

Antidote to Worker Lawsuits: Happy Employees

Avoid dissatisfaction, stagnation, burnout

By Paul Falcone 8/7/2014
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In July 2014, Littler published its third annual Executive Employer Survey, which examined how the nation's largest employers are being affected by current economic conditions and regulatory changes.

Not surprisingly, the survey found an increase in the number of employers whose employees are so disenchanted and disengaged that they're suing their companies more aggressively, primarily for discrimination and harassment.

Littler's survey confirmed what many employers already knew: Workers feel burned out, threatened and overwhelmed by the pace of change. The constant introduction of new technologies, expanding workloads, an inability to maintain a healthy work/life balance and the fear of losing one's job are eating away at morale—even as the media reports lower unemployment and higher job growth prospects across the nation.

When employees have difficulty keeping up and begin fearing for their jobs, they sometimes protect themselves in any way they can. That could mean more extended leaves of absence under the Family and Medical Leave Act or the Americans with Disabilities Act, an uptick in workers' compensation claims or an increase in wrongful termination lawsuits. In the latter case, workers can often justify such suits as a way to remain financially solvent.

If you, the employer, sense your workers are prone to burnout—or even inclined to sue—there are ways to re-energize and re-engage them that tend to work well across industries.

In short, you can avoid a sense of panic or helplessness among your workers by making them feel included, supported, engaged and rejuvenated.

Give Employees Chances to Reinvent Themselves

Plenty of books examine how to motivate workers when sometimes, all they really need is to feel their superiors care about them on a personal level. It's hard to care about someone you don't know well, and genuinely getting to know your employees only happens when you spend time with them.

You might want to start by initiating one-on-one conversations with your workers wherein you ask the following:

--What can I do to give you the structure, direction and feedback you need to sharpen skills and mark achievements that are key to your success?

--What external training programs or certifications would further your long-term career goals?

--Can I help you look at your resume objectively, and how can I help you take the next logical step on

your career path?

Master the Art of Appreciation and Recognition

Think about the best boss you ever had. He or she probably listened to you, valued your contributions and suggestions, had your back, and wanted what was best for you. Would the people on your team consider you that type of boss? Where would your organization rank if your employees had to grade their supervisors?

If your company offers on-the-spot or special recognition awards, use them. Celebrate successes openly and be generous in crediting your people for their efforts. Consider one-on-one lunches with your direct reports to catch up and reconnect with them, professionally and personally. Tell people how much you value them and how much they mean to the organization. It's far better to have this discussion now than after they give notice.

Change It Up

Variety is the spice of life ... and arguably of a workplace as well. Take a half day off—as a team—to go see a movie. Think of new, creative ways you can offer scheduling flexibility. Create a job-shadowing program that allows workers to try out new skills. Introduce a rotational shift in responsibilities to break up the routine and to give employees an idea what their colleagues do. Fostering a sense that “we’re all in this together” and “we’ve got each other’s backs” will bolster employee morale.

In general, workers don't file lawsuits—or have litigious thoughts—if they believe their managers are on their side and helping them get ahead.

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