Poor Communication = Declining Morale

By Melanie Lockwood Herman

Executive Director

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According to a survey of more than 300 HR managers, a lack of "honest and open communication" tops the list of factors causing low morale in the workplace. The survey, conducted by Accountemps, revealed that the #1 source of low morale in any workforce is poor communication. Although ineffective communication bears a steep price tag, the cost to remedy the situation is chump change. Max Messmer, chairman of Accountemps, noted in a press release that "improving workplace communication is one of the most effective—and least costly—ways to combat the problem of a disengaged workforce."

What other common workplace issues threaten your staff morale, and therefore your mission? When asked "what has the most negative impact on employee morale?" respondents made the following selections:

- Lack of open, honest communication – 33%
- Micromanaging employees – 18%
- Failure to recognize employee achievements – 15%
- Fear of job loss – 10%
- Excessive workloads for extended periods – 9%
- None of these or I don't know – 15%

The consequences of low morale include low productivity, co-worker sabotage, and the suffocation of a charitable mission. Of all the downside risks facing your nonprofit, this is one that demands immediate and thoughtful intervention. The first step is to stop blaming contextual issues over which you have little influence. Accept responsibility for making workplace morale the strongest it can be—your mission deserves no less.

Risk Tips to Combat Low Morale

1. **Share information widely and generously**. Err on the side of sharing information that employees may "want to know," rather than hoarding information because you can. Regardless of the size of the organization, it is crucial for every employee and volunteer to be on the same page. No one likes to be the odd man or woman out.
2. **Solicit feedback on management styles—including strengths and weaknesses**. If you're not ready to go all the way with a true 360 degree review, consider a multi-rater review. Pose a couple of simple questions to each manager's direct reports, such as:
    - Is your supervisor generous with sharing information and insights you need to succeed in your job? If "no," provide an example of the types of information you want to know that hasn't been made

available to you.
    - How would you rate the sense of mutual trust between you and your supervisor? Give your supervisor a “10” if you believe that he or she trusts you with important assignments directly related to our mission. Assign a lower number if mutual trust isn’t what it could and should be.
3. **Invite employees to openly share ideas for improving workload distribution, reducing the fear of job loss, and recognizing employee achievements**. Don’t solicit ideas unless you’re willing to implement at least one-third or more of the recommendations presented. Ask those offering suggestions to help design implementation (and evaluation) plans and timetables and offer sincere thanks to all who participate.
4. **Insist on candor in the workplace**. In *Beyond Management*, author Mark Addleson discusses the need for candid, “adult conversations” between knowledge workers in a 21st century workplace. When there has been a miscommunication or misunderstanding between staff members in your nonprofit, insist on a face to face conversation. Model that approach every day, even when it is easier to dash off an email, leave a voice mail, or send a text.

Melanie Lockwood Herman is Executive Director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. She welcomes your ideas about human resources risk, and questions about NRMC resources at Melanie@nonprofitrisk.org or 703.777.3504.