

An employeesurveys.com Tip

The Water Cooler Report

After a company has completed an employee satisfaction survey, the results must be communicated to two key constituencies: management and employees. Communication to management is the first step. The goals of this communication should be to:

- Remind management of the purpose of the survey,
- Communicate the findings,
- Obtain buy-in that the findings are correct,
- Begin the process of determining what policies and practices, if any, need to be changed to improve employee satisfaction.

This tip focuses on the third item. The first two items are fairly easy to accomplish through a standard presentation. You may be able to obtain buy-in that the findings are correct in a standard presentation (or management reading) of results, but the success of obtaining buy-in can be problematic, particularly if the findings communicate something management doesn't want to hear.

One company we know of got around this problem by giving a "water cooler" report. As the findings were being communicated in what appeared to be a standard presentation, the speaker would, from time to time, stop before he was about to make a potentially controversial point. At that time, the audience's attention was diverted to a water cooler at the front of the room, as two or more employees walked up to it.

These employees then launched into a role-playing exercise in which they would discuss the subject at hand, using actual comments from the survey results. Thus, management's first exposure to each potentially controversial finding had a ring of sincerity to it, and gave management the feeling of being "flies on the wall" near actual employee conversations. Only after a difficult topic had been addressed in this manner would the presenter give the actual survey statistics on the issue.

The process of crafting a water cooler report is as follows:

- Identify key controversial issues (you may desire to use this for all issues, whether controversial or not),
- Select comments which correspond to the quantitative findings on each issue,
- Solicit employees who enjoy acting,
- Working with employees (and swearing them to secrecy to prevent results from being disseminated to the general employee population before the presentation to management), write a script which addresses the issues. It is best to use actual employee comments. You may need to use a bit of imagination to string comments into a cohesive conversation on the issue.

This presentation methodology isn't necessary for most management teams. However, if you are faced with the prospect of delivering difficult-to-swallow results to a somewhat circumspect management team, the water cooler report may be the tool for you to use.

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