

IMPROVE ATTITUDE BY GIVING STAFF WHAT THEY WANT MOST: RECOGNITION AND FEEDBACK

What do staff want most?

Recognition and feedback.

That's what almost all employee surveys show, yet those are the very things employees see the least of, says JOEL GARFINKLE of GarfinkleExecutive-Coaching.Com, an Oakland, CA, company that helps managers develop leadership skills.

He recommends making recognition a never-ending focus.

And the easiest way to do that is with what he terms an accomplishments file.

A FILE FOR AND BY EACH STAFFER

The file is a joint effort.

The administrator keeps one for each person, and each staffer keeps a matching file. The administrator makes continuous notes on each person's accomplishments, and staff do the same on the individual level.

Employees have a responsibility "to reach out for feedback" just as much as the administrator has a responsibility to provide it, Garfinkle says. What's more, the staffer's file is assurance nothing gets overlooked, because the administrator might miss something.

What goes into the file are the positive accomplishments – goals met, projects done, problems solved, and experience gained.

Ideally, each item should show three things: the accomplishment itself, its measurable result, and the impact it has had on the firm. Here is an example of a more significant item:

Accomplishment: I helped prepare a trial brief.

Measurable result: We won the trial because of some of the research I did.

Impact on the firm: There will be an increase in revenue. This may also lead to future business.

Make the file documentation "a weekly thing," he says. On Friday afternoons when the past five days are still fresh in everybody's mind, staff write down their accomplishments for that time – preferably a minimum of three things. Then they give a copy to the administrator for the office file.

How much time does that take? Only three to five minutes per employee.

AN HONEST LOOK AT EACH PERSON

That file serves several purposes.

One is that it forces staff to look at what they are doing "well and right," and because the administrator keeps a copy of their entries, they know the firm is also looking at their "wells and rights" and cares about their performance.

Another is that it gives staff a continuous stream of recognition.

And another is that the administrator now has "some concrete things to say to the employee" at review time.

At most reviews, there's not enough information to make an honest appraisal, he says, and as a consequence, the rating gets based on what's most recent "or what is most glaring" as opposed to what the person has accomplished during the entire review period.

But with the weekly look-backs, the review turns into "a thorough analysis" of what each person is doing. What's more, the file "opens the dialogue and communication" so there's a good exchange at the review.

ONGOING FEEDBACK ON THE SIDE

Along with the accomplishments files, there needs to be ongoing feedback on each person's performance, Garfinkle says.

Focus on the positive. It need be no more than "nice job on that project."

Also, he says, don't hesitate to be liberal with the acknowledgements. "A manager needs to be active in what people are doing right," and a good measure is that it's not enough until the administrator thinks it's too much.

And to the administrator who says that's overkill, his response is to compare the average no-feedback atmosphere to one where staff cite their weekly accomplishments and hear positive remarks and there's even a file in the administrator's office documenting it all.

AND ON THE NOT-SO-GOOD SIDE . . .

So much for the positive. What about negative side of an employee's behavior?

Garfinkle's advice is not to wait until review time but to address the issue immediately.

He advocates the sandwich approach, or putting the negative remark between two positive ones, as in "you did a good job preparing that brief. But you got rushed and made mistakes in it. Overall, you did a good job, but we need to decide what steps you need to take to improve the mistake level."

PLUS A PERSONAL NOTE

An added note.

Along with documenting the staff's files, administrators should be keeping personal files documenting their own accomplishments, Garfinkle says.

It's a valuable item to present to the partners when the administrator's review time comes up.