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Cultivating Success: The Power of Genuine Staff Appreciation in the Modern Workplace

By Lori A. Hoffner

In several of my workshops, I often refer to the top three motivators for employees. Based on a survey conducted by HR Workforce approximately every four years since 2008, the top three motivators for employee satisfaction and retention have consistently been feeling cared about in the workplace, appreciation and recognition for effort and work done, and tactful disciplining. The most recent survey in 2022, following the pandemic, revealed a slight shift, with job security tying with tactful discipline as the third motivator. Despite this change, the crucial takeaway is that these motivators have remained constant for the last 15 years, emphasizing their enduring significance. A report from the US Department of Labor statistics underscores the importance of appreciation, identifying it as the primary reason employees leave their jobs. The pandemic has heightened awareness that life is too short to tolerate unfulfilling work, with unhealthy work environments being a major factor in employee turnover. "The pandemic made a lot of people realize that life is too short to do something that you hate," The Muse founder and CEO Kathryn Minshew told CBS MoneyWatch. The Muse also found that unhealthy, unsupportive work environments are the top culprit for individuals quitting a job.

Contrary to common belief that employee satisfaction is primarily linked to salary, numerous studies, including those cited by Forbes, assert that the creative fulfillment derived from projects and a sense of self-worth in one's job are more significant motivators than monetary compensation. While fair salaries are essential, fostering a culture that makes employees feel valued and appreciated is equally critical. How are you making sure that your staff feels appreciated?

One way to make sure that all members of your staff feel appreciated is to understand what is important to them in the workplace based on their generational values. Each generation approaches the workplace differently and is motivated by the influences of their generation. For example:

- Traditionalist – Less than 1% of the workforce, but high volunteer activity. Individuals from this generation want an environment of human interface with supervisors and other staff. Recognizing the

high level of institutional knowledge they possess and can share, lets them know how much they are appreciated.

- Boomers – Formerly the largest workforce, now represent approximately 21% in all industries.

Appreciation for this generation means that if they put in the time, they will receive credit and respect. Knowing that members of this generation see themselves as change-agents, asking for their assistance when exploring and researching business process improvements. This approach shows appreciation for their experience.

- Gen X – Approximately 30% of the workforce. One of the smallest generations in overall numbers, the changes they have brought makes them one of the largest influences. Training and development have always been particularly important to individuals in this generation who constantly seek opportunities for growth and learning. Because individuals in the Gen X generation are typically independent, resourceful, and self-sufficient workers, they want to know that their accomplishments are appreciated without being overly supervised.

- Millennial's – currently the largest workforce at 37% want a retention or 'stay interview' within 90 days. The stay interview focuses on what motivates the employee to stick around, what could be better about their work experience and how they envision the next stage of their career within the organization. Not only does this encourage retention, but it also meets the millennials' desire to provide input. Recognizing the power of both shows true appreciation for staff within this generation.

- Gen Z – the youngest of the workforce, and even though they currently represent about 11% of employees, because of the size of this generation, they will soon be the largest workforce percentage. However, this risk-adverse generation needs constant reassurance about the work they are doing. Therefore, one of the strongest appreciation approaches is constant feedback. Timely and frequent feedback lets them know they are an important part of the team; their work is important, and they are making a difference.

With multiple generations working together, creating a culture of cooperation within the workplace is critical to organizational success. Finding ways to make sure your staff feel appreciated reduces turnover, which also contributes to your success. Here's an exercise to test your cooperation. Cross your arms over your chest as you would normally do. Which arm is on top? Now, cross your arms again but this time put the other arm on top. How does that feel? A little uncomfortable? Maybe it's even a challenge to get your arms crossed since that's not how you would naturally do it. How often do you ask

staff to “cross their arms the way you do,” simply because it’s what you know? Is it possible that their way is just as effective, it’s just different? For a staff member to feel appreciated, it’s important that their approach is given consideration, and their ideas are taken seriously. This is especially true for emerging leaders in Millennial and Gen Z generations. These two generations thrive when their input is sought out and utilized. Just imagine how appreciated someone feels when you ask them for their ideas or find ways to implement their suggestions to improve productivity, your budget, or the work environment. Recognizing these generational nuances and incorporating diverse perspectives into decision-making not only fosters appreciation but also contributes to a positive organizational culture, reducing turnover and positively impacting the bottom line.

Staff appreciation is not merely a gesture; it’s a strategic imperative for fostering a harmonious, productive workplace. By recognizing and honoring the diverse values of each staff member, understanding their unique motivators, and creating a culture that genuinely appreciates contributions, organizations not only retain top talent but also lay the foundation for sustained success. In the tapestry of a thriving workplace, staff appreciation weaves the threads of loyalty, satisfaction, and collaboration, resulting in an environment where individuals feel valued, engaged, and motivated to contribute their best. As leaders, let’s commit to crossing boundaries, embracing differences, and imagining the positive culture and work environment we can collectively create—one that not only uplifts individuals but elevates the entire organization.

Lori A. Hoffner, Organizational Development Speaker & Trainer helps people and organizations create open, positive, and inclusive environments through her speaking, training, and consulting. Over the last 15 years in her work Lori has had the pleasure of working with audiences across the country to help them learn, grow, and develop positive practices for their organizations. Please contact us if you want more information on how Lori can bring an excellent learning experience to your team.

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