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**HUMAN RESOURCES & PAYROLL**

# The Care and Feeding of Employees – 2018

So how does a small business owner, plant or department manager, or even a supervisor create that employee goodwill and a caring workplace culture? Trite as it may seem, an occasional “Good morning,” or “Thank you for staying late yesterday” or ...

Richard D. Alaniz, JD • Mar. 29, 2018



How often have we heard some company owner or representative declare “Our employees are our most valuable asset”? Certainly more than occasionally. Some companies have even adopted this claim as their byword. In this era of more-than-full employment and a growing shortage of qualified job applicants in virtually every industry, those words have now become a reality for most employers. The unfortunate fact however, is that few companies, their owners, their managers or supervisors have taken that claim to heart. Despite the increasing difficulty and expense of recruiting and retaining suitable employees, little effort has been made by most employers to actually demonstrate that they truly value those “assets”. In all but a few workplaces it remains work as usual, with little if any effort made to show genuine employee consideration.

While wages are finally trending upward, largely due to the competitive job market, the recent tax overhaul, and state-mandated minimum wage increases, it isn’t always a matter of more money that makes employees feel appreciated. Even today, surveys show that most managers and supervisors believe that what matters most to employees are the tangible things such as wages, benefits and promotions. Yet studies have for years confirmed that what is actually most important to the majority of employees is having a boss that genuinely cares about them – one that is fair and makes them feel a part of the company. No doubt, there are some employees who care more about money and benefits than an employer’s thoughtful attention. But, they would be the exception.

### **What Should Companies Do?**

So how does a small business owner, plant or department manager, or even a supervisor create that employee goodwill and a caring workplace culture? Trite as it may seem, an occasional “Good morning,” or “Thank you for staying late yesterday,” or “I really appreciate your extra effort in completing that project so quickly,” and similar sincere remarks can make a world of difference in how employees feel about their company and management. Over the many years that I have worked with employers, the most successful managers I have known were those who every day made their employees their paramount concern. How is that done? Most of the time, it is easier than you might think.

One particular plant manager that I knew well, who ultimately became the Chairman and CEO of his highly successful Fortune 500 Company, began each workday by walking the plant floor and engaging every employee he encountered in casual conversation. Sometimes it was about how things were running in their

department. Other times it was about their family or how they had spent or intended to spend their vacation. Some days his tour would take him as long as two hours to complete. Despite the fact that there were almost 500 employees in his plant, spread over numerous departments, he knew every employee by name. I once asked him how he could afford to take so much time each day away from the many critical matters that required his personnel attention as General Manager. His answer, as you might expect, was “There is nothing that I do that is more important than talking with our employees.”

One more example demonstrating caring interest in employees comes from the world’s most successful retailer, Sam Walton. Throughout his long career in building Walmart into the retail giant it has become, Mr. Walton frequently visited the company stores. He almost always walked through the various departments and engaged employees in conversation. Mostly it was small talk about themselves, their families, or how they liked their job. He also required that every manager and supervisor know all they could about each of their employees.

He expected them to know about their families, their wife’s or husband’s name, how many children they had, their interests and similar personal information. He would occasionally walk in to a department and ask the manager to tell him about a specific employee he pointed out. If the manager was unable to respond in detail, it was made clear that the next time it was asked his or her job would depend upon knowing that information. The Walmart employees knew that their boss cared. Despite Mr. Walton’s passing a number of years ago, that employee focus remains at Walmart to this day.

### **How Else Can You Show Appreciation?**

Giving daily attention to your employees and their concerns is critical and requires a sincere effort. But, it is obviously not the only way to show that as their employer, you truly appreciate what they do to make the company a success. Like the daily greeting or occasional thanks, small gestures can pay big dividends. One mid-sized meat industry employer with whom I am familiar, made such a gesture at the beginning of 2017 that some might consider trivial and well-worn. They implemented something that has been around for years – an incentive program rewarding the production line with the best numbers for the month a chicken luncheon for the entire line.

Almost as importantly, the employees were given additional lunchtime to enjoy their meal. They were joined by the entire management team. This simple and well-

known method of rewarding employee productivity created such a competition between the production lines that by year's end plant productivity was up over 8%. Here something seemingly small and low cost paid off in a big way. The company was so pleased with the results that they are exploring other similar steps to demonstrate their gratitude for the employees' efforts in 2018.

## Conclusion

The ways in which to show appreciation for your employees and all they do are only limited by your imagination. Any effort you make, large or small, is effort well spent. Something as simple as resolving to have everyone in management and supervision make a point of regularly and sincerely thanking their employees for what they do can make a real difference. Singling out employees who have made a difference in front of their peers is another small gesture that speaks loudly to all. A genuine and caring employee focus will go a long way in helping you retain satisfied and productive employees. All that it requires is your decision to make it happen.

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