



## Management Holds Key To Employee Engagement

By Susan Meisinger, President of SHRM

Finding and keeping the right people with the right skills presents a major challenge for organizations. Engaging those people to voluntarily deliver maximum effort in key strategic areas adds another dimension to the challenge.

Achieving success requires the active and willing participation of the organization's workforce. However, a new survey finds that only one in seven employees worldwide is fully engaged with their work. There is a vast, largely untapped reserve of employee performance potential.

How can organizations engage workers and tap into this reserve? You can't order people to generate new ideas or to be more cost-conscious or more productive. Employees need to care about their organization and be committed to its success.

The Global Workforce Study, by consultancy Towers Perrin, found that while many people are eager to contribute more at work, the actions of their managers and culture of their organizations—with HR professionals playing a major role—may discourage them from doing so.

Some of the study's findings challenge commonly accepted workplace assumptions. For example, conventional wisdom holds that some people are natural self-motivators and others aren't—that's the way it is, and nothing can change it. The survey found otherwise—that people's engagement with their work is directly affected by their experience within their organizations.

Another widely held belief is that employees' attitudes toward their work are primarily

determined by their relationships with their immediate supervisors and their co-workers. However, the study found that senior management's attitude toward employees has a greater impact on engagement than day-to-day factors, and that the top driver of employee engagement is "senior management's sincere interest in employee well-being."

No one expects senior managers to abandon their business roles and become their employees' best friends. But a few simple activities by senior management, including HR leaders, can significantly increase levels of employee engagement.

When senior managers regularly communicate with employees, their organizations experience higher levels of engagement and lower turnover rates. Involving employees in the decisions that affect their jobs invests them in the overall success of the organization.

Senior managers who are visible and accessible—who routinely leave their offices, walk through the organization and talk with employees about their daily work—can significantly boost morale and engagement levels.

And managers should be open to new ideas from employees. The best ideas should be supported, and the originators recognized and rewarded—no matter where they are in the organization.

Fully engaged workers go beyond expectations and bring the full range of their abilities and creative potential to the enterprise. Every manager in every organization can help create an environment that fosters



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this level of engagement. HR must play a leadership role in ensuring that other leaders in senior management understand this fact.

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### WORKPLACE ISSUES

## Companies Fail to Address the Problem of Workplace Bullying

Workplace bullying is on the rise, but many companies are doing little or nothing to address the problem. According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2005, the most recent year for which statistics are available, 7.1 million industry establishments in the United States had experienced an incident of workplace violence within the past year. While about one-third of

these companies reported the incident had a negative impact on their workforce, the majority did not change their workplace violence prevention procedures after the incident.

"Organizations need better ways to identify bullying and better tools to address the problem," comments Terri Howard, VP of corporate preparedness for the Crisis Prevention Institute.

Bullying is defined as any negative behavior

that demonstrates a lack of regard for other workers, including harassment, incivility, teasing, gossiping, purposely withholding business information, overruling decisions without rationale, demeaning others and verbal intimidation. It results in time lost from work, unhappy employees, medical claims and legal fees, among other problems.

(SI Review-March 2008)

## WELLNESS ISSUES

### Employers Tell Workers to Get Healthy or Pay Up

In an effort to motivate workers to kick unhealthy habits, U.S. companies are hitting them where it hurts: in their wallets.

Employers who provide health insurance often use financial incentives, such as contributions towards premiums, to encourage workers to participate in wellness programs like smoking cessation courses.

Now some employers are wielding a stick as well as a carrot. Employees at some companies who are overweight, smoke, or have high cholesterol, for instance, and who don't participate in supplementary wellness programs, will pay more for health insurance. In extreme cases, employees' insurance deductibles could rise by \$2,000.

"The bottom line," says Tom Parry, president of the Integrated Benefits Institute, a nonprofit focused on health issues, "is that employers want to see results."

But meddling in workers' lifestyles through financial penalties risks lawsuits, say some consultants and lawyers. Indeed, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission says it is looking into wellness programs to see if they sometimes violate the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Starting in 2008, Tribune Co., which owns newspapers such as the Chicago Tribune and the

Baltimore Sun, will apply a monthly surcharge of \$100 to family premiums of workers or dependents who use tobacco. Clarian Health, an Indianapolis-based hospital chain, will charge employees who are smokers \$5 a paycheck.

Small employers, who are the most at risk from rising health costs, have gone the furthest in forcing unhealthy employees to pay more for insurance, as they struggle to continue providing coverage.

In most states, people with health problems already pay more for health policies in the individual insurance market. But for employer-sponsored plans, federal law dictates that all workers covered under the same plan must pay the same premium irrespective of their health.

Recent legislation granted some exceptions to this standard through the vehicle of wellness programs. Starting in 2008, Kellogg Co., the Battle Creek, Mich., cereal giant, will raise premiums for salaried and non-union employees by \$360. But it will also offer what it describes as financial incentives to employees who take a voluntary health risk assessment and participate in wellness programs.

Cydney Kilduff, associate director of work/life benefits at Kellogg, told delegates at a health conference that if employees don't participate, they will pay higher premiums: "It's all about how you market it."

A Kellogg's spokeswoman confirmed that

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employees who opt out will face higher insurance premiums, whereas those who participate won't see a change...

Last month, Tribune began offering a company-funded smoking-cessation program; the \$100 monthly premium surcharge for tobacco use will be waived upon completion. Employees who also quit smoking will be reimbursed for all tobacco-use surcharges they have incurred.

(*Wall Street Journal-December 2007*)

## LEGAL ISSUES

### Unions Can Be Barred From Company E-Mail

By Rita Zeidner, a SHRM Online editor/manager

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) on Dec. 16, 2007, ruled that an employer can prohibit workers from using its e-mail system for union business.

The ruling was split 3-2 along party lines. With it, the Republican majority applied a new standard for determining whether an employer has improperly discriminated against the union in enforcing its e-mail use policy.

The ruling involved The Register-Guard, a newspaper in Eugene, Ore. In 2000, a union organizer used the company's e-mail system to urge employees marching in a town parade to wear green in support of the union in contract negotiations.

In its decision, the NLRB specified the types of e-mail policies that would be unlawful under the new standard. Examples include:

- Allowing employees to use e-mail to solicit for one union but not another.

- Permitting solicitation by anti-union workers but not pro-union workers.

The Board also ruled that a company can draw a line between charitable and non-charitable messages to allow solicitations for organizations such as the Red Cross but not a union.

The ruling passed over union claims—and the arguments of the NLRB's two Democrats—that e-mail systems have become a key way for employees to communicate freely.

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