

# Satisfied Employees are Productive Employees

**H**ave you ever encountered an unhappy employee—whether it's the retail clerk at a local florist or the sales manager at a multi-million dollar corporation?

If the answer is yes, then you've probably also been left with a negative impression of that company.

Unhappy employees are definitely not good for business. They tend to deliver poor service and poor results, and are unlikely to feel committed to company objectives or motivated to go the extra mile. They also create missed opportunities, which can undermine the success of your organization. Companies have several options that can result in increasing employee satisfaction.

As biodiesel margins continue to be tight, happy, productive employees can boost company revenue. Also, in an already tight job market in the renewable fuels industries, it's important to retain and nurture productive employees.

Every business, large or small, has a great deal to gain from investing in employee satisfaction. When you make



employees feel happier with their work, the odds of an employee badmouthing your policies—or worse, your products—to customers, potential buyers, vendors or competitors will be significantly reduced. Even more important, a satisfied staff will be much more motivated to put in the extra effort required to make the company more productive and profitable. Happy employees become loyal employees, which can dramatically reduce attrition rates and lower the associated hiring and training costs.

While you can invest in a wide variety of formal (and often expensive) initiatives to boost job satisfaction, the most powerful tool is one that costs nothing at all—good management. Encourage the management team to view every employee as a valuable individual worthy of respect for his or her time, talent and opinions. Strive to understand each individual's unique needs and motivational triggers.

"Hold on," you might be saying to yourself. "Is management supposed to cater to each employee's every whim?" Not exactly, but there are some broad motivational practices that can be implemented to help make the majority of the team feel respected and valued. Here are some favorites:

## Hire People that Fit

To have happy employees, you have to hire people who fit not just the job, but

the company and its culture. Don't underestimate the importance of looking for more than just aptitude in an applicant. In his article, "Hire, Inspire, Admire, Retire," John Reh, founder of [www.peoplearecapital.com](http://www.peoplearecapital.com), says, "Hire talent, not just trainable skills. Skills can be taught to a talented employee. A skilled employee cannot just be given talent." When a worker possesses the right talent for a position, he or she is more likely to succeed and thus find contentment in the position.

"Make your company a place people want to come to and work for," Reh says. "Company culture can be a powerful recruiting tool. Make sure yours reflects the goals the company wants to achieve."

## Train Well

Training and the opportunity to learn new skills is a highly sought-after benefit, particularly among engineers, scientists and other knowledge workers. By providing formal training and informal shared learning experiences, you create an environment that will keep your most talented people excited about their careers. Be sure the personnel budget includes a line item for training, and just as importantly, ensure that the budget gets spent.

Beyond formal training, look for opportunities for mentoring, cross training, on-the-job learning experiences and even simple brainstorming. The more you create a culture where learning and knowledge sharing is valued, the more people will feel energized and satisfied with their work. As an additional benefit, unmotivated people will very likely be replaced by those who are interested in developing their skills, which makes your business more competitive over the long-term.



**Patrick B. Ropella**  
Chairman & CEO, Ropella

Tel: (850) 983-4777  
Web: [www.Ropella.com](http://www.Ropella.com)

Patrick Ropella is Chairman & CEO of the Ropella Group an international Executive Search, Leadership Transformation, and Corporate Consulting firm. He authored the book and web-based training program, *The Right Hire – Mastering the Art of SMART Talent Management*, and has seen his content featured in many trade magazines, business publications, and industry journals. Patrick regularly speaks at webinars, career fairs, and conferences.

## Keep an Open Door, Invite People In

From an employee's point of view, approachability is a key trait in a good manager. If your workers feel they can come to you to "vent" and offer suggestions, they'll feel that their ideas and opinions are understood and valued. Being appreciated is a key to job satisfaction.

Also, when you're facing important decisions or challenges, invite your employees to participate in developing solutions. By soliciting input on key decisions, you demonstrate to your people that you value their ideas and respect their knowledge.

## Be Clear, Be Fair

Make sure you clearly convey your performance expectations. Let each employee know, ideally in writing, what is expected in terms of work ethic and job performance. Let them know the specific tasks they are responsible for performing, the results they are responsible for delivering and how their work will be evaluated.

At the same time, make sure your expectations are consistent and equitable. If one person or department perceives that they are consistently getting "the short end of the stick," you'll breed discontent, a cancer that can decimate your culture.

## Survey the Staff and Yourself

Job satisfaction can be an elusive target; it is certainly something that changes over time. The key to building a great culture is to maintain open, honest two-way communication. As a manager, you have to be proactive about getting the conversations started by regularly asking for feedback.

However, before you survey the troops, start by asking yourself a few questions about how you think your people are feeling. For example:

☉ Do the employees seem to enjoy working for our organization or in this department?

How good do they feel about their role in the company?

☉ If asked by a friend, what might they say it's like to work for this company and for me as a manager?

Then, ask the employees similar questions in anonymous surveys to find out what people are really thinking. Be sure to encourage people to include their candid comments and suggestions. As tempting as it may be, avoid trying to figure out who wrote what. The point of keeping the survey anonymous is to get honest feedback and be alerted to problems before they occur. If employees feel they'll be punished for being honest, they won't speak up, and that will only create further discontent.

## Acknowledge Achievement

Recognition can go a long way in making people feel proud of their accomplishments and appreciated for their abilities and performance. The key is to provide sincere, timely praise for accomplishments that merit recognition. Too often, praise is either never given out or given for every little task so that the recognition loses its value.

## Supervise from a Distance

It takes a confident leader to delegate responsibility. However, when it comes to job satisfaction, effective delegation is essential. According to the online article "Ways to Keep Your Employees Happy" by the Council of Better Business Bureaus, "Empower workers to do the job you hired them to do. A work environment in which employees are constantly monitored, micro-managed and bossed around can be stifling."

Not all employees prefer to be left on their own. Ironically, some personalities feel more in control if they're provided with structure and closer supervision than others. It's up to you to distinguish which employees will thrive on independence and which will need a little more handholding.

## Reward Equitably

Money isn't everything, but there's no question that compensation is tied to job satisfaction. At a minimum, compensation has to be equitable—both within your organization and as compared to the industry as a whole. As a starting point, benchmark your salary

and wage rates to make sure that they are at or above industry averages. Review your health benefits, time off policies and other compensation to ensure they stack up to the competition. As part of your employee surveying process, ask people if they believe that their pay plans, bonuses and other financial incentives are fairly managed.

## Keep a Smile on Your Face

We spend more than half our waking hours on the job. No one wants to spend that time in an environment where everyone's stressed and miserable. To boost morale, find small ways to make each day enjoyable. It can be as simple as adding a little humor to your office communications (maybe an occasional joke or cartoon in a memo), or incorporating games and music into meetings from time to time. Remember, if you want happy employees, you must lead by example.