

Hotel Business Review

Best practices, insights & trends

Hotel Recruitment: Take My Job – Please!

By Paul Feeney, President, Sanford Rose Associates



Mr. Paul Feeney

Are your employees simply showing up most days?

Half of all workers hate their jobs. Wait, scratch that: let's be more precise. According to a new survey by The Conference Board, a non-profit organization that studies business issues, just 51% of all American workers say they are satisfied with their jobs. That figure stood at 59% just seven years ago. Perhaps most alarming, workers aged 35-44 had the highest level of satisfaction in 1995 (at 61%) – but today have the lowest (at 47%).

In the year 2000, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, that age group accounted for 27% of the workforce – five percent higher than the nearest age group. By 2010, those same individuals will be in the 45-54 age bracket – where most high-level promotions occur – and will continue to be the largest age group, based on current demographic trends. Will they also continue to be the least happy?

While exact percentages are likely to vary from country to country, there is little reason to believe that overall trends are markedly different. Work just isn't as much fun as it used to be. According to Lynn Franco, research director of The Conference Board, the survey found almost no bright spots. For example, even though satisfaction increases with income level, satisfied workers in the highest income breakout declined from 67% in 1995 to 55% in 2002. And while 58% of survey respondents claimed to like their fellow workers, that percentage declined as well – from over 64% in the previous study.

Some aspects of work received a failing grade. A scant 22% of today's workers said their promotional opportunities were satisfactory (the lowest rating in the survey), only 37% approved of their wages and just 40% found their health plan sufficient. Exactly half were satisfied with job security.

It's a mad, mad world!

There's a lot of anger in the workplace:

- At the capriciousness of modern employment;
- At the perceived greed of top management;
- At frozen salaries and reduced benefits;
- At reduced promotional opportunities;
- At facing an uncertain retirement age and income level;
- At being expected to do the work of two;
- At never being thanked for a job well done.

Good headhunters are trained to ferret out a potential job prospect's "reasons to leave." Maybe it's being passed over for promotion, reporting to an unbearable boss or experiencing an unsettling sense of impending doom (e.g., the company is headed toward bankruptcy court or a hostile takeover). What the search professional seeks is emotion, because – nine times out of ten – offering a cure for emotional upset beats waving more money at the candidate or promising

more perks.

Some employers may feel a false sense of security from the fact that employee resignations don't seem to be particularly high, but that is primarily attributable to the lackluster job market, stalled economy and uncertainty about world events. Unless the economic cycle has been repealed, there will be brighter days ahead, and employees once again will feel more comfortable in trading the devil they know for the devil they don't.

Can passion be made to pay?

Gallup pollster Gabriel Gonzales-Molina, in collaboration with Curt Coffman, has written a new book called *Follow This Path: How the World's Great Organizations Drive Growth by Unleashing Human Potential* (Warner Books, 2002). Based on Gallup's research at thousands of companies around the world, the book examines the amount of passion that employees have for their jobs, their co-workers and their customers.

	1995	2002
Workers satisfied with current job	59%	51%
25-34 years old	58	53
35-44	61	47
45-54	57	50
55-64	56	48
\$25-35,000 household income	56	45
\$35-50,000	60	49
\$50,000 and over	67	55
Aspects of job satisfaction		
Job security	49	50
Wages	39	37
Promotion	23	22
Health plan	44	40
Supervisor	56	55
Fellow workers	64	58
Interesting work	65	58
Sources: The Conference Board, Associated Press		
Visits each day to an Internet job board: 4 million		
Source: Pew Research Center		

In keeping with the Conference Board survey, the book contends that 50-60% of workers are doing less than their best work – and that up to 20% are "actively disengaged" from work (i.e., on an emotional level, they have left their current place of employment).

If 100% of an organization's workers were motivated to do their best work, say the authors, then sales would go up, customers would be more loyal and both productivity and profits would increase. Moreover, since better-motivated workers would be happier workers, turnover would decline.

That state of grace, of course, cannot be accomplished overnight. Just like gardens and marriages, workplaces require constant tending. Small amounts of effort, however, can produce big improvements. For instance, publicly recognizing an employee for performance above and beyond the call of duty doesn't take a whole lot of time, energy or money – yet it can boost an entire

department's morale.

And when times are tough, employees want to know that management cares. Thus, on the battlefield, the commanding general makes sure his troops have been fed before partaking himself. Unfortunately, that fundamental principle of leadership has been lost on too many corporate chieftains of late, who not only devour their own rations – but those of employees and shareholders as well.

The good news is that improving organizational effectiveness and morale does not require brain surgery (although your employees may disagree). Rather, it requires a simple combination of humility and common sense: "If I would not want to be treated this way, why would my employees?" (Or, from a positive standpoint: "What can I do to help people feel proud to work here?")

Meanwhile, time's a-wasting. If your employees match the Conference Board profile, up to half could scoot when better times beckon. And they may not be the half you want to lose.

Paul Feeney is currently the President of Sanford Rose Associates, an Executive Search Firm located in Butler, New Jersey. Sanford Rose Associates was founded in 1959, is a full-service executive search organization conducting retained and contingency searches through a network of 60+ offices worldwide devotes its practice to all areas of finance, accounting, general

management, operations, technology, management consulting and project management for national and international searches. Paul has over 14 years of executive search management and corporate recruiting experience while working in New York, London and Prague. To contact Paul, please call 973-492-5424, fax 973-492-5422, e-mail pffeeney@sanfordrose.com or visit www.sanfordrose.com/wayne

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