

Canâ??t Find Workers? Time to Check in on the Ones You DO Have.

Description

So many companies are struggling to find workers. It is everywhere. It seems that on most retail store doors, thereâ??s a â??hiringâ?• sign posted. At a recent event, a person who works for a county government came up to me and said, â??There are no people.â?•

I agree totally that it is a tough environment to attract, hire, and retain talent. Yet, just as with any demanding situation, there will be some companies that do better than others. This does not mean they will not be impacted by being open fewer hours, providing fewer services, and paying higher wages. It does mean they will be impacted less than others who arenâ??t doing certain things right.

Companies that make it through tough times know what metrics to track based on their importance to their long-term success. An accelerator roundtable hosted by the Studer Community Institute brought together a host of leaders from a variety of companies. The size ranged from 1 to 806 employees. When asked what an important metric was, my answer was *financial sustainability*. Whether itâ??s a company or a church, if an organization isnâ??t financially stable, the excellent work it does will disappear.

This does not mean the focus is on money. Rather the focus must be on those key metrics that will allow the organization to provide excellent service and/or products delivered by an engaged workforce. The focus on these metrics (which can range from inventory control to ability to collect money owed) will increase and/or decrease in importance based on the situation. Some items require short-term focus, and others are always paid attention to.

Today I believe two areas that have always been on the to-do list have moved to the top. These are supply chain management and staffing. For this column, my focus is on staffing.

When I hear people express concern and at times complain about lack of staffing, I ask them, â??Do you have people working now?â?• The answer is typically, â??Yes, but we need more.â?• I then ask them how the current employees feel about working there. For many small businesses; city, state, and county organizations; and even some mid- to generous-sized companies, measuring how the current employees feel about their place of work provides insight into what is retaining them and what could assure they stay.

I have written in the past about stay interviews. That is just one tool in a leaderâ??s toolbox. By consistently measuring or taking the temperature of the workforce, we can make sure we continue to provide what is working well and also address items that need improvement. I am finding shorter surveys conducted more frequently than the once-a-year employee engagement survey provide good learnings. When we regularly take employeesâ?? temperatures, we can be sure theyâ??re feeling good about working for usâ??and if they arenâ??t, we can take needed action quickly to turn things around.

Most recently, at Studer Family of Companies, we chose seven questions from the forty-four questions on the yearly survey. Four of them were areas in which we did not do well in the large survey, and three were areas in which we did do well. In the survey, which is anonymous, we used a five-point system, ranging from strongly agree to agree to mixed feeling to disagree to strongly disagree. One of the statements measured was: *I am kept informed of decisions that impact me.* The data can be summarized as, for example, â??80 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree.â?•

The survey results also provide the number of employees under each category. We can also look at the data by work area. In the rollout sessions, the results are discussed, and then an area to focus on more is decided along with steps to do so.

This process provides feedback thatâ??s far more â??just in timeâ?• than if we did only a yearly survey. It is also very inexpensive to conduct. It shows areas of success and at times areas that need more focus.

When discussing surveying staff, I hear at times from small businesses, â??We will do that when we get bigger.â?• I feel that if a company waits to measure employee engagement, it may never get bigger.

Is it scary at first? Yes. Could you see some results that are disappointing? Yes. Will you see come incredibly positive results in some or many areas? Yes. Will it help to take actions to retain workers and recruit more staff? Yes.

A few next steps to consider:

1. Select some questions for an employee engagement survey. If you have a vendor, they will help you.
2. Select five to seven questions at the most. This is taking a temperature, not doing a full physical.
3. Send a note to all with a link to the survey. We use an outside company for confidentiality.
4. When the results come in, take time to study them. Be careful not to rationalize less-than-desired results.
5. Roll out the results in an open manner.
6. Celebrate the positive results.
7. Pick one question to focus on over the next several weeks.
8. Communicate the actions you are taking and connect them back to the survey and staff meeting input. This will go a long way toward helping people feel listened to and valued.

While yes, there is a recruitment challenge, it is exacerbated by a retention challenge. We canâ??t always control the number of people in the job market, but there *is* a lot we can do to make sure employees are engaged and fulfilled. The better a companyâ??s retention, the better its recruitment.

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Author

quint-studer