

Let Staff Do Reviews Too

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Most performance reviews reflect one individual's viewpoint. However, that person's actions and decisions, such as setting unrealistic deadlines and demanding excessive overtime, can adversely affect employees in ways that are hidden from upper management.

This is especially true of IT project leaders and managers. A project may be completed on time, which from the perspective of upper management, is good, but may leave many "dead bodies" behind. When managers, peers, and subordinates have different opinions of a person's performance, the department can become a ticking time bomb.

If a company values its workers, it needs to include them in the process of evaluating its policies, ethics, and management. Employees feel attached to the products they produce and want to become a part of the decision making process that affects the quality of those products.

An annual employee attitude survey and follow up can greatly improve worker morale. However, conducting the survey without adequate follow up can hurt workers' morale by giving them a false sense of hope, which leads to depression. It's like being stood up for a date.

For Instance

Let's look at two examples. At one company, a manager was highly thought of by the boss for finishing projects ahead of schedule and under budget. However, he was considered a slave driver by the workers and political opportunist by his peers. Everyone, with the exception of upper level managers, disliked working with this person. And although the projects were within budget, they failed to satisfy users' requirements.

Since all of these problems went unnoticed by upper management, the manager was repeatedly rewarded and used as an example for others to follow. When the manager was promoted, the department was in an uproar, and resignations soon followed.

A second company implemented an annual employee attitude survey. The survey went beyond asking about the food service, parking spaces, and office furniture; it focused on the employees' feelings about their direct manager, company policy, and other levels of management in their department. The surveys were completed anonymously, and all essay-type were retyped before the results were distributed to managers.

To ensure that the remarks about the managers and workers were consistent, the department frequently reorganized project teams to get different perspectives on the same project leader or manager. And it wasn't unusual for developers to be reviewed by two project leaders or managers in a three-year period. If reviews were consistent, despite changes in management and developers, any actions based on them were considered to be well-founded. Any inconsistencies required further investigation.

Quiz Kids

Typical questions concerned the ethics, work habits, management skills, knowledge and interpersonal skills of managers. Some of the essay questions asked employees what they planned to do to resolve some of their managerial problems. It wasn't unusual for an employee to state that he couldn't stand his manager and that he was interviewing with other companies.

After two years of negative surveys by two different project teams, one manager was relieved of all managerial duties and given a non-managerial special projects staff position. Six employees indicated that they either wanted to be "traded" or were interviewing.

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This company employed the basic philosophy of professional athletic teams: It's cheaper to get rid of a bad manager than to replace the entire team.

Too Late

It's unfortunate, but most companies don't ask for an employee's opinion until his exit interview. At that point, it's too late to do anything to keep a valued worker, and, for the most part, the interview responses are taken lightly and rarely lead to corrective action.

This was the case for the first company. For every employee who resigned, management would discount anything said during the exit interviews as the remarks of yet another disgruntled former employee. It wasn't unusual for management to suddenly downgrade a final performance review to back up his claim. Needless to say, the company suffered high turnover and low morale.

At the second company, when an individual was promoted, there was a general agreement that he deserved it. The promotion was based on consistent management performance reviews and the staff members' attitude surveys. This type of cooperation can lead to higher quality systems, lower employee turnover, lower employee training costs, and improved morale.

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