

HR SOLUTIONS

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RETAINING TALENT

As supervisors and managers we know that one of our hardest jobs is recruiting and selecting the right individuals to help our program meet its goals. The effort to recruit is time consuming and then, once you have selected a new staff member, there is the additional time spent training the individual so they are fully proficient in their duties. It is a tremendous investment of time and resources, an investment we should not give up lightly.

There are a lot of myths regarding the reasons employees look for other work. The most common of these is that employees look for other work because their compensation packages are unsatisfactory. While money may play a role in an employee's decision to leave, it is seldom the reason employees begin to look for other work. Numerous management studies point to one overarching reason employees seek other opportunities: dissatisfaction with the immediate work environment.

The good news is that as supervisors and managers we are well positioned to influence whether or not an employee will begin to look for other work. Take a moment and think about work situations you've encountered that have been positive. What factors existed? Was the work exciting? Did you like your colleagues? Did your supervisor let you do your best work?

Now, think about a time when you were dissatisfied and motivated to seek other employment. Chances are you found the work unfulfilling or you found yourself in a position of not being able to work for someone specific because of their supervisory style or professional ethics. Perhaps you felt that you were treated unfairly. Now, ask yourself, what work environment are you creating for your employees?

If you help create a work place that operates in an atmosphere of trust and respect, one that fosters creative thinking, independent judgment and discretion, and values feedback, you will go a long way toward creating an environment where people want to work. As a supervisor this means paying attention both to the work product, and the people who produce the product for you. Make the effort to establish warm and genuine connections with your staff. If they feel valued as people, they will be employees you value on your staff.

This issue of HR Solutions focuses on how to best retain employees. Inside you will find articles on new employee orientation, creating a feedback rich environment, and the importance of updating position descriptions as a retention tool. You'll also find general information on factors influencing retention in the public sector. Finally, we have our usual offering of arbitration case law, supervisor tips and general information on employment law topics.

Take the time to increase your knowledge and sharpen your skills. You will be a better supervisor for it and your employees will stick around longer.

HR

DIVISION OF PERSONNEL VISION STATEMENT

The Division of Personnel is a unified staff who coordinates strengths and talents to deliver client focused human resource services. We provide innovative program development, consultation, and direct service delivery.

HR...passionate about your success.

HR

NEW EMPLOYEE ORIENTATION: SETTING THE STAGE FOR RETENTION

New employee orientation has two distinct purposes. The first and most commonly thought of is an intake or enrollment function. The new employee fills out a number of employment forms to initiate enrollment in the payroll system, benefit programs and to comply with various laws, regulations, and work site specific policies. The second purpose of new employee orientation is often overlooked but plays a critical function in employee productivity and retention.

You have worked hard to recruit and select a new team member to fill a vacancy in your office. You think that everything is going well, but after a few months or sometimes sooner, the employee resigns to accept another position turning your recruitment efforts and on-the-job training into wasted time and resources. Why did the employee move on and what could you have done to influence a different outcome? Research shows that well oriented employees stay longer and perform better over the duration of employment. Imagine if you came to a new school, team or job and were ignored by the teacher, coach or boss: how would you feel? Would you be motivated to do your best and how long would you stay?

An employee who knows what is expected of them in a new workplace regarding performance, behavior and cultural norms knows that the supervisor is interested in their success. While supervisors often point to compensation as a reason employees move on, it is often not the driving factor. The two primary reasons an employee chooses to leave a job are a poor working relationship with their boss or dissatisfaction with the opportunities or environment provided by the job. The third is compensation. In the case of a new employee, they have accepted the monetary package and are looking for an opportunity to get off to a good start.

Failing to clearly initiate the supervisory relationship with the new employee is a missed opportunity: no supervisory relationship is the ultimate bad supervisory relationship. With this in mind, take advantage of your "fresh start" and orient your new employee

to the work place.

- ✓ Introduce them to their coworkers, management, and key individuals they will interact with. Explain their role in the organization and the roles of others, so they understand where they fit within the organization.
- ✓ Set clear expectations regarding work rules and performance standards. Don't assume they know the work rules of your office, spell them out so you are both comfortable there is a common understanding.
- ✓ Talk about what types of problems you want to know about and how often you would like the new staff member to brief you on their projects or ongoing work.
- ✓ Make sure they have the tools and resources to perform the duties of their position and that they understand how to use them.
- ✓ Help them understand the probationary period and follow through with the completion of both an interim and an end of probation performance evaluation.
- ✓ Provide regular feedback! Praise what is going well and communicate where you see a need for improvement.



The Division of Personnel provides a "Supervisor Guide to New Employee Orientation" on the Workplace Alaska Hiring Manager homepage. The guide is issued in the form of a checklist that covers a variety of areas to discuss with the new employee. Use the guide to begin the first of many important conversations with your new staff person, it will help set

the stage for a beneficial relationship. Take the time to properly orient your new employees, they will stay longer and perform better; retention at it's best!

"Failing to clearly initiate the supervisory relationship with the new employee is a missed opportunity..."

EMPLOYEE RETENTION IN A FEEDBACK RICH ENVIRONMENT

Of all of the anomalous tendencies in employee recruitment, the fact that inquiries are seldom heard about the quality and quantity of on-job performance feedback is indeed puzzling. Job applicants rarely inquire about the workplace feedback environment and hiring managers just as rarely discuss their performance management behavior and processes.

Why is this puzzling? It is puzzling because government and private sector studies as well as management and organizational development experts have found time and again that lack of feedback—particularly positive, reinforcing feedback—is among the most common reasons employees leave employers. Consider:

- Sixty-five percent of Americans received NO praise or recognition in the workplace in the last year, reports a Gallup Poll. And the number-one reason people leave organizations is that they don't feel appreciated, notes the U.S. Department of Labor. (www.bucketbook.com and "How Full Is Your Bucket?" by Tom Rath and Donald O. Clifton, Ph.D.)
- In their book, "First, Break All The Rules," Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman indicate that the twelve most important things a supervisor or manager should accomplish with their employees include the following feedback related behaviors: articulating expectations (#1); giving recognition or praise for doing good work (#4); demonstrate caring for the employee as a person (#5); encourage development (#6); and talking with the employee about his or her progress (#11).
- The book "First, Break All The Rules" and it's companion book "Now, Discover Your Strengths" are based on in-depth interviews by the Gallup Organization of over 80,000 managers in over 400 organizations and offers the following finding: "...It tells us that people leave managers, not companies. So much money has been thrown at the challenge of keeping good people—in the form of better pay, better perks, and better training—when, in the end, turnover is mostly a manager issue. If you have a turnover problem, look first to your managers."
- Dr. Kenneth Blanchard, co-author of "The One-Minute Manager" believes that "feedback is the breakfast of champions."



We simply cannot ignore the fact that employees thrive and are significantly more likely to continue working in a feedback rich work environment, particularly when the feedback is focused on "catching people doing things right"—to quote Dr. Blanchard.

The [Division of Personnel Training & Development](#) program now offers several management skill development courses that include learning modules focused on building feedback and other interpersonal communication skills. The [courses](#) and learning modules are:

- Academy For New Supervisors (AFNS)
 - * The skill of assertiveness.
 - * Empowered communication.
 - * Interpersonal feedback
 - * Skillful listening behaviors.
 - * The One Minute Manager's skills of Goal Setting, Praising, and Reprimand
- Interpersonal Skills (INSK)
 - * The skill of assertiveness.
 - * The fundamental rules and skills of Dialogue.
 - * Empowered communication.
 - * Skillful listening behaviors.
 - * Interpersonal feedback.
- Performance Coaching (PECO)
 - * Performance observation.
 - * Feedback and evaluation.
- Performance Appraisal – The Basics (PATB)
 - * The basic coaching process.
 - * Preparing for and conducting a performance appraisal meeting.
- Valuing Diversity (VDIV)
 - * Interpersonal feedback.
- A Respectful Workplace
 - * Interpersonal feedback.

You can access complete DOP Training & Development course descriptions and learning objectives on the [Division of Personnel Training & Development home page](#).

Do your part to enhance employee retention by building a feedback rich environment.

"We simply cannot ignore the fact that employees thrive and are significantly more likely to continue working in a feedback rich work environment..."

EMPLOYEE RETENTION: WHAT TO KNOW AND WHERE TO GET MORE

You may be thinking to yourself, "Oh great, employee retention. Yet another supervisory challenge." Employee retention is one of the hottest management topics in the United States for good reason; it is impacting employers on a daily basis. The number of qualified applicants available for vacant positions is currently in decline and employers are finding it difficult to hire new employees and to keep employees over the long run.

The problem may seem undefeatable. Fortunately, workforce experts are giving us a lot of useful information and realistic coping techniques. This article provides some general conclusions about employee retention and a listing of available resources. The related article, "Government Retention Factors," provides retention information geared specifically toward the public sector.

What is Employee Retention?

Employee retention is more than just keeping employees on the job. It is also about sustaining employees, primarily by enhancing their job satisfaction. Job satisfaction, in turn, can increase productivity and keep employees energized and motivated to give their best. Job satisfaction can equate to employees who stick with their current employer and strive to perform at or above expectations and standards. The following lists are from the 2003 SHRM study and show the top five job satisfaction factors for a variety of employee groups.

Employee Group: Gender

- Male**
1. Benefits
 2. Job Security
 3. Compensation/Pay
 4. Communication
 5. Work/Life Balance

- Female**
1. Work/Life Balance
 2. Communication
 3. Job Security
 4. Benefits
 5. Compensation/Pay

Employee Group: Industry

- Education
1. Communication
 2. Job Security
 3. Benefits
 4. Career Development
 5. The Work Itself

- Finance
1. Job Security
 2. Work/Life Balance
 3. Communication
 4. Benefits
 5. Compensation/Pay

- Government
1. Benefits
 2. Communication
 3. Work/Life Balance
 4. Job Security
 5. The Work Itself

- Health
1. Benefits
 2. Career Development
 3. Job Security
 4. Career Advancement
 5. Communication

- High Tech
1. Work/Life Balance
 2. Compensation/Pay
 3. Job Security
 4. Benefits
 5. The Work Itself

- Services (nonprofit)
1. Compensation/Pay
 2. Career Advancement
 3. Job Security
 4. Benefits
 5. Career Development

In his book, *Working with Emotional Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman further emphasizes the importance of organizational commitment to employee retention:

"In a study of workers like teachers, clerks, insurance reps, and police officers, the key to how much effort they put into their work was how emotionally attached they felt to their organization – how proud to work there, how large their job figures in their sense of identity, how much they feel "part of the family." The more support employees feel from their organization, the more trust, attachment, and loyalty they will feel."

He goes on to explain;

"Employees who see themselves as visitors rather than organizational residents show little commitment. But the same attitude can be found among workers who may have been in an organization for years. Employees who feel bitter about being underpaid or otherwise taken advantage of by an organization are certain to feel little commitment >>>

Common Job Satisfaction Factors

- * Job Content
- * Level of Responsibility
- * Company Culture
- * Caliber of Colleagues
- * Salary
- * Job Security
- * Benefits
- * Communication
- * Work/Life Balance
- * Career Development and advancement
- * Recognition

EMPLOYEE RETENTION: WHAT TO KNOW AND WHERE TO GET MORE CONT.

Most workforce experts agree that the responsibility for retention rests with individual managers. What can you do to improve employee retention in your team, section, division, or department? Several effective techniques exist. A few are listed below and more can be found in the resource list provided at the end of this article.

- * Provide work that best suits individual employees' particular interests
- * Give employees a sense of empowerment by providing the breathing room to take risks, use their own best judgment, and be accountable for the decisions they make
- * Improve morale and boost engagement through one-on-one meetings, communication and information sharing, or more flexible work schedules
- * Foster feelings of inclusion among all employees

The following general conclusions can be drawn about job satisfaction and employee retention:

1. Compensation is usually not the main reason employees choose jobs and stay with them.
2. Dissatisfaction with management style or practices is often a reason employees leave jobs, though not always the stated reason.
3. Different groups of employees have different job satisfaction factors. Consequently, uniform retention strategies will be less effective than targeted strategies.
4. Individual managers and supervisors have the greatest impact on whether or not an employee becomes committed to an organization and chooses to stay with the agency as a positive contributor.

Finally, the one universal truth about employee retention is that employees are more likely to stick it out in tough times when they feel that they are treated with integrity.

Employee Retention Resource List

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"David Sholkoff, a principal in Deloitte & Touche's Human Capital Advisory Services practice, says, "I think we are seeing more employees take an individual look at their jobs in the long term. They would rather remain with their current employer if career opportunities are presented. Thus, organizations that are serious about retaining key talent have a great opportunity today to create a work environment that allows for flexibility, growth, and development."

GOVERNMENT RETENTION FACTORS

Does being a public employer influence retention factors? Different groups of employees have different job satisfaction factors that influence their retention. A 2003 study report on employee satisfaction published by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) revealed some differences in the top five “very important” aspects of job satisfaction for a variety of industries including government. This study listed the top five government job satisfaction factors as: 1) Benefits; 2) Communication; 3) Work/Life Balance; 4) Job Security; and 5) The Work Itself.

While the SHRM study contains cautionary language about relying too heavily on the preferences shown when devising retention strategies, the information can be used as a general guideline. The related article, “Employee Retention: what to know and where to go to know more” provides the results of the SHRM study in more detail. Interesting to note in this study is that the job satisfaction factor Compensation does not appear in the top five for government. This implies that pay is not one of the major reasons employees choose to stay or leave government employment. In fact, individual managers and supervisors can have significant impact on several of the top five government job satisfaction factors. You as a supervisor can make a difference! Your retention strategies do not necessarily have to revolve around compensation and pay. This is good news for the public sector.

Public Respect and Employee Retention in Government

One factor not mentioned in the SHRM study applies in particular for analyzing retention factors for government employees: public respect. According to the results of a survey conducted by the Princeton Survey Research Associates for the Brookings Institute (May 2002), Americans estimate that 42% of federal employees do not do their jobs well. They also estimate that 42% of people who work for business do not do a good job, but they had a higher opinion of business as an institution. 65% of those surveyed had a very favorable or somewhat favorable opinion of business versus a 54% opinion of government. The comparison was even less favorable between government and charitable organizations. Charitable organizations received a 71% very favorable or somewhat favorable opinion among those surveyed.

In a recent report (*Urgent Business for America, Revitalizing the Federal Government of the 21st Cen-*

tury, January 2003), the National Commission on the Public Service expressed concern about the future of the federal workforce: “The notion of public service, once a noble calling proudly pursued by the most talented Americans of every generation, draws an indifferent response from today’s young people and repels many of the country’s leading private citizens.”

The report notes that the middle of the 20th century was a golden age for recruitment and retention. Employees were drawn to public service in response to the Depression and World War II and in the 1960s in response to the missions of federal involvement in civil rights and environmental protection. The report goes on to say that within the next five years more than half of the senior managers in the federal service are eligible to retire, and the drain of experienced personnel will be one of the greatest in history even though not all eligible to retire will. The State of Alaska is facing a similar drain. A preliminary retirement gap analysis for the State is available in the FY2004 issue of the [Workforce Profile](#), published by the Division of Personnel. The Profile is available online at the Division’s web site.

Further compounding this issue is that within the middle ranks of government, the primary source of expertise to fill these managerial positions, many are abandoning federal service. Among the reasons discussed in the report was this one:

“Some employees leave federal service because they can no longer tolerate the dismal facilities and working conditions in many agencies. Drab and tiny workspaces, inadequate room for storage and record-keeping, and aging lighting, heating, and air-conditioning systems – too common in the federal government – seem to many employees emblematic of the low value in which they as workers are held.”

As a manager, you may feel at times that these issues are insurmountable. Employee retention in the State of Alaska is possible! New information about employee retention and job satisfaction factors is discovered daily and managers and supervisors can better estimate which issues could have the biggest impact on job satisfaction. Some of the factors employees may come to cherish most in the near future could be the very things employers will find difficult to offer. Planning ahead and focusing on addressing the issues that can be changed, however, will go a long way in maintaining and improving job satisfaction for government employees.

“pay is not one of the major reasons employees choose to stay or leave government employment. In fact, individual managers and supervisors can have significant impact on several of the top five government job satisfaction factors.”

POSITION DESCRIPTIONS AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION: A VITAL LINK

What does a position description have to do with retaining employees? An accurate position description will help a supervisor recruit the right person for an opening, provide a mechanism for ongoing performance development, and assure that the employee is compensated appropriately for the work being performed. All these factors have a direct impact on employee retention.

Let's start at the beginning of the employment relationship. One of your key staff members has given notice and you begin the process of trying to replace her. Supervisors skilled at building successful work teams begin with hiring the right person for the job. How do you assure that you will have the greatest success in finding the right person for the position? You must have a clear understanding of the work to be performed and the ability to articulate that work to an applicant.

Getting the right person from the applicant pool that is the most qualified and motivated starts with the position description you write. A well written position description assures that both the supervisor and employee have the same road map for the same destination: the successful completion of the probationary period and continued success for the annual appraisal period. Be sure to share the position description with applicants at the time of your interview so they have a clear understanding of what the work entails.

Once your new employee joins the staff, the position description forms the basis for ongoing performance development. The successful supervisor will use the position description as the foundation for building and implementing a training and development plan for the new employee. A training plan should be developed for each of the key functional areas in the position description, so that both you and the employee have a clear road map for how knowledge and skill development will occur.

As the employee gains proficiency in the duties assigned and shows promise of making greater contributions to the organization, you can begin to look for ways to increase the employee's overall performance. Delegating higher level tasks and working with the employee to assure successful completion of those tasks, increases the employee's knowledge, skills and abilities. In the long run, this type of on-the-job development is the best way to assure that there are qualified people in your organi-

zation capable of moving up as the organization grows or you have turnover at the higher level.

Employees stay in the work force longer and are more productive when recognized for the contributions they make to their organizations. Part of that recognition occurs through an accurate description of the work they perform. Over time, the duties assigned to an employee may change. Such change could result from the employee's own ability to do higher level work, or the change may occur due to the shifting needs of the organization. Regardless of the reason, changes in duties should be documented in a new position description and the PD should be reviewed for proper classification. Failure to keep a PD current can have a negative impact on employee morale leading to a greater chance of employee turnover.

As a supervisor you are the one responsible for ensuring that each position you supervise has a position description that accurately describes the duties assigned to the incumbent of the position. How do you know when the duties have changed enough to warrant a new PD? To assist you in determining when a new PD may be needed, the Division of Personnel has created an assessment tool to help document work changes that may impact proper classification. This tool asks the following questions:

1. What has changed in the division's organization structure, program, project, or methods of accomplishing the work?
2. Describe how this change affects the work and level of responsibility assigned to the position(s). Specifically consider, what the position does, the working conditions under which the work is performed, the qualifications the employee must have to do the work successfully.
3. Do you know how the proposed structure compares to similar work units in the department?
4. How will you allocate the work previously performed by this position?
5. What position, if any, was previously performing the work that this position(s) will now be performing?
6. Identify the primary job duties of the position.

Once you've answered those questions, review and compare the against the existing position description. Note the differences, if any. If there are significant differences, it is time to rewrite the PD. >>>

"Progression through the retention process also involves the supervisor's ability to quickly respond to the changing needs of the organization to effectively carry out its mission."

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AS A RETENTION TOOL

As awareness of the need to actively plan employee retention grows, the variety of methods and tools continues to expand. One constant remains; the most effective retention strategies address both the organization's needs and the individual employee's needs. An excellent tool supervisors can add to their retention toolbox is knowledge transfer. The scenario below may sound familiar...

Scenario: Supervisor Jones invests time and energy into a creative and effective recruitment and selection process for a key vacancy in the unit. After the team interview and reference checks, Applicant Smith receives and accepts the position. Both Jones and Smith are energetic and enthusiastic; Smith is especially motivated by Jones' emphasis on the opportunities that are available to learn the program from the inside out and the career potential. Three months into the new job, Smith is actively looking for a new position in spite of positive performance feedback and Jones is confused by

the disinterest Smith is displaying on the job.

What happened to this seemingly dynamic, highly motivated team? The supervisor did everything right in the recruitment and selection phase and is following through with timely and appropriate performance feedback. The applicant accepted the position with a clear understanding of the duties and performance expectations and is meeting all performance standards. In this scenario, the disconnect between supervisor and direct report lies in development opportunities. The supervisor believes the on-the-job training will meet the applicant's expectations. The applicant was looking for knowledge transfer. Knowledge transfer is a vital link in employee retention and workforce planning. By ensuring a broad base of knowledge holders, the impact of turnover and retirement can be lessened. Some methods of knowledge transfer you as a supervisor can use are listed below:

"The Division of Personnel's Management Services program is available to assist you with employee retention planning."

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER TECHNIQUES

- Job Shadowing – The shadowing experience allows future employees to spend a designated amount of time observing different roles and responsibilities in the workplace
- Communities of Practice – groups that come together to share information about common problems, issues or topics
- Process Document – procedure manuals or flow charts that document the work process
- Critical Incident Interview or Questionnaire – documents difficult situations and the responses to them
- Electronic Performance Support System – software that stores information that can be accessed to find answers – often used in conjunction with training
- Job Aides – lowtech informational tools such as a checklist or process of steps
- Story Boards – pictures that tell a story or process – often used to clarify a complex system or to enhance "big picture" understanding
- Mentoring Programs – experienced workers (not supervisors) offer guidance on what to do, how to do it and why it is worth doing
- Story Telling – less structured than critical incident reporting but gives the same information
- Best Practice Studies – may be within the State system or include other public and private employers
- Retirees on Retainer – available to answer questions or consult with for particularly challenging situations

Not all of these methods may be possible in the State system where budgets and resources are limited but many of these suggestions can be implemented. These techniques may also spark the idea for another technique that will fit your employee retention strategy

needs.

The Division of Personnel's Management Services program is available to assist you with employee retention planning.

INVOKING FAMILY LEAVE: WHAT IS MY ROLE AS A SUPERVISOR?

The [Alaska Family Leave Act \(AFLA\)](#) became effective September 16, 1992 and the [Federal Family and Medical Leave Act \(FMLA\)](#) became effective August 5, 1993. The acts promote the preservation of the integrity and stability of the family unit, as well as promoting job security for the employee. The acts also accommodate the legitimate interests of the employer, including employee retention. As a supervisor, you can promote employee retention by knowing your role in family leave.



Family leave must be invoked for all qualifying conditions if the employee otherwise qualifies for family leave. Family leave is not a choice; it is the law and as an employer the State is required to ensure the entitlements are invoked.

How does the employee notify the employer of the need to invoke family leave entitlements?

An employee should advise their supervisor when requesting leave and state a qualifying reason. The State requires notice in writing (a Leave Request/Report form, satisfies the written notice requirement), but where extenuating circumstances prevent it the employee may still invoke the entitlement verbally. For foreseeable leave, the employee must provide 30 days advance notice.

A Certification of Health Care Provider (CHCP) is required as documentation for the need for medical leave that exceeds three consecutive days. If the supervisor finds the certification to be incomplete, the supervisor will advise the employee and provide the employee a reasonable opportunity to obtain additional information from the health care provider. Direct contact by the supervisor with the employee's health care provider is not permitted by FMLA.

Is it permissible for the supervisor to invoke the employee's family leave entitlement?

Yes. In all circumstances, it is the State's

(employer's) responsibility to designate leave (paid or unpaid) as potentially family leave qualifying. The designation must be based only on information received from the employee or employee's spokesperson (e.g. if the employee is incapacitated, the spouse or adult child of the employee). The inquiry may seek information similar to the information on the CHCP, but no additional information. A checklist to aid in determining whether to designate leave as Family Leave can be found on the Division of Personnel Website, HR forms, [FMLA Supervisors Checklist](#)

Does the supervisor have the right to question the nature of the requested leave if necessary?

Yes. If the supervisor has reason to doubt whether an absence qualifies for family leave, further inquiry of the employee or the employee's spokesperson must be made, but no more information may be sought than provided on the CHCP.

Supervisors are generally the first to know an absence may be due to a potentially qualifying condition and should inquire about leave at the time leave is requested or initiated. If the requested leave may be for a qualifying condition, a conditional determination may be made and tentatively invoking family leave is appropriate. The FMLA Supervisor's Checklist form can assist with making this determination.

Once family leave has been invoked or a potentially qualifying condition exists, Technical Services should be notified immediately to make the final determination if the employee qualifies and will

subsequently provide notice to the employee. Supervisors and employees should ensure any leave slips submitted for the condition are clearly marked as family leave for proper documentation. Coordination with Technical Services is crucial to provide timely invocation and accurate tracking of the employee's leave use under these entitlements.



"The family leave acts promote job security for the employee. As a supervisor, you can promote employee retention by knowing your role in family leave."

SUPERVISOR'S CORNER

I'm Important, You're Important, We're All Important 20 Down-to-Earth Ideas for Building Self-Worth in Your Workplace

When I spent two years interviewing people about their work and workplaces, the concept of "self-worth" came up time and again. "I don't feel important." "I'm a worker bee." "I'm just not valued." Worth emerged as such a dominant theme that it's on my list of the 22 keys to a meaningful workplace.

No, worth can't be measured like ROI or turnover. But it sure as heck can be increased. Below are some thought-provoking ideas for nurturing a stronger sense of self-worth among employees in your workplace. I hope you'll print the list and use it to stir conversation, discovery, and action.

1. Those hallway hellos really do matter. Make them count.

2. Someone somewhere in your organization has the answer to that problem you've been struggling with. Turn off your computer, and surf the sea of knowledge that surrounds you.

3. We're obsessed with knowledge, skills, and abilities. Shouldn't we also tap into our deep interests?

4. Internal competition always produces at least one loser, which is one too many. Especially when we're the loser.

5. The fancy award dinners and wall plaques aren't essential. This is: thank you.

6. Let's have a month when everyone is named employee of the month.

7. Co-creation may be the most time-intensive, frustrating, exhausting, and surest way to foster true empowerment and a deep sense of worth.

8. People are moved by compelling missions -- not by run-on mission statements.

9. Plenty of organizations have complaint departments, complaint forms, and complaint-resolution personnel. Will someone please create a compliment department?

10. Who should have easy access to all customer input? Easy answer: everyone.

11. Employee attitude surveys are an exercise in tree-killing unless they're used to generate rich dialogue and focused action. Save a tree: Just say no to employee surveys that are destined for a dusty shelf.

12. Okay, it's a cliché, but it's so true: Respect takes years to nurture, but it can be destroyed in seconds.

13. Can you cite one example of a performance evaluation that truly informs, inspires, and energizes?

14. Few people expect high pay. Everyone expects fair pay.

15. For years, we've used terms like boss, subordinate, my people, your people, and upper-level. Should we be surprised that some employees feel like second-class workplace citizens?

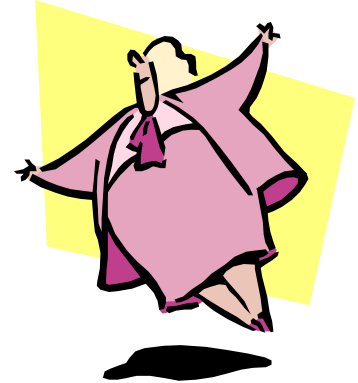
16. Space matters. If some people are jammed into tiny cubicles while others get cavernous offices, what kind of message is being sent?

17. If you don't think Dilbert is funny, you need to worry.

18. If you think you're turning into Dilbert, you really need to worry.

19. If your workplace is a Dilbertesque universe, engage in random acts of positive change management. Focus on the one positive thing you can do instead of the 100 things you can't do.

20. If you're unwilling to do a thing about it, stop off at the local office-supply store, buy some resumé paper, and get busy. A better situation awaits -- but only if you seek it out and seize it.



"Challenge is one of them, and it just so happens to be one of the most, well, challenging."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Tom Terez is a speaker, consultant, and author of the book *22 Keys to Creating a Meaningful Workplace*. His Web site, BetterWorkplaceNow.com, is filled with strategies and tools for making the workplace more meaningful and productive. To contact Tom, use this site's online form or call him at 614-571-9529.

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SUPERVISOR'S CORNER CONT.

Ring In the New Year with Old Year Reflections

January 1 is fast approaching, and you know what that means. People will be vowing to lose weight, stop smoking, stick to a budget, save money, find a better job, become more organized, exercise more, be more patient, eat better, and _____ (fill in your own resolution).

New Year's resolutions have been with us for 4,000 years, ever since the Babylonians began celebrating the start of each new planting cycle. The Babylonians knew how to ring in the new year. They'd party for 11 days, with each day devoted to a theme, before packing up their party hats and pulling out their plows.

Even the king got involved. The festive folk would symbolically strip the king of his robes and send him away for several days -- just to make sure no authorities were around to dampen the party atmosphere. (Think your boss would be open to such a tradition?)

The Babylonians were the first to have New Year's resolutions. The most common promises were to return borrowed farm equipment and pay off old debts. Starting on the 12th day, of course.

I'm all for New Year's resolutions. In fact, I seem to like them so much that I make them all the time, even without waiting for January 1. I make so many resolutions that my one New Year's resolution this year might be to make fewer resolutions.

But do I *keep* these resolutions? And what about you? Do you keep *your* resolutions?

A study at the University of Washington found some interesting answers. Among people in their study group, 67% made at least three resolutions for the coming new year, and 63% of them stuck with their No. 1 resolution for at least two months. Conclusion: about two out of every five people make and keep a resolution, at least for a while.

Another study, this one conducted by the American Medical Association, found that only 40% of their study participants had any intention of making New Year's resolutions. Half of these people went on to keep their promises. Conclusion: one in five people makes New Year's commitments and turns them into action.

If the Roman god Janus were around today, he'd have a thing or two to say about this. Enshrined in ancient mythology, he was the god of change, transitions, and beginnings. The Romans named the first month of the year after him.

Janus was often pictured with a set of keys, in keeping with his role as warden of gates. Shrines to him typically took the form of archways, gateways, and arcades. In later years, the Romans even exchanged coins embossed with Janus' image, as a way of offering people good fortune in the New Year.

As for his physical appearance, well, Janus had a face only a mother could love. That's because he had two faces -- one looking forward, the other backward. This showed his ability to watch entrances and exits. Symbolically, it signaled the need to balance our hopes for tomorrow with a keen awareness of what happened yesterday.

I'm sure you don't have much need for Roman mythology. But it strikes me that Janus might know why so many resolutions are forgotten by February. Could it be that we're only looking forward -- when we should be looking back

in equal measure? We have New Year's resolutions. What about Old Year reflections?

Surveys show that rashly made resolutions are the first to fall by the wayside. The University of Washington study found that 65% of their study subjects made their promises between December 28 and New Year's Day. These were the folks most likely to fall off the resolution wagon within a few weeks.

In contrast, resolutions that stick are almost always backed by a strong personal commitment to change. And commitment depends on deep reflection, including an honest look at what unfolded during the recent past. As Janus would tell you, it's not enough to look at the entrance; the exit calls for attention as well.

Much of this reflection is done individually and around dinner tables, when it's done at all. Why not go further and open a dialogue in the workplace? The arrival of a new year gives us the perfect nudge.

How to proceed? Simple. Make a point of getting together with your colleagues to carve a collective resolution in stone. But don't agree on anything -- don't even talk in terms of action -- until you've reflected on the past year. Here are several questions you can use in your work group to seed the dialogue:

If a headline and news article were written to capture our work group's accomplishments for the year, what would they say?

Forget metrics and scorecards and all the measurable stuff for a moment. What are we plain old proud of from this past year?

What values were most important to us as the year began? What values seem to be paramount right now? Why the change?

What would we do differently at work if given the chance to circle back and relive one week of our choosing?

What did we learn at work this past year, and how did we learn it?

Did we stay in touch with our deep interests as individuals, and were we able to apply these passions in the workplace?

How well did we nurture a sense of community and teamwork while valuing and leveraging people's unique knowledge, talents, skills, and interests?

Questions like these will spark other questions and open the way to a meaningful conversation. It won't be the easiest or quickest exchange in recent memory, and at first, it might make your metric-minded colleagues a bit queasy. But it could be the most honest and revealing conversation you have all year.

Thoughtful answers to questions like those above will point you and others to just the right resolutions for the coming year. There's no need to light candles to Janus. Some serious reflection on the past will shine a much brighter light on how you and your co-workers can shape the future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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HR

"Much of this reflection is done individually and around dinner tables, when it's done at all. Why not go further and open a dialogue in the workplace? The arrival of a new year gives us the perfect nudge."

ARBITRATION / CASE LAW

**Off Duty Conduct, Make the Connection
Dismissal: Get It Right or They'll be Back**

Anonymous citizen complaints alleging the use, sale and production of marijuana by an employee caused a public employer to initiate an investigation. The employer alleged that the employee's marijuana use was in conflict with employer policy and law. The employer confronted the employee about the drug use and requested the employee take a drug test. With a union representative present, the employee admitted to using marijuana and said that he would probably fail a drug test based on regular use of marijuana. The employee claimed the use of marijuana was for medical purposes. While on leave pending the outcome of the investigation, the employer reviewed the employee's status on the medical marijuana registry.

Relevant employer policies and contract language included notice about following rules and laws. All employees were given written notice to follow policy, regulations and laws pertinent to their duties for the employer. Working under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol was specifically prohibited by employer policy. The employer was also subject to the Federal Drug Free Workplace Act.

Based on the citizen complaints, the employee's absence from the medical use registry and the employee's own statements, the employer dismissed the employee from employment for violating law and policy (by being under the influence of marijuana) and lying during the investigation. Primary evidence supporting the employer's decision to dismiss included the employee's admissions: of regular marijuana use, likelihood of failing the drug test, that the use was for medical reasons and that he/she probably was no longer on the state register.

The Union argued through to hearing that the employer failed to provide adequate notice of how the employee violated law and policy; failed to use progressive discipline; failed to provide notice that the medical use of marijuana was in conflict with employer policy; could not show that the employee was under the influence; and could not demonstrate an impact to the employee's work performance based on the off duty use. As an additional basis for dismissal, during the grievance process, the employer added the employee was in a safety sensitive position because his/her duties required monitoring the respiratory function of an elderly person and noti-

fying the employer's medical staff in the event of an emergency.

The parties could not resolve the employment issue surrounding the dismissal and the case was scheduled for arbitration. The arbitrator heard the case consistent with the labor agreement and rendered a decision that upheld the grievance and returned the employee to work with full back pay and benefits.

During the hearing, the employer's position was that the employee's admitted daily use of marijuana equated to being under the influence of the drug. The employer further argued that the employee was in a safety sensitive position and his/her marijuana use put the employer in violation of the

Federal Drug Free Workplace Act. Finally, the employer argued that the employee lied during the investigation by stating that he/she was using the marijuana for medicinal purposes but was "probably not" on the state registry.



Employer arguments that the employee was breaking the law and putting vulnerable individual at risk were compelling but unsupported by the evidence. Without drug test results, performance observations or convincing medical testimony, the employer could not show that the employee was under the influence of marijuana. Working under the influence while in employer owned facilities was a key element of the policy that the employee was alleged to have broken. Use of the anonymous complaints was restricted to evidence that provided a reasonable basis for initiating an investigation.

The arbitrator showed that on close reading of the Federal Drug Free Workplace Act, employees need to be engaged in the illegal activities of selling drugs or under the influence of illegal drugs while at work. The evidence supported neither element. Finally, the arbitrator determined that the employee's lie was not a lie because stating that he/she was probably no longer on the registry should not have misdirected the employer's investigation.

This case is rich in lessons for supervisors, managers and those who advise them about employee off duty conduct issues. Know the connection of the conduct to our workplace. All employees engage in multitude of behaviors (conduct) off duty, the majority of which have no impact on their duties at work or the employer's mission. Establishing >>>

"This case is rich in lessons for supervisors, managers and those who advise them about employee off duty conduct issues."

ARBITRATION / CASE LAW CONT.

the influence of marijuana use was key to making a connection between the employee's conduct and to breaking the employer's policy. Find all relevant issues early. The employer added the reason for the dismissal of occupying a safety sensitive position. It is common to address additional issues supporting dismissal after the fact. When relevant, it is important that the issue be treated as it would have been during the investigation process. Assuming the employee had been under the influence of marijuana (a violation of policy) the nature of the employee's position would have provided an aggravating fact. The fact of the safety sensitive duties does not prove the employee's innocence or guilt nor does it lower the burden of proof to a point that the employer could rely on anonymous complaints or not demonstrate "influence" through behavior observation. Further, the



concept of "safety sensitive" may have clear definition due to licenses or certifications associated with the employee's duties.

Employers have a compelling interest in responding to employee conduct that interferes with the performance of duties or the employer's mission. The impacts of drugs and alcohol in the workplace (low production, absenteeism, illegal activity in the workplace and others) are well known. When the impact of drug or alcohol use occurs from off duty conduct, the employer must seek a connection of the conduct to the workplace. So, that the employer may take necessary action to support its interests in the performance of duties and mission.

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"Know the connection of the conduct to our workplace."

HUMAN RESOURCE QUICK LINKS

[State Personnel Act](#)
[Personnel Rules](#)

[Title 18.80: State Commission for Human Rights](#)
[Alaska State Commission for Human Rights](#)
[Title 39.52 Alaska Executive Branch Ethics Act](#)
[Federal ADA Act](#)

[Labor Relations home page](#)
[Federal Department of Labor home page](#)

[Family Leave Acts](#)
[Federal \(FMLA\)](#)
[State \(AFLA\)](#)

HR

RETIREMENT PROJECTIONS

Over the next five years 26% of state employees will be eligible to retire based on age, retirement tier and years of service. In some occupational groups, the retirement rate is as high as 40%. Workforce Planning can help mitigate the impact of high retirement rates.

One of the Division of Personnel's workforce planning tools is its semi-annual publication, the

Workforce Profile. A discussion of recruitment, retention and knowledge transfer strategies as well as a breakdown of the retirement rates by department, retirement tier and job groups is available in the latest issue of the Profile.

The [Workforce Profile](#) is located on the Division of Personnel's web site in the [Statewide Planning and Research section](#).

HR

POSITION DESCRIPTIONS AND EMPLOYEE RETENTION: A VITAL LINK CONT.

A hard copy of this assessment tool can be found through the Division of Personnel home page, Quick Links, HR forms. The document itself is titled, [Position Description Classification Request Questionnaire](#).

Using this assessment tool will help guide you through the position classification process. Keep in mind that consulting with your supervisor and contacting your DOP Management Services Consultant can provide additional assistance if necessary.

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