

PERSONNEL NOTEBOOK

For Your Most Important Resource — The Human Resource

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MYTH BUSTERS ABOUT WORKERS

Myth: My Miriam-Webster dictionary defines “myth” as “A legendary narrative that presents part of the beliefs of a people or explains a practice. An imaginary or unverifiable thing”

Worker: It says that’s a “A person who works for wages”

So, our title suggests that some of what we believe and practice about people who work for wages is imaginary and unverifiable. They’re myths. These myths about workers are not trivial matters because managers act on these beliefs. If a manager believes that people want a lot of supervision, guidance and instruction, the he or she will give them very little latitude or freedom to act when it comes to how they do their work. If that manager is wrong, frustration, conflict and turnover are often the result.

Wharton School of Publishing produced a white paper reporting on the results of more than 30 years of research by Sirota Survey Intelligence (SSI), an international consulting group. The authors of the report, David Sirota, Louis Mischkind and Michael Meltzer found many

inconsistencies in what we think about workers. In analyzing their findings, SSI discovered that so much of what managers and executives considered to be common knowledge, was imaginary and unverifiable. More-over, the prevailing views expressed by them were *mostly* myth.

Let’s take a look at some of the myths they discovered about workers.

Myth No. 1: Most employees dislike their immediate managers.

The Reality: It is one of the most prevalent of myths that the immediate supervisor is the cause of most employee morale problems. It makes sense to target them because they are in direct contact with workers and are often relatively inexperienced and not well trained as supervisors. Yes, they are a big influence, but usually for the better! The research shows that the immediate managers are among the highest rated elements in the workers environment. The survey shows that 78 percent of employees are very positive towards their supervisor’s

technical skills. Although their rating on human relations skills is lower at 66 percent, it is still much higher than the ratings on the company's bureaucracy. Only 10 percent of supervisors received unfavorable ratings.

Myth No. 2: Worker's will never be satisfied with their pay.

The Reality: Across the board, 40 percent of workers rank their pay as 'Good' or 'Very Good'. And 23 percent of them rate it as "Poor" or 'Very Poor'. The rest rate it as "So-So". However, individual companies that pay competitive rates or better, rank as high as 69 percent for "Good" or "Very Good" pay, while companies that pay less than competitive wages rank as low as 8 percent for "Good" or "Very Good" pay. The authors found that when workers complained about pay it was not a "cover" for something else such as boring work or bad supervisors. Complaints about pay are almost always actually about pay.

Myth No. 3: Most people don't care whether they do a quality job or not.

The Reality: Almost everybody really wants to do a good job. They do care! The major frustration is not being able to get the job done or done well because of obstacles due to poor equipment, insufficient training, bureaucracy and conflicts among various parts of the organization. The study showed that 95 percent of all employees surveyed wanted to do a good job. The other 5 percent can be described as "allergic" to work. But managers tend to see those 5 percent as the majority so they institute harsh rules and practices on everyone such as very close supervision or demeaning policies. When much of the 95 percent start to act

the way they're treated, it all becomes a self fulfilling prophecy.

Myth No. 4: Workers object to large differences between their earnings and the earnings of senior management.

The Reality: It has become a common belief that workers resent the high compensation that senior executives often earn. The authors found that this is not an issue when the co-many is doing well and the workers feel that they are also benefiting from that success. A standard comment was "Let him make as much as he wants-he deserves it and it's been good for me. Let him keep doing what he's doing and I'll do what I do as long as it's working".

If employees see that better pay, benefits and privileges come to those who advance and that advancement is due to productivity and quality work, they recognize that as something to aspire to. There is opportunity! Reward people who give you what you want. Whatever you reward, you get more of.

Myth No. 5: Most employees resist change, regardless of what the change is.

The Reality: The belief that "People hate and resist change" has become a "truism" that few dare deny. The fact is that people almost always say they want change. But they resist change they see as harmful to them or their organizations. They resist change that they do not understand. They don't want change just for the sake of change, but change they understand and particularly change they helped create. The more people know about what is coming the less they fear it.

Often managers will secretly develop plans and “spring” them on employees at the last minute because they do not want to hear about legitimate concerns or problems. They don’t want to take the time or effort to sell their ideas to employees. It’s tempting to say “Why waste time listening to employees, they’re just resisting change”.

After such surprise changes people begin to complain about all changes and the “self-fulfilling prophecy” is at work again. Employee’s behavior reflects the way they are treated. Begin to truly think of employees as thinking adults and partners who will also be affected by changes.

Myth No. 6: In jobs that require “thinking”, employees should be involved in decisions about their work. But that’s not necessary for standardized, functional work.

The Reality: Most managers accept the concept that employees doing professional or managerial work should be brought into the decision making process. But in spite of that awareness they also believe that blue-collar, clerical and labor intensive jobs just aren’t the place for participative management. They feel that ideas are for “idea” jobs but not for physical or “functional” jobs.

The authors say that this bit of “common sense” doesn’t hold up to the light of day when it is contradicted by the history of extraordinary developments by the legion of hands-on innovators who are largely responsible for most of the advancements in industry. Those blue-collar workers who participated in decision making and development changed the manufacturing processes in every country in the world.

In Japan the shop-floor decisions made by the people doing the work are credited with making Japan one of the world’s greatest manufacturing economies.

In fact, say the authors, there is no category of work for which involving workers in decision making, which means asking them to help though thinking, is not appropriate.

Myth No. 7: Different generations want different things in their work. Young people today resent authority much more than young people of two or three decades ago.

The Reality: The research demonstrated clearly there are no differences in the basic three things people want in their jobs based on age, sex, occupation, industry, nation or culture. People everywhere and in every walk of life wanted to be treated fairly, be proud of what they do and for whom they do it and have good relationships with the people they work with.

Much of what is written about the generational differences may be true, but the concept that Generation X is less concerned about job security and more resentful of authority doesn’t hold up. Resentment of authority is an individual attitude not a generational trait.

Myth No. 8: You just can’t generalize about people at work because every individual is so different.

The Reality: Of course no two individuals are exactly alike and managers often need to take those differences into account when managing people. But there are broad and useful generalizations that are well grounded in solid research that

can be made about people at work. For example, as mentioned in myth no. 7, it is clear that while there are differences in degree, the overwhelming majority of people do want to be proud of the work they do and the company they work for (This satisfies a human need for **Achievement**). They do want to be treated fairly (the need for **Equity**) and they do want to work harmoniously and productively with others (the need for **Camaraderie**). When these needs are frustrated the company pays the price by finding an indifferent workforce and generally mediocre performance. Yes people are individuals, but there are very few individuals to whom these principles do not apply.

Myth No. 9: Whether or not a company is ethical and a good corporate citizen is of little concern to most of its employees.

The Reality: Except for gangsters and sociopaths, people do not feel good about a day's work that requires lying, cheating or stealing. And people don't want to work for companies that act this way. The ethics of their employers are of great concern to the large majority of workers.

The authors find that there are four main sources of pride people are attracted to in their company. These points of pride are seen as different facets of one attribute-*Excellence:*

- Excellence in the organization's financial performance
- Excellence in the efficiency with which the work gets done
- Excellence in the organization's products, including their usefulness, distinctiveness and quality
- Excellence in the organization's moral character.

People want to work for an organization that does well but also does good.

There is considerable research that indicates that companies that exude a moral ethic in their corporate behavior produce more long-term business success. It may be a reflection of how employees in such an environment take as much pride in their work as they do in their company.

The Findings: The overwhelming majority of workers are shown to have three main goals in their work:
Achievement: To take pride in one's accomplishments by doing things that matter and doing them well. To take pride in their own and their companies accomplishments.

Equity: To be treated justly in relation to the basic conditions of employment including pay, benefits, job security and respectful treatment.

Camaraderie: To have warm, interesting and cooperative relations with others in the workplace.

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