

NAHB Research Center

Sharpening Your Resources: Employee Satisfaction

The beginning of a new millennium offers a natural opportunity to step back and reflect on where you and your company have been in recent years as well as where you're going in 2000 and beyond. It's a time for employers to look anew at the big picture—a time for forecasting, planning, retooling and re-energizing. A perfect time, then, for employers to refocus on one of their most valuable resources—their employees.

Given today's shortage of qualified labor and the ongoing constraint of a finite labor force, employee retention is the best offensive strategy an employer can take to assure that the demands of production are met. Employee retention should be an active undertaking, and the undertaking should be aimed at facilitating the job success of each member of the company's team. Job success leads to company loyalty, good morale, and not surprisingly, high productivity and retention. At the core of this challenge to retain qualified employees is effective employee training, as knowledgeable employees have confidence in their skills and abilities. Confidence actually empowers employees to plan and then to accomplish an outcome.

In the manufacturing environment, formal employee training is often focused on safety. Programs center around highlighting the safety features of various machines and around procedures that allow for the safe operation of those machines. Equipment with safety features is issued and its use promoted. But, safety is as much about the ease of performing one's work continuously, as it is about compliance with codes and standards, and avoidance of, or preparedness for, the infrequent accident.

Basic training needs to encompass additional focal points beyond the safe use of equipment. For instance, entry level team members may need to know that hammers should be held with the wrist straight and the hand firmly wrapped around the handle, with the hammer head fully striking parallel to the surface being struck. Employees should also be made aware that safety equipment requires frequent inspection and replacement. For example, scratched safety glasses may protect against the airborne steel tooth, but they also may obscure the reading of proper plate alignment in the setup. While seemingly simplistic when taken at face value, that which is taken for granted often provides the first and best target for training.

Human resource research of the '90s reported that compensation was of secondary importance to workers eager to learn new skills and receive the coaching and feedback of talented leaders. Cross-training programs fulfill this need to develop and can provide the framework for defining the steps toward advancement. In the process of gaining additional skills and knowledge, people develop empathy for co-workers, communicate, and work together as a team. And, cross-trained

employees provide scheduling flexibility so team safety need not be compromised by unplanned absences. Clearly, providing employees with needed training and knowledge fulfills multiple company objectives while enhancing employee morale and performance.

To reduce musculoskeletal disorders, some simple ergonomic procedures can be easily integrated into current plant practices, while sending the message that an employee is valued enough to assure his or her relative comfort. The addition of heat to work areas, encouraging short, authorized rest breaks, and anti-fatigue floor mats are a just few of the measures that can serve to aid an employee's fitness and promote his or her efficiency.

Sharp employees will carve out solutions to emerging challenges in the organizations that provide them with the tools they need, and the means for keeping those tools sharpened. Employees, employers and their companies will be the long-term beneficiaries of strategies that focus on employees as a company's most valuable resource.

The NAHB Research Center is the not-for-profit research arm of the National Association of Home Builders, and is located in Upper Marlboro, MD. In its nearly 40 years of service to the home building industry, the Research Center has provided product research and building process improvements that have been widely adopted by home builders in the United States.

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