

FINDINGS

Most employees feel org'ns are supportive of work-family balance -- those studied had initiatives, after all.

However, there are many areas where employees need more support:

- **Direct supervisors are more supportive** (37%) than company leaders (29%)
- **Their employers expect them to keep family matters out of the workplace** "a great deal" or "a lot", say 1/5th
- **Impossible or only slightly possible** to have a family life & get ahead at their companies, say 1/5th

EMPLOYEE GROUPS

Men are more apt to believe the org'n asks too much of them at the expense of family life.

Mid-life employees, rather than the youngest & oldest employees, tend to rate their companies as family friendly. **Salespersons** (51%) were the most positive about their companies' respect for family life, while only one fourth (24%) of **production workers** feel this way. **Those without kids** are more likely to feel the company is family friendly than those with children. **Those with eldercare responsibilities** tend to feel their org'ns don't respect family needs as much as those without such responsibilities.

SUPPORT = COMMITMENT

Predictably, those who feel their work-places are supportive of family needs in-

dicade greater quality of worklife & a feeling of work-family balance in their lives (51% who reported very supportive workplaces rated this balance as "very good"; only 2% in unsupportive workplace cultures thought so).

"Even in 'best practice' companies, workplace culture impacts the full implementation of work/life policies & programs," the researchers conclude. **"When organizations do address issues related to culture, they are far more likely to elicit employee commitment, which is critical to achieving business goals."** (More from Kathy Lynch at 617/552-2865)

ITEM OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

¶ **Anti-confidentiality harbinger or new form of law firm promotion: bragging about specific cases.** Raves a 2x6" ad: "Billion-dollar judgment upheld in Jones case." Copy would, a few years ago, have gotten the firm disbarred: "In 2 rulings by the Supreme Judicial Court, the saga of the Jones litigation is finally coming to closure with a *resounding victory for our clients* [emphasis added]. Competing against several of Boston's & New York's largest law firms, our staff had the opportunity to win a moral victory as well. At one point, an observer counted 19 attorneys in the courtroom to our 3. 'Outnumbered but not outgunned', our firm was able to litigate from beginning to end what is believed to be the largest judgment in state history. Good news for us, better news for our clients." One can see where this could lead for several professions.

"ARE YOU BEING SERVED?" STUDY FINDS EMPLOYEE POLITENESS IS HUGE DETERMINANT OF CUSTOMER LOYALTY, AS PR HAS INSISTED

Staff is a powerful "living brand" for the org'n & a profitable relationship-builder, finds British-based Marketing Communication Agency (MCA) in a survey aimed at finding if relationship-building by employees plays a role in customer loyalty.

- **"There is a direct link between the way people inside an org'n feel & behave, and how customers feel about that org'n,"** mktg dir Lorrie Arganbright told prr. "The link between the employee & the customer is a very real one."

RESEARCH GOALS -- THE STUDY WANTED TO FIND OUT:

- How well staff represent their org'ns in dealing with customers
- Staff's impact on purchase decisions, compared with more traditional marketing tools like advertising, price & promotion
- How a positive or negative encounter with staff affects customer loyalty
- What customers value in their dealings with staff; and whether there are industry sectors in which staff are seen as more effective
- Potential business value of staff acting as "brand ambassadors", meaning they represent their org'n or brand well in their dealings with customers

SERVICE WITH A SMILE NOT ENOUGH

Genuine desire to help, mixed with a sincere commitment to do

their job well is what customers want -- real effort by staff. Findings:

- Staff attitude weighed in far more significantly than advertising, branding & promotions when it comes to customer loyalty
- Whether customers will make a repeat purchase or recommend a company is determined by 3 main factors: quality, price, how they are treated
- Staff are not up to the challenge, say 42%, & often damage relationships with them
- No. 1 reason customers feel put off from a purchase is how they are treated by staff, ahead of price and quality



- More than half feel staff shows little interest in helping
- Only 1 in 5 say staff showed appreciation for their interest or purchase
- Less than a third say staff seemed committed to doing their best

WHEN CUSTOMERS ARE TREATED WELL:

1) They are more than twice as likely to purchase an orgn's products or services again, & 2) More than 3 times as likely to recommend the org'n or company.

Earlier research by MCA showed employees can more easily be turned into "brand ambassadors" when the company practices effective internal com'n -- strengthening employees' commitment & understanding.

"The well-known marketing mix of product, price, place and promotion deserves a 5th 'p' -- 'people,'" says Arganbright. [pr previously added this, plus packaging, positioning, perception & participation: the 9 P's of Marketing]

MCA is considering a similar study in the US -- tho Arganbright suspects results will be similar. "Certainly just from anecdotal comments I've heard, from business leaders & others who have seen the study, I would expect the similarities to be great. There aren't many differences; people are people, wherever you are."

An AT&T study shows "how I am treated" accounts for 70% of choice between competing products or services. Sears has found that a 5 unit gain in employee attitude on average translates into a 1.3 unit increase in customer impression & a .5% increase in revenue.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Market & Opinion Research Int'l (MORI) conducted the study for MCA, which consisted of face-to-face interviews with a representative quota sample of 925 people with a cross section of age, region, social class, education & income. Meetings were held in respondents' homes. MORI asked them to think about occasions when they bought or considered buying a product or service & had dealings with staff. (Copy of "Brand Ambassador Benchmark" study from pr.)

¶ Of Related Interest

SAFeway GETS TOO FRIENDLY, ACCORDING TO SOME

Safeway supermarket employees are taught to be super-friendly, to the point of using customers' names on completion of the transaction. They do this either by memory or by reading the customers check (e.g., "Thank you Mr. Jones, have a nice day.")

- "It's part of our training process," eastern div pa mgr Crack Muckle told pr. "It's really nothing more than common sense -- when you're servicing a customer, use that customer's name."

ODDBALL RESPONSES

The policy put the supermarket in a pickle last winter when some female employees reported their friendliness was being misinterpreted as flirtatiousness. "Some employees felt that people were harassing them in response," says Muckle. "Some male customers would hit on them."

- Store also received complaints that the policy was invasive. "They felt if you said their name out loud, you were invading their privacy."

BUT -- when the *Washington Post* reported the ripple of complaints, Safeway received a lot of positive feedback from customers encouraging the chain to keep up the practice. "We feel (friendliness) is a strong part of the equation for retaining customers," Muckle says. "It makes the supermarket seem like a home-town grocery store." Safeway is, of course, a national chain based in Pleasanton, Calif.

MEDIA DISHONESTY = IMAGE CONSTRUCTION = VIEWER DECEPTION

At PRSA Educator's Academy Interdisciplinary Conf., Shawn Parry-Giles, U of Maryland, demonstrated with film clips a recent incident of how the media can mislead viewers by using cut-&-paste footage.

- Dateline voiceover was speculating on how Hillary must feel about allegations of Pres. Clinton's sexual misconduct
- On screen was a video clip of Mrs. Clinton crying
- To viewers it would appear to be a public display of being hurt & deceived
- BUT the shot was of her at the Kenyan-Tanzanian embassy funeral
- Had the viewer known the proper context of the tears rolling down her cheeks, entirely different perceptions would result

Is this any different from purposely mistating facts in text? Practitioners would have a shot at getting such corrected, if that helps. But what can one do about video lies?

NEW SERIES IS AIMED AT STRENGTHENING WORK / LIFE INITIATIVES

Boston College Center for Work & Family (Chestnut Hill, Mass) has started a unique publication series designed to provide information to org'ns with work/life initiatives. "Research Highlights for Practitioners" will make available findings from relevant studies.

Premiere issue focuses on "Culture & Work/Life Balance", a study done with *Business Week* of 12,000 employees from 54 family-friendly companies.

Study addresses: a) how employees assess their corporate culture; b) how different employee groups have different opinions about their corporate culture; c) to what extent culture is related to employees' assessments of life satisfaction, work-family balance & quality of worklife.