

"Ultimately, employees are our field's greatest asset, but their needs are not always as well understood or supported as much as they need to be," notes Lee Duffey, Duffey Comms (Atlanta) & pres of Pinnacle Worldwide, sponsor of the research which was presented at recent PRSA Counselors Academy meeting in San Diego. Study examines the opinions of staff at 12 firms ranging in size from a few employees to more than 50. Results were compared to opinions of the principals of these & similarly situated firms. Response rate was 51%. Some other findings:

- **Employee satisfaction declines with age:** 68% of 18-24 yr olds are satisfied/very satisfied; 25-29 yr olds (51%); 30-39 (49%); 40-49 (47%); 50-59 (29%); 60+ (25%).
- **Salary is not strongly related to satisfaction:** 43% of employees making less than \$25,500 are satisfied or very satisfied; \$25,500 - \$33,500 (62%); \$33,500 - \$53,000 (43%); \$53,000+ (57%)
- **Giving raises helps in the short term:** 59% of those who received a raise 1-2 months ago are satisfied or very satisfied; 3-6 months (37%); 6+ months (50%)
- **Promotions have a longer lasting effect:** 61% of employees receiving a promotion within the last 1-5 months are satisfied/very satisfied; 6-12 months (61%); 12+ months (30%).
- **Staffers are most satisfied with their "fellow workers"** (82%), least satisfied with their clients (55%), promotions (43%) & pay (32%).

(More info from Horizon Research, 1055 W. 7th st, Los Angeles 90017; 213/627-7100, fax 213/627-7911)

NEW LOOK AT A BASIC SKILL OFTEN DOWNPLAYED

While many old line pr capabilities are shoved aside by new circumstances, **ability to put on superior meetings & events** -- as basic as pr gets -- takes on new luster. Reasons:

- **Relationship-building** is now primary tactic -- & nothing surpasses getting a group together for an event to build or maintain relationships.
- **Symbolic communication** overpowers any rhetoric or statement -- and an event that builds in symbols which enhance the sponsoring organization's vision has impact & memorability. E.g. a hospital sponsors a figure skating show to symbolize the high skill & precision of its healthcare.
- **Strategic possibilities** abound -- in such obvious ways as inviting the right opinion leaders & placing them together with key execs.
- **Triggering event** -- to stimulate behaviors that need nudging.

"The data show that pr firm employees, while very dedicated, are struggling more & more with the challenges of balancing their human needs with the demands of their profession. The data also support the view that pay alone is not necessarily a major factor in influencing employee satisfaction, except in the short-term," notes Ian Cesa, pres of Horizon Research which conducted the study.

STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT: WAYS TO REACH OPINION LEADERS

Several years ago pr predicted constituency relations would rule pr practice, as overcommunication made face-to-face programs essential (pr 3/2/92). Subsequently, as the "public participation" mode of formal input or hearings became dysfunctional, it gave way to "stakeholder involvement" -- in which organizations locate, then reach out & involve opinion leaders among key groups. Some proven programs of this type include:

EMPLOYEE AMBASSADORS A way to get employees into the community to build beneficial relationships with stakeholders (see pr 1/29 re: corp involvement teams). Indianapolis Power & Light's program, called IPALCO Ambassadors, has 20 teams, 300+ employee volunteers.

Their focus, says CEO Ray Humke, "is building & maintaining relationships of trust with civic leaders & organizations thru collaborative community activities. These relationships will help us sell our products, improve customer service & convey important messages to opinion shapers & decisionmakers about the future of the electric utility industry."

- **Targeting geographically.** While IP&L's relationships are good in the core of the city, "we discovered further out they weren't as good," Bob Golobish, dir comty rels, told pr. To remedy this, IP&L 1) identified which employees live within the 9 townships within the county in which it operates. 2) Teams were set up geographically with a lead ambassador in charge of each team. 3) Contacted employees & retirees in contiguous counties as well & organized teams in each of them. 4) Also developed an environmental team for those employees interested in working on that issue. 5) Another team was formed where IP&L has a major power plant.
- **All teams are autonomous.** They decide on the needs & resources available, & pick their own projects. A small budget comes from IP&L. "Employees go out & do good works & make friends," mostly on their own time. Some projects involve company time. "They're exploring areas we haven't explored before. E.g. partnering with a grocery chain to do a food drive. In addition to doing good community service, they partnered with a commercial customer of ours, building a stronger relationship with that customer." (More info: IP&L, P.O. Box 1595, Indianapolis 46206-1595; 317/261-8974)

ADVISORY BOARDS

These work best if you have a controversial decision to make, finds Ken Morgan, Dep't of Energy (Miamisburg, Ohio). Without a clear focus, an advisory board is apt to go on a fishing expedition, becoming another auditing agency which can destroy



the credibility of your organization because it will find things to criticize, he told prr. From his experience setting up the Citizen's Task Force at the Fernald nuclear cleanup site, he offers these guidelines:

- **Choose board members carefully.** Find opinion leaders from a cross section of society, not just big shots or volunteers or politicians. They need to be respected in a broad number of areas. Frequently a board is made up of volunteers. What you can end up with then are very partisan people who have an axe to grind, who want control over the issue. Instead, board members should be appointed by your org'n, seeking OLs from very involved sectors as well as people who ordinarily wouldn't participate because they've got lives & aren't particularly interested in the issue. Pulling them into the dialogue will moderate the polarization that would occur if you have a board full of partisans & zealots.
- **Have full blown awareness & public involvement programs going on** at the same time so people are aware of the decisionmaking process. If the board is making decisions in the dark, the effect of its decisions will be no different than if the org'n had made them on its own. One type of public involvement program is the Envoy method (pr 3/11).
- **Hand the board an ugly, thorny problem** with which it must wrestle to find a collaborative decision -- the best decision among alternatives that nobody loves. Then -- if you've done a good job of letting everybody know about the process that's going on -- when your org'n agrees with the board's recommendation, you've got a decision that's implementable even tho some individuals may not like it.

FLOATING FOCUS GROUPS If you don't have a thorny issue but instead have numerous people with concerns or anxieties that can be addressed individually, then a floating focus group works better, explains Morgan. It allows exchange of information back & forth and can ferret out problems. It may mean making accommodations -- i.e. rerouting trucks because neighbors feel they are unsafe -- or may involve explaining why things are happening when people don't know. Some features:

- Good for increasing dialogue with people who have special concerns.
- Anyone can participate. There is no formal membership; it "floats."
- Just a regular, informal open meeting, the agenda driven by the needs of the group. "It increases dialogue with the segment of the community that may feel disenfranchised."
- To clearly state the purpose, group is called an "Action Committee."

Morgan set up a typical, research-type focus group initially, planning to form one any time there was an issue for whomever was interested. In practice, however, he discovered a large core group of people who were interested in most issues. Ended up having one floating focus group dealing with 2 or 3 issues at a time, sometimes breaking up into subcommittees.

"We're finding that as dialogues increase, the level of concern goes down. So there's less interest & less participation. Now we have the challenge of keeping people aware & involved so we can continue to be sensitive to their needs & concerns."

The focus group ("Mound Action Committee") was started when a petition with 70 signatures was submitted demanding an advisory board be formed. "What often happens is an advisory board gets set up & members perceive themselves as a board of directors. That can be deadly." It took some persuasion to get the focus group idea going "but the selling point was that we could get it started right away. And one of the issues we could begin with is do we really need an advisory board. Once the dialogue began & people found their information needs & concerns were met, the need for this more formal -- & likely to be more polarized -- structure went away."

STUDY: STAFF NEEDS MISPERCEIVED BY PR FIRM PRINCIPALS

Employees of pr firms rank "ability to have a 'balanced' lifestyle blending time-off for friends & family" their no. 1 career priority -- above compensation & promotion opportunities. In contrast, firm principals ranked it no. 8 on their estimation of employees' priorities.

CAREER PRIORITIES	Employees	Principals
Ability to have a "balanced" lifestyle blending time-off for friends & family	1	8
Superior financial compensation	2	1
Clear opportunities for promotion & career advancement	3	4
Exciting accounts to work on	4	2
Who you directly work for	5	6
The reputation of your firm locally & nationally	6	5
Consistent expressions of appreciation from your boss	7	3
Opportunities for more flexible work schedule	8	NA
Fast-paced work environment	9	7
Retirement plans	10	10
Comprehensive medical benefits	11	9

Principals are twice as likely as employees (68% vs 35%) to agree with the statement: "Management shows adequate concern for how work impacts the personal lives of people who work at the firm." More agreement is found on work issues but significant statistical differences sometimes remain:

- *I trust the company to care about me & the people in the company.* Principals, 68% agree; employees rate lower but 50% do agree.
- *Management is fair in dealing with people in the company when it comes to performance related issues,* principals 56%, employees 44%.
- *Management only fires people who deserve to be fired,* principals 58%, employees 55%.
- *People in supervisory positions are very open to the suggestions & opinions of subordinates,* principals 42%, employees 52%.