

In the July, September, and October issues of this e-zine, I discussed eight of the twelve employee perceptions that have a proven positive impact on profitability, productivity, customer satisfaction, and employee turnover. (Source: "First, Break All The Rules" by Curt Coffman and Marcus Buckingham.) If you'd like to read those articles, the link to the page on my website where you can download them is <http://www.larry-johnson.com/free-articles.shtml>.

The titles to look for are

o "Do I Look Like I Care?"

o "Managing Productivity, Etc."

o "Further Adventures In Managing Productivity."

The Final Chapter In Managing Productivity

In this article, I'd like to finish up with the last, and, according to Coffman & Buckingham, the most powerful of the four employee perceptions.

Perception #4 - "In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work."

In the business world there are different schools of thought about the importance of praising people. Some managers think it's essential to give people pats on the back regularly and often. Others think that an occasional good word to an employee is plenty; and others are like the fellow who says, "My people know they're doing a good job when the DON'T hear from me." This kind of manager reminds me of the curmudgeon who tells his wife, "I told you I loved you when we got married. If I change my mind, I'll let you know."

Regardless of your feelings on the matter, Coffman and Buckingham's research showed that when people get positive feedback about their work from their bosses at least once every seven days, they are more likely to produce more, create higher profits, please more customers and be less likely to leave than those who don't get that feedback. Take it or leave it.

As for you curmudgeons, for whom giving someone a compliment is downright painful, you can take heart - you only have to do it once a week to get the desired result.

Now you may be asking, "Do I have to do this with every employee?" The answer is yes. "But," you say, "I've got employees who NEVER do anything worth complimenting. I'd have to lie through my teeth. What do I do about them?"

First of all, never lie about how an employee is doing, especially a poor performer. It not only rewards the poor performance, it sets a terrible example for your good performers. Simply catch the person, no matter how poor his performance, doing something right and compliment him. This will raise the odds he'll repeat the positive act. Talk to him about his poor performance at another time.

If, on the other hand, you find it impossible to catch him doing something right because he's such a screw up, you should ask yourself why you are keeping him in the first place. Your top performers are asking themselves that very question, wondering if you are too afraid to do what's right, or you just don't care about quality.

Question: Have you praised each of your employees about some aspect of his or her work in the past seven days? If not, when will you start?

Perception #3 - "At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day."

For most people, work represents more than just a way to earn a paycheck. People feel good when they are able to do something that makes them feel worthwhile. Being good at something, especially something that uses their talents and contributes to the organization's success, has a powerful positive effect on how they feel about their work, their customers, and the organization. When combined with Perception #4, where they perceive that they are getting regular positive feedback that recognizes this contribution, it's no surprise that they will be willing to work harder to produce more, make more profits, please more customers, and be less likely to leave.

Question: Are you making sure your employees are getting opportunities to do what they are good at doing every day?

Perception #2 - "I have the materials and equipment I need to do my job right."

Robert McDermott, the renowned past CEO of USAA Insurance Company, was once asked what the secret to USAA's success was. He replied that there were three things they supply to their employees that make USAA great: 1. The latest and greatest state-of-the-art equipment and resources - whether it's computers or extra claims adjusters. It's critical, he says, that people have what they need to do the job right. To not give it to them hampers their ability to do a good job for the customer, which is bad enough, but it also sends a message to the employee that says you're not important. Employees are not stupid. They will get the message loud and clear, whatever that message is. It's a matter of putting your money where your mouth is.

2. Training, training, training. According to McDermott, at any one time, 7% or more of USAA's workforce is in a formal training session. That's a lot of non-productive time spent, but McDermott emphasized that the investment is critical, especially when you're giving them state-of-the-art equipment that is continually being updated. Their skills must keep pace with the changing demands of the system.

3. Empowerment - USAA employees are famous for their ability to make instant decisions on the

phone as they talk to customers about claims or premiums. Rarely do they have to say to the customer, "I'll have to get my supervisor's approval on that question." Of course, they have the equipment and the training to make those decisions without throwing a monkey wrench into the system or giving away the store.

To sum it up, USAA earns its reputation of having the best customer service in the insurance industry by rabidly attending to Perception #2 - "I have the materials and equipment I need to do my job right."

Question: What are you doing to make sure your employees are getting what they need to do a great job?

Perception #1 - "I know what is expected of me at work."

Question - Are expectations between you and your employees crystal clear?

Try this exercise: list the five major expectations you have of each of your direct reports. Then list the five major expectations you think each of them has of you. Do this on your own without consulting anyone beforehand. Once you've completed the lists, ask each of your direct reports to do the same, listing the expectations they have of you and the expectations they think you have of them. Again, they should do this individually, without consulting others.

Then, sit down with each employee and compare your list with theirs. Discuss the discrepancies and similarities. Make sure you both agree on the meaning of the terms you use. For example, if your direct report says that he expects you to "support him," discuss what that means. His definition of "support" may be different than yours.

Wrap up the exercise by clarifying what each of you expects of the other.

So there you have it. Coffman & Buckingham discovered in their comprehensive study that when employees "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with these twelve perceptions, profitability rose, productive increased, customer satisfaction ratings went up, and employee turn-over went down.

What can you do? Each day, how about making sure that:

1. Expectations are clear.
2. Employees get the tools and materials to do a great job.
3. Employees have the opportunity to do what they do best.

4. Every employee receives a positive word about his or her work within each seven day period.
5. You regularly say or do something to show that you care about your employees.
6. You encourage employee development through training, creative delegation, and involved coaching.
7. Regularly ask employees their opinions, especially about how to improve things.
8. Remind employees of how their performance contributes to the over-all mission of the organization. During that weekly praise-giving mentioned in #4 would be a good time to do this.
9. Hold everyone to high standards of quality. Don't let shoddy work ever leave the premises. Cheerlead and reward those who do quality work. Be willing to fire those who don't.
10. Encourage people to socialize at work. Coffman & Buckingham found that when people have a best friend at work, they're more likely to do a better job.
11. Give people regular feedback about their progress.
12. Make sure people have plenty of opportunities to learn and grow.

Take these twelve actions every day and you can expect your profitability to go up, your employee productivity to improve, your customer satisfaction scores to get better, and your employee turnover rates to go down. Pretty handsome ROI on your efforts, don't you think?

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