

WORK SATISFACTION

As the quote from the Work in America report indicates, people want to feel that their work matters, that what they do gives them some sense of fulfillment. Of course, other factors matter too, especially room for advancement and compensation, but the most important thing here is that work be meaningful.

But are these needs important to the organization? Sometimes yes, sometimes no. But more and more, they are becoming significant to most organizations. While employers want a good job done, the more enlightened ones also know that anyone can master their job and still lack satisfaction from it. Employees need to be happy at work, they need to know that there is room for them to advance in the organization, and that they are being adequately compensated for their efforts. They want to be assured that they are improving in life as well as in their careers. Workers will be more loyal to an organization that they think cares about them as people, not just employees.

Improving the quality of work life is one of the most important trends in personnel management in the 1980's. More and more personnel managers are reporting to the president of an organization rather than a vice-president. (Mathis and Jackson, 1985)

Organizations should endeavor to achieve a working environment conducive to job satisfaction. Why? Because employees who get satisfaction from the work they do tend to do quality work consistently, which benefits the organization. At the same time, the individual owes it to him/herself to seek work that is most fulfilling to him. Failure to do this leads to the quote from Studs Terkel's book.

All aspects of work are amenable to proper control/management, including employee satisfaction. What can an organization do to ensure that their workers are happy?

An organization can look for signs that the prospective employee might or might not be satisfied with the job during the hiring process. They can be better about gathering information on the job. Some steps to improve this would include interviewing peers, subordinates, and supervisors. There also has to be better interviewing of prospective employees, to see if they have the skills or abilities under those conditions which the information gathering identified. (Bolles, 1981)

Organizations can listen to the suggestions, praises, and complaints of employees and act on them appropriately. For example, if there is a supervisor who is difficult and several employees complain about him, the organization should take steps to rectify the problem and not ignore it.

There are specific actions organizations can take to express appreciation for their employees - compensation, benefits, recognition, awards, etc. Some employers, for example, offer career counseling for employees who might be dissatisfied with their jobs. Others offer employee-of-the-month awards.

What can the individual control? His/her experience of the job. As people learn what actions and activities satisfy them inside the most, they will take responsibility for finding and expressing it in work. As people honor the actions they value most by working at them, they grow as human beings and as employees, (Sinetar, 1987) Nobody has to take a job they truly do not want.

Society has certain obligations to improving the nature of work. Our

institutions, especially the media,, education and business, need to do more to value the intrinsic rewards derived from work instead of glorifying the outer ones like money, security, etc. Too many people wind up or stay in jobs they dislike because "I need to support my family," "I've been here twenty years," "I'm too old to try anything new." "I don't know what I want," "The pay (or pension plan, insurance, etc.) is good." "I'll always be able to find work." At the same time, the stereo types of "starving artists" or "PhD's driving taxicabs" are promoted to tell us that we will suffer if we are not "practical" and take whatever jobs are available.

Society can also go further in valuing all kinds of work, not just work that is glamorous, prestigious, well-paying, or self-sacrificing. How many maids, janitors, street-sweepers and other "low-lever" workers are unhappy because society says they should be doing "more" with their lives? This is one reason why such work is so low-paying- it is not valued.

The organization has the obligation to provide jobs, know fully what the jobs entail, hire and train the right workers for them, provide a working environment conducive to job satisfaction, listen to those workers, and compensate/reward/advance/evaluate them adequately.

Individuals are obligated to take ultimate responsibility for their satisfaction at work, for improving the nature of their jobs. No employer will do for us what we should do for ourselves, and we must learn to be above society's messages and listen to our own "inner voices" that tell us what will give us the highest fulfillment.

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