



Celebrating 75 Years In Service

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Workplace Stress and Employee Morale

The year of 2020 with COVID-19, economic challenges and other societal conflict has compounded employee stress. **Nearly 70% of American workers reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has been the most stressful time of their career. Similarly, 88% of employees reported moderate to extreme stress in the first months of the pandemic.**

The primary causes that have compounded work related stress and anxiety for employees during 2020 include:

- Personal health or the health of family and friends
- Related financial circumstances or worry about being laid off or furloughed
- Difficulty in maintaining focus
- Worsening of existing mental health or physical conditions
- Increased consumption of caffeine, nicotine, alcohol and other legal and illegal substances

With stress, anxiety and uncertainty at all-time high levels, it is important for businesses to implement morale - boosting measures to establish and maintain an effective workforce and a positive company culture.

Employee morale describes the "overall outlook, attitude, satisfaction, and confidence that employees feel at work." In basic terms, employees with high levels of

morale are happy, productive and produce a high quality of customer service and team support.

Major benefits of high employee morale include:

1. High employee morale results in increased teamwork
2. Companies with high employee morale retain productive staff
3. Good morale improves office and customer relationships
4. The higher the morale, the more productive the team
5. High morale results in less absenteeism, high quality of work and high customer satisfaction
6. Improved morale results in greater attention to detail
7. Employees represent your good name and organization at a much higher level

How to Boost and Maintain Employee Morale

1. Improve workplace communications. Effective owners and leaders fill the void with effective and positive communications. These types of communications take a number of forms to include:
 - Daily "touch base", meet and greet with employees to see how they are doing, feeling, etc. An effective leader will establish that personal relationship exhibiting personal concern for an employee's and their family's wellbeing.
 - Daily, weekly and certainly no longer than monthly, communicate with employees business results, goals, positive client feedback, recognize individuals before the team

who have performed exceedingly well and other "catch up" meetings and luncheons. During these meetings, always request and allow for employee feedback.

2. Encourage employee feedback. An effective organization fosters a culture that encourages employee feedback. Whether it's through the "catch up" communications as previously noted or more formal employee surveys, suggestion boxes, etc., employee feedback should be a part of leadership efforts.
3. Create a culture of being positive. Company owners and leaders must set the example in creating an enjoyable work environment. This can be done through positive thinking. If the leader is positive, it will trickle down throughout the rest of the organization. A leader must remain optimistic in the face of adversity and serve as a role model for all employees in all situations - no matter how challenging or frustrating things may be.

Create Employee Recognition Opportunities

As with any relationship, positive recognition is extremely important to employee morale. Leadership needs to acknowledge staff's exceptional and hard work through informal as well as formal recognition programs. Informal programs can be as simple as positive feedback as noted in the "catch up" meetings as well as individual meet and greet on a daily basis. More formal programs can include nominations of managers or employees to be recognized. These recognition opportunities may include gift cards, cash rewards and other items of "value." Other types of recognition can be

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letters to employees and their families in their homes, emails, recognition of employee efforts in newsletters, company websites, bulletin boards, etc.

Recognize Individual Performance with Increased Compensation

The kiss of death to employee morale is an employee who shows up, does an outstanding job, is committed but receives the same or less in pay and benefits as an employee who shows up and just gets through the day. Employees must be recognized both with employee recognition programs as previously noted but also, more importantly, through increased pay and benefits. Those employees who are your most effective need to know that there are increased career opportunities through promotions and/or compensation. Financial opportunities encourage hard working employees to remain with your organization instead of seeking other career opportunities with higher pay.

Create Opportunities for Employees to Bond

Positive morale is closely tied to how employees feel about their manager as well as team members. So it's important to be creative and provide activities that bring employees closer. It may be as simple as hosting weekly lunches or happy hours. Organize events to include celebrating birthdays, anniversaries or other important milestones. Try to think outside the box asking your team to come up with activities they would like to do together. For those that are working from home, consider hosting virtual happy hours and one-on-one video chat meetings.

Challenge Health, Wellness and Mental Health Programs

Employers should review their formal, defined offerings as well as informal offerings. Informal efforts include offering flexible schedules, providing additional paid time off, encouraging employees to take regular breaks as well as taking earned vacation.

Many organizations are establishing wellness programs where fitness classes or health education classes are provided.

Some organizations are bringing in occupational nurses to do individual mental and health "work ups" to establish a roadmap to improve health and wellness. Others are providing everyone with a wearable tracker, like a Fitbit, and have office competition on who has the highest number of steps. Again, these efforts should be creative and involve employee input and development.

As owners and leaders place employee morale as a priority for 2021, pay attention to the following:

- Employees who stop communicating
- Employees whose energy level has dropped
- Employees who are showing signs of burnout
- Employees who are missing work
- Employees who are becoming frustrated at work
- Employees who may be having financial, family or other personal challenges

These warning signs are not only issues as relates to employee morale but also employee health, wellness and safety. Managers shouldn't hesitate to engage these individuals to see what the organization can offer to support the individual.

The following are SESCO's reminders to owners and managers of what employees want and need from their organization. Further, one of the most effective communications programs an employer can engage is that of an employee satisfaction survey. This will provide owners and leaders a baseline of employee satisfaction and also employee feedback to improve the organization's overall productivity and success.

What Employees Want and Need

- **Employees want** to do interesting, challenging work in which they can assume some responsibility. Employees welcome work that is challenging and want the chance to think for themselves and contribute new ideas. If you don't give people work that is challenging and motivating, you force them to get job satisfaction through compensation

- more money and higher benefits. This results in more wage and benefit demands and labor unrest. Spiraling wages over the years have not motivated working people except to look for their next wage increase. So-called "*fringe benefits*," which now cost employers approximately 35% of their annual payroll, do not motivate employees. People spend less time working for money and more security than ever before, and the trend cannot be reversed.

- **Employees want** recognition for good work. Verbal and tangible recognition is often more important than pay increases. "*Recognition*" from management makes an employee feel important and appreciated. These basic "*self-esteem*" needs, when consistently met by management and supervision, is one of the most powerful, intrinsic job motivators.
- **Employees want** to work with managers and supervisors who treat them with respect. Employees, supervisors, and managers bring to the job a consistent need to be treated fairly, consistently, and with respect. They desire employee and communications that are two-way, not one way, and free of verbal threats, verbal abuse, and unrealistic demands.
- **Employees want** to have the chance of developing new skills. Employees want the opportunity to advance and grow into more skillful people so they can have the opportunity to move into more responsible, challenging, and financially rewarding jobs. We have observed in our consulting profession that the more employees are qualified to do, the more they are motivated. The less they are qualified to do or have to do, the less they are motivated.
- **Employees want** to work with managers who listen and appreciate employee ideas on how a job can be done better, more productively or more safely. Employees want to have the opportunity of sharing their opinion on how their company can be a better place to work for everyone.

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- **Employees want** a chance to think for themselves rather than just carrying out rigid instructions from their boss. Today's working man and working woman are more intelligent and better educated than any previous period in our U.S. labor history. Employers that implement employee involvement programs, quality circles, and management-supported employee suggestion systems have benefited greatly by meeting this on-the-job need of working people.
- **Employees like** to see or know the "end results" of their work. The employee wants to know how his job will contribute to achieving the company's mission and objectives. The need for "job enrichment" is not a one-time proposition, but a continuous management challenge.
- **Employees want** to work with managers and supervisors that are committed, dedicated, and supportive. We all wish to work with a manager or supervisor that is an effective leader. Employees want to be loyal and supportive of their managers and supervisors.
- **Employees want** to know what's going on. Today's employee wants to know how well the company is doing and the problems and challenges facing their employer. Only in this way can employees and their families decide whether or not to go in debt for a new home, a new vehicle or to borrow for other family needs.
- **Employees want** to feel good about working for their employer. They want to have pride in their contribution to the company's objectives. Employees want to feel proud about where they work. They want to work with ethical managers that believe there is no right way to do a wrong thing.

SESCO's Management/Employee Satisfaction Survey

SESCO's Satisfaction Survey has been **validated** by the University of Tennessee and is the only satisfaction survey on the market that has a validation rating. The rating is 92.7.

Since it was professionally developed and field-tested among hundreds of organizations over the past 75 years, the core survey questions in eighteen (18) attitude categories are reinforced by our national norms. Comparison of the individual question and attitude category results of your organization with our national norms will add a tremendous dimension to your evaluation, comparison and reporting of the survey results and feedback with your managers and employees throughout the organization.

Additionally, when future surveys are conducted, our program allows for on-going analysis and comparison of your survey results and progress. In essence, we establish your personalized data bank providing benchmarking from survey to survey.

Special Features of SESCO's Satisfaction Survey Program:

- Customized questionnaires/questions
- Industry-specific databases for comparison of organization survey results
- Breakdown of survey results by demographics, survey groups, departments, sites and other comparisons as directed by the client
- Validated survey system
- On or offsite administration
- Follow-up action planning and professional consulting

Contact SESCO at 423-764-4127 or sesco@sescomgt.com

Year-End Employment Law and HR Checklist

The following checklist can be used internally to challenge not only your compliance posture to federal and state employment regulations, but also to ensure that your systems and practices are effective.

Of course, SESCO retainer clients (service agreement) receive onsite or virtual employment law and HR audits as part of the monthly fee. Those clients wishing to schedule an audit should simply contact SESCO and/or your assigned consultant. Those who are not a current retainer client (monthly service agreement), simply contact SESCO to explore our services as provided at no additional charge and to schedule your audit.

- Ensure your employee handbook and policies and procedures are compliant to federal and state law.
- Review compensation practices to determine if labor grades need to be adjusted or positions need to be reevaluated. Determine if your compensation system is externally competitive but more importantly, internally equitable and affordable.
- Conduct Fair Labor Standards Act audit as non-compliance with Wage and Hour regulations continues to be at an all-time high – 81% of businesses audited are not in compliance.
- Challenge personnel documentation, especially to include inactive files to determine support of resignations or, more importantly, terminations.
- Schedule and plan for 2021 employee and management harassment training.
- Ensure that your Affirmative Action Program is up to date and compliant with the latest OFCCP regulations.
- Review your EEOC policies and practices to ensure compliance with new federal and state regulations.



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During this holiday season, we take time to reflect upon all of the good things we have...like our partnership and friendship with you and your organization. We appreciate the opportunity to support your human resource and employment law needs and hope that the holidays and the coming year will bring you much happiness and success. Thank you from the SESCO staff!

Thank You to Our SESCO Staff

2020 has been a very challenging year and our valued clients have needed SESCO more than ever! As such, we would like to extend our sincere thanks to our consulting and legal team for the extraordinary efforts in providing professional and timely service to our valued clients throughout the country. These efforts including becoming a national expert on COVID-19 and related FFCRA and CARES Act regulations. Our team has worked night and day to serve clients in need and our firm is extremely proud of all of our staff and subsequent efforts.