

How to Help Your Staff Feel Heard

ASAE | Brian Haney | August 11, 2023



If you want productive, motivated, and happy employees, they need to feel heard, be engaged, and have a sense of belonging. A look at some strategies for improving both workplace culture and employee well-being.

Employees who feel disregarded by their organization are more likely to get frustrated, feel burnt out, and quit. Forbes listed being unheard by supervisors and feeling “overlooked or ignored” as two of the top ten reasons employees leave their jobs. This can devastate employee retention rates, increasing hiring costs and making it challenging for employers to keep talented workers.

Conversely, a study by workforce management organization Ultimate Kronos Group (UKG) found that organizations are more likely to perform well financially when employees feel heard and engaged and have a sense of belonging.

Although employers thought 2021 was the year of the Great Resignation, the trend continued into 2022 and may impact 2023 as well. As the talent market continues to evolve, employers that invest in creating a culture of openness will stand out. There are several strategies employers can deploy to make workers feel seen and heard, improve culture, and ultimately boost retention and attraction rates, increasing employee engagement and positively contributing to organizational culture.

What It Means to Be Heard

We all want to be seen for who we are as individuals, not just for what we can do. Creating intentionality around a workplace culture that values people beyond their job descriptions is critical. Being heard may mean different things to different people; however, employees generally feel heard when they're included in decision-making processes. Allowing employees to have a say in how things are done makes them feel like their opinions are valued and instills a sense of control over their work life. Fostering two-way communication can also significantly improve employee well-being and loyalty.

Why It Matters

Research from UKG showed that 86 percent of employees feel that different voices at their organization aren't heard fairly, with almost half (47 percent) saying underrepresented voices, such as those of young and essential workers, are less valued by their employers. Meanwhile, 63 percent of workers feel their employer has ignored their voice, and 75 percent don't feel heard on critical issues, such as safety, benefits, and time-off requests. As a result, 34 percent of employees would rather quit or switch teams than voice their genuine concerns to management.

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It should come as no surprise that organizations that effectively listen to employees see vastly different responses regarding employee productivity. Most employees (74 percent) report being more engaged and effective when they feel heard at work, and 92 percent of highly engaged workers feel listened to in the workplace, compared to 30 percent of highly disengaged workers. Clearly actively listening and responding to employees is crucial for a productive and loyal workforce.

Doing the Work

Creating a culture where employees feel their opinion is valued relies on several factors. Employers should consider the following four strategies to help workers feel valued:

Encourage communication. Let your employees know you want to hear from them. The Workforce Institute at UKG [PDF] found that 47 percent of employees are more likely to share feedback anonymously, via a third-party site such as Glassdoor or Indeed, than through internal channels. This is primarily caused by employees feeling ignored (63 percent) by managers or employers, not taken seriously (34 percent), or not cared about (35 percent). This can be a serious issue because, if employees aren't willing to provide feedback, employers will remain unaware of potential problems. Therefore, it's crucial to proactively ask for feedback. For the best results, this should be done through multiple channels, such as internal surveys and one-on-one meetings with supervisors.

Respond to employee concerns. Hearing is only one part; responding to the feedback being given is the next critical step. Employees are unlikely to provide feedback if they believe their opinions will be ignored. Unfortunately, 40 percent of employees don't think their input leads to actionable organizational change, according to UKG. Employers must embrace constructive

criticism by actively listening to employees, addressing concerns, and being transparent about workplace decisions.

Focus on employees as people. A recent survey Gallup found that fewer than one in four American workers strongly believe their organization cares about their well-being. Demonstrating to employees they are valued goes a long way toward making them feel their opinions matter. Employers can do this by allowing them autonomy in certain areas, such as offering flexible scheduling, remote work options, or employee growth opportunities beyond mandatory training. Offering employees mentorship can also improve retention.

Lead by example. Leadership plays a crucial role in making workers feel valued. When leaders demonstrate vulnerability by being open to feedback, while encouraging collaboration and idea sharing, it cultivates positive behaviors in staff. Leaders should be encouraged to view feedback as constructive criticism, not a personal attack. Understanding critical aspects of emotional intelligence—such as active listening, body language, and eye contact—can also help employees not feel dismissed or ignored when voicing concerns.

When employees feel chronically overlooked and unheard, the results are high rates of turnover, poor attraction rates, low employee morale, and worsened productivity. That's why associations must create a culture and working environment that draws unique people in, encourages them to grow, and empowers them to be the best versions of themselves.