



**The Blake Group**  
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## Employee Surveys: To Know or Not To Know. That is the question!

It really is better to know what your employees are thinking and feeling. What often happens, unfortunately, is that management's perception of a situation is totally different from the reality. This explains why it's important to receive feedback from all levels, not just any kind of feedback, but feedback that is honest and timely, and routinely received.

In many companies, the management either receives little or no feedback. Don't believe that no news is good news - or believe just what is pleasing to your ears. This is an extremely dangerous situation because you're not hearing what you should.

The employee survey is but one of the many ways of obtaining feedback from employees. It cannot replace regular and meaningful dialogue between management and its employees.

Since the aim of the survey is to ascertain the feelings and attitudes of employees in the company, management must be prepared to accept the survey findings with an open mind. You must share the results with employees, and, crucially, use the findings to bring about the desired improvements.

This requires a high degree of maturity, integrity and transparency on management's part. If these are not in place, the survey will be a pure waste of money. It must not be used for any other purpose.

### **How *Not* To Conduct an Employee Survey**

The CEO of an organization engaged a consultant, at a huge fee, to conduct the employee survey. His story was a classic case of how not to do an employee survey.

Contrary to expectations, the survey was shrouded in great secrecy with only himself, his second-in-command and the consultant in the know.

The survey data was shabbily collated and hastily interpreted. There were follow-up sessions of sorts, they were mainly used by the consultant to further enrich himself.

The company did not seem bothered whether it derived any benefits from its expensive investment. Unsurprisingly, employees were confused and untrusting.

However, the CEO had his own secret agenda to fulfill. He thoughtlessly revealed it, shortly after, at a meeting with his managers. He said, "I only consented to the employee opinion survey because I wanted to give employees the impression that I was genuinely interested in what they had to say."

He had not intention of addressing areas of concern or working to improve conditions. You can imagine the unhealthy culture that continued in this organization.

We were told the story by his successor; after we were hired to develop and conduct a new employee survey.

## **A Success Story**

Here is a good example of how to use the results from an employee survey. The Cultural Health Index (CHI)™ is an assessment we use for clients that are committed to understanding their employees and improving the company's bottom line. The CHI is a highly technical measurement of just 63 questions.

The Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) used the CHI in 2003 and 2004 with surprising results. Survey results were subjected to the same kind of rigorous testing used in Statistical Process Control.

TVA actually factored in the response rate to data analysis. If a work group has an 80% response rate versus 40%, there is a better degree of confidence of the accuracy of the information around their employee engagement. Sounds obvious, but most employee surveys fail to function so logically.

The CHI index has become more valuable to TVA than ever. The power company's compensation program is based on the balanced scorecard system. This measures a business's workforce operational efficiency, productivity, financial indicators, and customer and stakeholder satisfaction. TVA soon found that the results of the CHI could be used to forecast the productivity of business units.

The correlations were remarkable. Business units that performed within the top quartile of the Cultural Health Index in mid-2003 had nearly doubled their year-end productivity bonuses in 2004. Conversely, 11 out of 15 business units that had underperformed gave early signs of trouble in the 2003 Cultural Health Index.

TVA's culture seems to have changed for the better. The CHI focuses on how winning performance and the winning behaviors are becoming a way of life. The CHI helps an employer understand how to engage employees and be more excited about their work.

## **Your Secret Weapon**

Is it any wonder why employee surveys are the secret weapon for many top companies? Best Practices LLC consulting firm reports that 64% of high-performing companies report using external surveys as one of their most effective methods of bolstering employee engagement. A 2003 Towers Perrin study showed a positive correlation between highly engaged employees and their companies' one-year revenue growth relative to average revenue growth for their respective Dew Jones industry sectors.

## **Conclusion**

An employee survey gives employees a way to anonymously communicate candidly, without fear of reprisal. One concern that employees have is that anonymity will not be preserved in an opinion survey process. However, if the survey is handled properly, anonymity can be

preserved and at the same time employees can have the opportunity to express their feelings about anything that relates to their job and their working relationship.

When considering the alternatives (e.g., low retention, employee replacement cost, and employee morale), employee surveys are relatively inexpensive. Management cannot make assumptions about what employees are thinking. An employee may not provide important information to management for several reasons, including a fear of “rocking the boat,” hurting someone's feelings, or being ignored.

In sum, an employee opinion survey provides an ideal process to accomplish communication needs, productivity improvement and customer service enhancement. Use an employee survey to strengthen your organization. The results of the survey:

- Are essential to facilitating development and organizational change
- Allows the organization to focus on needs and leverage its strengths
- Provides management with employee feedback on the internal health of the organization
- Measures the impact of current programs, policies, and procedures
- Can be used to motivate employees and improve job satisfaction
- Informs management on which actions will create problems for employees
- Identifies external and internal customer service issues and needs

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