

## All You Have to Do Is Ask

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Conducting an employee opinion survey can deliver enormous rewards – if you act on what you discover. Potential results: better service to members, higher morale, improved productivity, and more profitability, to name a few.

A survey gives your credit union a base line to measure what employees think about their work environment. A survey doesn't cost that much to produce – often about \$30 to \$40 per employee, and less as the number of employees climbs -- and implementing suggested improvements doesn't have to cost much, either.

You don't even need a crisis to conduct a survey. Look at Core One Credit Union of Columbus, Ohio. "It wasn't a case where we said, 'My gosh, we've got to do an employee survey,'" says Paul Bohlman, VP of marketing and human resources at Core One Credit Union in Columbus, Ohio. "It was because of overall concern for our employees. We wanted to build better relations."

A survey typically includes a list of "satisfaction factors." They measure benefits, communication systems, employee involvement, opportunities for advancement, management practices, organizational image, policies, pay, performance support, service quality, supervisory practices, teamwork, and working conditions. Employees all get the same questions. The results are confidential and are compiled by the survey firm.

After the results are review, areas of concern can be identified and improvements made in each area. To measure the effect of improvements, follow up in 18 to 24 months with the same questions.

At the start of 2002, Core One (\$137 million assets; 10,000 members) sent an online survey to all employees. Next, managers and employees analyzed results, and devised and implemented improvement plans. Employees were polled again in the fall of 2003.

The results of their second survey showed significant improvement in each of 14 categories. On a 1-to-4 scale, the average improvement was a solid 0.27 of a point.

Core One experienced success because of these factors:

- **They listened to their employees.** "Once you've identified problem areas, get as much input as you can from as many employees as you can," says Bohlman.
- **They realized little changes add up.** After the first survey, Core One made several minor adjustments and initiated some simple programs. The CU held more frequent staff meetings, communicated the credit union's strategic plan to everyone, created an incentive program for each employee, and started the "Overboard" program in which employees could recognize co-workers who went overboard in serving members.



- **They obtained top-down buy-in.** “Our board was very supportive,” says Bohlman. “Without it, we wouldn’t have succeeded.”

And don’t give lip service to surveys. “Listen to your employees,” Bohlman says. “Take their thoughts and give them the opportunity to express themselves. Recognize that they’ve got good ideas, and use them.”

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