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The Value of Positivity

by Tricia Jack, M.P.A. CPPA

Take a look around... is your workplace a happy one? Do people laugh and smile? Is the atmosphere one of fun, or one of boredom and frustration? Do employees trust each other? How many of us go home at the end of the day thinking "I love working there?" How many of us think "I can't wait to go into work tomorrow?" Is it a positive work environment?

The research proves it: there is value in positive emotions at work. Generally the research shows that people who have fun at work are more productive, have better relationships with their peers and are more creative and innovative. People who are happy at work are also more loyal – even when the pay is less than they really want.

It's a fact of life that sometimes people get frustrated and bored at work. Having fun can help to alleviate boredom, and it is widely known that laughter releases endorphins that lead to a feeling of well-being and optimism, and can reduce tension in difficult situations. Mark Twain reportedly said:

"The human race has only one really effective weapon, and that is laughter. The moment it arises, all our hardnesses yield, all our irritations and resentments slip away and a sunny spirit takes their place."

Of course there are boundaries, and the humor and fun must be appropriate, both in content and timing. The work must still be done, but a positive atmosphere can help it along considerably.

So how do you know that your organization is a great place to work? First, take a look at a model and make a comparison to your organization. The *Great Place to Work Institute*^[1] has developed a model that is simple and makes sense. It is based on trust, with aspects of credibility, respect, fairness, pride, and camaraderie as the fundamental aspects of a great place to work. Below are examples of how this plays out in the workplace:

Credibility: open and accessible communication, competence in coordinating human and material resources, integrity in carrying out vision with consistency.

Respect: Supporting professional development and showing appreciation, collaborating with employees on relevant decisions, caring for employees as individuals with personal lives.

Fairness: balanced treatment for all in terms of rewards, absence of favoritism in hiring and promotions, lack of discrimination, and process for appeals.

Pride and Camaraderie: In personal job and individual contributions, in work produced by the team, and in the organization's standing in the community. This is also an ability to be oneself, to be socially friendly and have a welcoming atmosphere, indeed a sense of "family" or "team."

Second, you can measure employee satisfaction. Employee satisfaction surveys can measure how people feel at work – about their jobs, the organization, management and culture - and are a worthwhile investment as a starting point to identify the positives as well as the problems and to assess what can be done to solve them.

In next month's column, Ken Embley will address the issues surrounding negative workplace behaviors and the toll that can take on an organization.

[1] www.greatplacetowork.com

The Center for Public Policy & Administration can assist in designing and implementing employee satisfaction and organizational culture surveys. For more information contact:

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