



What Do Employees Want?

Work/Life Balance, Learning Opportunities Key Factors

By Robert Half

It's a perennial question of interest to all companies concerned with attracting and keeping top talent: What do workers want?

A [survey](#) by Robert Half sheds some light on the question. The results suggest that work/life balance and the opportunity to learn are the keys to an employee's heart.

Aside from salary, employees were asked to rank certain factors that were tied to their job satisfaction. They identified work/life balance (28 percent) and opportunities to learn and grow (27 percent) as the top contributors to their on-the-job contentment. Other responses included the ability to accomplish goals (20 percent), camaraderie with coworkers (13 percent) and a good working relationship with the boss (11 percent).

The survey, which included responses from more than 400 workers employed in office environments and more than 1,000 senior managers, also revealed differences by age: Respondents between the ages of 34 and 44 were most concerned with work/life balance (46 percent), and those between the ages of 18 and 34 indicated the greatest interest in opportunities to learn and grow (37 percent).

With these preferences in mind, what are some of the most effective ways for employers to address employees' needs for these intangible sources of satisfaction? Consider these suggestions:

Be flexible. Try to give employees some control over their schedules, and focus on the quality of their work rather than face time. Perhaps you ask staff members to keep certain core hours but allow individual modifications to their schedules. Some may want to arrive by 7 and leave by 4, for instance, while others may want to stroll in after 9 but work until 7 p.m. or so. As summer sets in, flexible schedules and the opportunity to leave work early on Friday are especially coveted benefits.

Reduce their commute. Another way to offer more flexibility is to give employees whose jobs can be done remotely the option of working from home one or more days a week. Telecommuting is an invaluable benefit to many employees. It saves them time and money on commuting, yet costs a company nothing to offer.

Take a breather. Set a good example as a manager by taking lunch breaks and vacations. If you show that you think it's important to have good work/life balance, employees won't feel guilty or stressed about leaving the office at a normal time in the evening and taking time off to recharge.

Bring in reinforcements. Keep a close eye on workloads. Encourage your staff members to seek help when they are overwhelmed with projects, and don't be hesitant to bring in temporary professionals as needed to fill gaps and provide relief. If you overburden your top performers, they're more likely to seek a better situation elsewhere.

Focus on development. Everyone, especially top performers, wants to feel like they're moving forward in their careers. Make sure you're continually asking team members what more they would like to be doing professionally to build new skills. Look for ways to help them develop, whether it's earning a new certification, working with a new group of clients or switching out some of their responsibilities.

Have some fun. Don't wait until the end-of-year holidays to do something nice for employees. Scatter celebrations throughout the year to reward them for their hard work and build camaraderie. Regular breaks for fun will show employees they're appreciated and rekindle their motivation.

Find one-on-one time. Keep employees engaged by making a point to talk to them individually about how their work is going and gather their perspectives on office issues. Invite them for coffee, lunch or a Friday afternoon chat in your office. Be consistent in reaching out to your team members and provide equal time.

Be generous with praise. What's always appreciated and costs nothing? Praise. And employees cannot get enough of it. Just make sure to dole out the gratitude when it's really deserved – when someone has truly done stellar work, gone the extra mile to see something through or made a significant improvement in performance. Also, don't hesitate to commend them publicly. Everyone likes a moment in the spotlight.

Tailor your approach. There's no one-size-fits-all formula to keeping employees inspired and satisfied. Moreover, professional priorities change over time. Make an effort to understand what motivates each of your employees and tailor your management style accordingly.

Finally, keep in mind that although intangibles such as having a good work/life balance and strong relationships with colleagues count for a great deal with employees, they can't make up for poor compensation. Long-term job satisfaction is also tied to competitive pay. Continue to review your salary and benefits to ensure they're on par with what other companies are offering. And if you can pay slightly higher than your peers, you'll send a message that you truly believe your employees are key to your company's success and worth investing in.

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