Managing Employee, Volunteer and Board Discontent

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Unhappy Stakeholders

• Impossible to keep everyone happy all of the time.
• The risks that arise from discontent have evolved.
• The potential danger to a nonprofit mission seems greater as does the potential for a "flash crisis."

“Most people are about as happy as they make up their minds to be.”
– Abraham Lincoln

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Employee Unrest

Common reasons for discontent among paid staff:
• Perception of unfairness with respect to wages, benefits, job duties
• Dislike of immediate supervisor
• Frustration with extra work, stagnant wages

Employee Dissatisfaction

• Low pay
• Lack of opportunity
• No chance for career advancement

Source: Accenture study

Signs of Employee Discontent

• Tardiness – arriving late, leaving earlier
• Disdain – “grouchy, whining or exceedingly complaining” plus overly sensitive to criticism
• Indifference – Unable to focus, resists new assignments
• Aloofness – distanced from coworkers and sometimes uncooperative

Source: rightattitudes.com
What Employees Seek
- New, challenging assignments
- Flexible work arrangements
- Leadership positions
- Appropriate supervision
- A voice

What Employers Should Do
- Listen to your employees
- Strive to provide meaningful training and leadership development opportunities
- Give employees problem-solving opportunities
- Stay interviews

Addressing Employee Complaints
- Welcome complaints and remove barriers to complaining.
- Compile a list of problems and complaints and share it with your staff.
- Form task forces to address discrete issues.
- Implement the best ideas without delay.
Volunteer discontent

- Organization and disorganization
- Interpersonal relationships
- Orientation and training (or the lack thereof!)
- Communication
- Skills/assignment match

Strategies to mitigate discontent

- Organization/disorganization
- Orientation and training
- Communication
- Skills/assignments match
- Unrealized expectations
- Following through on policies
- Praise and accountability
- Volunteers input

Discontent in the Board Room

Consequences:
- Low productivity; board is frequently at an impasse
- "Factionalism"
- Loss of key members; turnover before terms expire
- Mission advancement is hamstrung


Practical Strategies

- Effective, intentional culture
- Board structure
- Approach to board duties
- Engagement in discussion of strategic issues
- Surveys/assessments

Questions?

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