

Gauging Workplace Satisfaction and Health

Granny's Poultry completes successful employee evaluation.

By *Gerry Kaplan*

It is clear from both literature and various employee workplace studies that there is a significant relationship between employees' levels of workplace stress and the degree to which they feel valued, and their rates of absenteeism and presenteeism (coming to work when they should stay home), as well as their at-work relationships, company loyalty and future employment intentions.

The best way to gauge the health of your workplace, and to identify needed changes, is through a customized evaluation process and a detailed analysis and interpretation of the study findings.

The following steps will help ensure the success of your employee workplace evaluation:

- Get buy-in and support from all groups in your company prior to proceeding with the study.
- Have a champion in senior management who supports the evaluation and planning processes, and whatever may follow from them.
- Create an inclusive steering committee to oversee the work of the researchers.
- Get agreement from all committee members that study findings will not be used for political or bargaining advantage by any stakeholders.
- Invite all employees to complete a questionnaire, not just a partial random sample.
- Ensure respondents' anonymity.
- Have a plan, and the willingness, to address concerns that may arise from the study.
- Be prepared to deal with unexpected or negative outcomes.
- Set evaluation benchmarks prior to the evaluation process.
- Develop a communication strategy regarding the study findings.

By following these steps you will be

able to attain the best response rate, and the most useful information from your employees. This was the experience at Granny's Poultry Cooperative Ltd., which recently completed its employee satisfaction and wellness evaluation.

When Craig Evans became the company's CEO in January 2009, he began by "informally meeting and talking with employees across all departments to learn what they thought about the company, and to explore the changes they would make here if they could."

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— Craig Evans, *Granny's Poultry*

Through this process he discovered that some employees were unaware of the company's corporate goals, that there was a need for a "clear strategy to move the company forward," and that there were varied degrees of employee satisfaction across the company.

Evans said he feels the need to harness the untapped potential of all employees by creating an environment where people feel valued. He added that in order to reinforce the healthy aspects of poultry in the eyes of the public, the company must ensure the physical, emotional and mental health and wellness of its people.

"A healthy workplace will help us attract and retain the kind of employees we're looking for – people seeking a challenging career, along with a healthy work and life balance," he said. "By maintaining a healthy workplace we'll also be able to reduce the company's disability and health

care claims."

To establish a baseline for employee satisfaction and wellness, Evans engaged Kaplan Research Associates Inc. to design and administer a company-wide employee satisfaction and wellness evaluation.

A steering committee was created that included management, the union and employees from across the company. Committee members worked with the researchers to develop project goals and objectives, helped to design the questionnaire, and developed conclusions and 'suggested next steps' based on the findings.

To ensure that all employees felt included, the questionnaire was translated into German.

All employees were provided with time during regular work hours to complete their forms, and were also promised that they would have access to the key study findings.

The evaluation had a very successful response rate of 89.9 per cent, meaning most employees from all departments and locations completed questionnaires. And, according to the researchers, virtually all respondents carefully considered their responses to each question.

The next step for the company is to review the findings and develop plans to address issues requiring change. As Evans noted, "the findings will allow us to focus our resources on areas that can make a difference. They'll help us to identify gaps and the factors that reduce some employees' current feelings of satisfaction and wellness."

He added that the findings may also be used to ensure the best use of "the skills, knowledge and expertise of all employees."



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