be well-received too. However, these obvious workplace improvements are often not the ones that matter most to employees. The truth about the employee experience in your company will be found deep beneath the surface. You will probably discover—as most companies do—the need for stronger management practices. Nothing irritates employees more than a lack of fairness and consistency among managers in an organization. Employees need to know that everyone is being treated the same. There is a lot you can do, usually through manager training, to ensure that communication, performance management, recognition and rewards are handled similarly by all managers. This can be challenging, but it will pay huge dividends. A great place to work takes work!

SUCCESS OF THE ENTERPRISE

BUSINESS FUNDAMENTALS ARE OFTEN OVERLOOKED in the quest for employee satisfaction. One of the things employees value most is stability. They want to work for a company with sound business practices and a consistent record of strong financial results. Every manager needs an inviolable set of corporate values. Every manager needs the skills to drive performance. With the right tools and training, high-performing managers can build high-performing teams. Everyone will play a role in helping the company succeed.

When you commit to an employee satisfaction program, be prepared for a marathon not a sprint. Your workplace is likely to remain a work-in-progress for a long time. Change of this magnitude takes a while, but it is well within your power to make real advances. Make employee satisfaction a strategic priority. Dig deep for your employees' most-wanted improvements. Strengthen business fundamentals so that your company rests on a strong foundation. Soon, providing a great place to work will come naturally to you. It will be the new way of doing business in your organization.

Mary Vogan is the Founder and CEO of One Stop LeaderShop in Chester Springs, Pennsylvania, and author of the One Stop LeaderShop manager training program. To learn more about making your company a great place to work, call (610) 827-1452 or visit www.OneStopLeaderShop.com.