

# How to Keep Your Employees Happy

The employees in your company are your most valuable assets. They keep the company running, help generate revenue, keep your customers satisfied and not only contain the intellectual property of the company, but also hold the keys to your future success.

It is perhaps surprising then that many companies reserve their respect for only a small number of top executives, who often display no more loyalty than middle and lower level employees.

In today's fast moving, vibrant markets, employees tend to show little loyalty to their companies. They chop and change jobs seemingly at will, moving on to greener pastures after a few years at a specific company.

How then can you keep your employees happy, improving their motivation at work and enhancing the likelihood that they will stay longer with your company?

Some of the leading Fortune 500 companies understand the importance of investing in their employees. The principles of keeping someone happy in their job are simple. It is surprising though, how few companies adopt a consistent policy towards keeping their employees satisfied.

The following suggestions may help to make your employees happier in their jobs and keep them on longer.



## Ways of Keeping Employees Happy

### *Showing Respect*

Respect is reflected in many different ways. It is displayed through how you talk to your workers and treat them, how you pay them and how you invest in them. The need to feel respected is a basic human trait that has to be fully understood by anyone who manages other people.

### *Investing in Your Employees*

The quickest way to your employee's heart is to show you care by investing in their professional development and health. This could include subsidized courses in their area of specialty, subsidized gym or sporting activities, and dental coverage. If you have the funding, think of investing annually or biannually in short day trips and vacations to holiday locations for company employees. Some companies pay for continued professional education, in return for a commitment to the company.

Employees view this investment as having a very tangible value, far greater than the value that they would have found if they were paying for it themselves.

### *Fostering a Team Atmosphere*

Involve your employees in decision-making and keep them informed of what's happening in the company. This should apply especially to areas in which an employee has expertise. The primary factor in satisfaction for many employees is the feeling that they are valuable contributors to the running of a company and that they have an important

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role to play, in their area of expertise. The feeling should be of everyone in the team working together towards a common goal, and pooling their resources and skills.

## *Providing Opportunities for Promotion*

The fastest way to lose an employee is to not provide a relatively clear path for growth and promotion (either vertical or lateral) within a company. When an employee sees that their career at a company is at a dead-end, they will rapidly find an opportunity to leave. On the other hand, if they see that their career is providing exciting and stimulating opportunities, they will definitely not want to give this up so easily.

## *Paying Adequately*

When tightening the bottom line, many companies start first with worker salaries. When this happens, employees feel their time is not being properly valued and that they can achieve better compensation somewhere else. Pay your employees at or just above market rates. Bonus insensitive and stock options (which are actually worth something) for employees that show long-term loyalty towards the company or are highly productive workers, should be a regular part of encouraging performance and loyalty to the company.

## *Knowing Your Employees*

It is surprising the number of senior executives and CEOs who do not have a clue who their employees are and do not take the time to meet them or get to know them. The same can be applied to middle-level managers.

When you don't know the first thing about your employee's needs and aspirations, or their personal life, how can you help keep them happy and productive?

At the very least, you should know your employee's birthday and the birthday of their family members, and provide small gifts on these dates, or find out about any special needs or concerns they or their family may have. The best way to get to know your employees is to speak to them. Find out what they are interested in, outside of work, or any special hobbies they may have. You may find untapped skills and expertise that could be of great benefit to your organization.

## *Offering Positive Feedback*

Employees like to hear about what they are doing well or right in the company. They also appreciate receiving feedback on what they are doing less productively, but only if this feedback is presented in a positive and friendly manner, and is not threatening or criticizing. Providing feedback means focusing on problems and work processes, and thinking of how to improve them. It also indicates that you care about what your employees are doing and take an active interest in their jobs.

How many employees are fired out of the blue, are told that they didn't perform fast enough or accurate enough or just weren't up to standard? And yet, in all the months during which the employee was there, did their supervisor bother to check up and provide direct feedback and support, which could have improved the situation?

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## *Providing Opportunities for Responsibility and Creativity*

The primary factor in satisfaction for many employees is the feeling that they are valuable contributors to the running of a company and that they have an important role to play, in their area of expertise. When employees have the opportunity to take responsibility for projects and use their own initiative, they not only enjoy their work more, but are far more productive and efficient.

## *Offering Long-term Security*

Often employees will jump the bandwagon if they feel a company has no real long-term future - or they personally have no long-term future with the company. Partly this is because they fear cutbacks in pay and layoffs or see fewer opportunities for personal growth.

Many companies adopt a revolving door policy. They hire a new employee, pay a low salary and don't allow their worker's responsibility or opportunity for growth. Eventually the employee leaves or is fired, taking with them their knowledge and training. The company then has to invest the time and money in hiring and training another employee to do the same job.

Other companies that are traded on the stock exchange hire more employees than they really need, when they have the cash to expand, in an effort to increase their market share or keep up with spiraling or foreseen demands. When the economy undergoes a downturn, the company cuts back again, to reduce costs and satisfy their shareholders. This leads to a continual cycle of hiring and firing - a revolving door, which is extremely destructive to remaining employees.

Avoid revolving door policies by adopting a responsible hiring policy that takes into account legitimate needs, hires carefully, to match the needs and culture of the company, while at the same time offering the newly hired employee with long term growth opportunities and professional development.

## *Setting up a Consistent Employee Policy*

The above suggestions should be formalized with your human resources (HR) department. HR should have enough resources, in terms of capital and manpower, to implement the employee policy. Middle level managers should also receive specific training on how to manage those working for them, in a way that is consistent with the company's policy towards employees.

## **Conclusion**

Keeping your employees happy and productive is based on elementary principles of human behavior, which include showing respect, giving opportunities for employees to take ownership and responsibility, rewarding employees and helping them build their careers.

The best run and most successful companies know that their employees are the heart of the business. They realise that providing the right atmosphere and conditions will help both their employees and their business to flourish.

Your employees are like plants that flourish when they have the right environment. If you cannot provide this, can you blame them for seeking greener pastures?