

Making the Most of Your Post-survey Action-planning and Communication Process: *Proven and Powerful Secrets for Success to your Post-survey Process*



One of the greatest challenges faced by organizations conducting Employee Opinion Surveys occurs during the Post-survey Action-planning and Communication phase.

How do you know that you have properly linked the very real and positive actions taken by your organization as a result of a survey to an Employee Survey itself? Unfortunately, without such clear linkage, employees will never give their management team full credit for taking the time to ask for their opinions, and far more importantly, taking the time to *act* on these opinions. Such is not only very common, but also a worse case scenario for an Employee Opinion Survey.

As many of our clients have learned, an organization should seize upon every opportunity to report positive changes as a result of their Employee Opinion Survey. We have humorously suggested to many clients that “if the sun comes up tomorrow, it is because of the Employee Survey.” In fact, some organizations are already aware changes they will likely implement as a result of the survey, but delay making these changes until after the survey so that they can link their *planned* positive action steps directly to their employees’ opinions.

We thought it would be helpful to suggest to you several novel and innovative ways in which our clients have best addressed this important communication and action-planning objective.

Proven & Powerful Action Planning Tips

- Share survey success stories at all-employee/town-hall meetings. Invite employees *and* their manager to present where their action plans have “made a difference” for their department. Not only will the manager and the employees feel recognized for their success with the survey, but others in the audience will naturally question what has been done with the survey in their own department. In addition, the employee’s presence increases management’s accountability that action plans will be implemented.
- Add a “Survey Update” column to your employee newsletter/publication. The column’s consistent theme should be “Here’s what you said, here’s what we did.”
- Quantify, track, and report all organizational and/or managerial responses to your final survey results, whether they are global or department-specific in nature. For example, one of HR Solutions’ clients displayed a color-coded chart near their employee cafeteria; this chart reports all up-to-date progress on 2,500 potential action-plan items, no matter of how big or small the action plan step might have seemed (most of the 2,500 items were actually “quick-fixes”). In the case of the mere 250 items where management decided *not* to implement changes, the charts clearly report the reasons *why* the changes could not be made. Therefore, the employees are well-informed about each possible action plan item and why or why not certain actions would be taken.
- Have the head of your organization make 10 to 15 strategically-placed requests to review line-level supervisors’ action plans; this will effectively make use of your organization’s “grapevine” and send the widespread message that the survey’s eventual outcomes are being tracked and monitored at the highest level of the organization. If you would like some assistance in identifying which line-level supervisors your organization should chose, your HR Solutions’ Project Manager will be able to work with you in making the most effective choices.
- Add a set item in every supervisor’s staff meeting agenda to discuss updates to the Employee Opinion Survey. The reason for implementing a set item on the agenda is for the employees to recognize the accountability of the management team to fully implement the action-plans resulting from the Employee Opinion Survey. It is essential that management *regularly* communicate any changes that are being implemented which resulted from the information obtained from the Employee Opinion Survey during the staff meeting. Additionally, this is

a key opportunity for management to share the survey action-planning information with the employees for their feedback and “buy-in.” By involving and continually communicating information to the employees, it will help ensure that the action plans that management established are meaningful, accountable, and successful.

- The APulse Survey is a simple, hassle-free two-item survey which holds managers and the organization accountable for implementing their action plans. As you know, on average, most organizations survey their employees every eighteen months, using the survey the way it was meant to be used, that is, as an ongoing *system* of measurement as opposed to a one-time event. But why wait eighteen months to find out if your managers and the organization implemented action plans that introduced positive change within the organization as well as the work groups? Positioning the APulse Survey three months after the action planning has been implemented from the last full employee survey, allows enough time for the employees to recognize the positive changes that occurred as a result of their comments and suggestions. The items would be the following:

My supervisor used the feedback from the last Employee Opinion Survey to make positive change in our work group.

This organization used the feedback from the last Employee Opinion Survey to make improvements.

- Host an awards banquet for those managers who have implemented the most effective action plans as a result of the Employee Opinion Survey. This is not only an excellent way to recognize those managers who took full advantage of the survey feedback and made positive changes, but it also allows the managers to share “tips” on why their action plans were so successful. Each “action planning star” should be afforded an opportunity to explain what they believe made them a “star action planner” within the company. Taking full advantage of this learning opportunity, someone from Human Resources should be taking copious notes about what makes a “Best-In-Class” action planner. Those notes on Best Action Planning Practices can then be shared with managers that did not have as positive perceptions from their employees with regard to their action planning (i.e. those with the lower scores on the APulse Survey).
- Consider emulating the practice that many of our Best-In-Class clients have in linking future survey improvement to their management team’s bonuses. Linking management bonuses to future survey improvement guarantees greater management ownership and buy-in to the survey process. It also reinforces the organization’s commitment to improving and rewards those managers that make the organization a more satisfying place to work.

At this point, it is important to note that supervisors are underutilized as the vehicles of communication at most organizations. When employees were asked how they would *prefer* to receive organizational information, 62% of survey respondents indicated they would prefer to receive this information from their supervisor rather than from coworkers, e-mail, newsletters, or paycheck stuffers. When the same employees were asked how they *actually* received organizational information, however, only 32% of employees indicated that they received organizational information from their supervisor. Thus, supervisory communication is critical to the post action-planning process and to the success of how the survey is perceived.

Common Pitfalls

It is especially important for an organization to avoid the most common mistakes, including:

- *Globalization.* Not bringing the action-planning down deep enough into the organization (to the work group level).
- *Lost Opportunity.* Not quickly seizing upon the “low-hanging fruit” or “easy fixes,” especially those that carry a visible or tangible action plan result. As an example, one of our clients felt “like Santa Claus” after personally delivering a fax machine to a satellite facility which felt “out of the loop” when it came to organizational news.

Another client wisely branded “From the Employee Opinion Survey” on mops given to Environmental Services employees as a result of their survey (something as simple as providing mops was the single greatest priority expressed by employees during the feedback sessions).

- *Organizational Denial and Paralysis.* Hiring more consultants or conducting more research to confirm what was already identified by the Employee Opinion Survey. We watched one organization spend nearly \$400,000 on additional pay studies, while doing nothing to repair the serious external pay competitiveness issues already highlighted by their Employee Opinion Survey results.
- *The River of Denial.* This is not a river in Egypt, but rather, a river that a manager may fall (or jump) into after learning the survey results for his/her work group. The manager becomes trapped by the current and is unwilling to accept the perceptions of his/her employees as a reality. Instead of recognizing the priorities for change and addressing them, the manager refuses to take action, and continues to listlessly float down the “River of Denial.”
- *All talk, no action.* Employees are especially perceptive when it comes to seeing through a senior management team’s false commitment to an Employee Survey. We know of one organization that watched its employee participation rate in its survey slide from 89% to a measly 29%, because nothing was done with the first survey’s results. Not by accident, this organization’s employees ushered in a union early last year. Needless to say, it will be a long time before this organization can regain employees’ trust and reap the benefits of a properly conducted Employee Survey and Post-survey Action-planning process.
- *The KISS Rule.* “Keep It Simple Silly.” Some organizations inadvertently complicate what should be a simple action-planning implementation process; this is the primary reason HR Solutions offers its clients a simple action-planning template which is no more than one-page in length.
- *Flash in the Pan.* In this case, a survey is unfortunately treated as a one-time event with no follow-up survey announced or in sight. As long as the managers of an organization know there is no repeat survey scheduled which will effectively “grade” the success of their collective and individual action plans, how seriously do you think their action-plan implementation will be? Without a follow-up survey, there is no accountability, and without accountability, there will be no change.

By following the aforementioned suggestions and avoiding the pitfalls we have highlighted, you should be well on your way to achieving success during the post-survey process.