



Office ☎ 03 9422618 Mobile ☎ 0211670614 Fax ☎ 03 9422603
✉ PO Box 7804, Sydenham, Christchurch 8240, New Zealand www.nicheforecasting.co.nz

What is **hindering** your staff?

Why are they not making you enough money
and what can you do about it?

Whether small, massive, a family business or a corporate, all are at risk of cultivating a yucky workplace. In this e-book learn:

- ➔ What simple mistakes can **seriously** hinder staff
- ➔ What condition **your** workplace is in
- ➔ What transforms workers into **passionate** high performers

→ Simple mistakes that can seriously hinder staff

1. Not giving staff enough control

When you give staff control over their work circumstances they become engaged. This was demonstrated in a test where one group of people were asked to do proof reading and puzzles in a room that had random loud noises. A second group were asked to do the same, but had a button to push to stop the noise if it got too much. Nobody used the button - yet the second group got **twice** as much work done. Why? Just by knowing the button was there **they were in control**.

The only way to develop responsible employees is to give them responsibility! It develops them professionally and they see they are trusted. Being scared to give employees ownership makes them dependant on you and uncomfortable making even the smallest decisions. Unless you think running around putting out fires all day every day is the best use of your time you need to change that.

TIP: Read 'The One Minute Manager Meets The Monkey'

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE OF A NICHE FORECASTING CLIENT:

The most junior employee management had deemed 'of little value' was the only one that had an accurate perspective – they hit the businesses issues on the head. They were also the only one on the team who considered themselves passionate about their role. If the manager didn't start to nurture them soon the best employee would have been lost or worse lost their passion!

2. Setting the wrong company values

Employees will not respect you if you say one thing and do another. You can not say you value:

Best talent – if you underpay

Fun – if even smiles are banned

Amazing service – if you are understaffed

Flexibility – if altering schedules is forbidden

Employee feedback – if you shoot down suggestions

Teamwork – if management will not lend a hand in busy periods

Communication – if staff get their 'heads up' at the water cooler

Innovation – if staff get a scolding when they do things a bit differently

Don't bother with values unless they are fully intertwined in your staff, service, brand, behaviours and attitudes. Values should not be something the management team dream up at a boozy executive retreat, your staff are the ones expected to live them so for them to be successful they need to pen them. Values do not belong on a gold plaque at the entrance - when chosen properly they should be engraved on the hearts of your workers and experienced by all customers.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE OF A NICHE FORECASTING CLIENT:

The team of a youthful brand that prided themselves on being funky and laid back, heard loud and clear how desperate staff were for some rules! It seems things got a little too laid back!

Hair product brand Redken value honest communication so have a 'face it solve it forget it' policy so there is no talking about workmates behind their back.

3. Believing that management knows best

Managers that sport an 'I know best' attitude are not respecting the hugely valuable knowledge employees gain everyday out there on the floor. Such managers really mess up workplaces. Humble, intelligent managers know that employees' opinions and discoveries can draw attention to things it would take management forever to find out alone. The longer it takes you to realise this, the more expensive that talent and knowledge becomes.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE OF A NICHE FORECASTING CLIENT:

A management team learnt their staff are unified in thinking they are “*real know it alls who never listen to us because we aren't important enough*” – this kind of feedback was long overdue and has overhauled their management style and ultimately the productivity and profitability of the business.

When would you rather buy talent?

- a) Out of business school @ \$35k
- b) After an MBA @ \$100k
- c) After 3 years experience at a huge brand @ \$150-200k
- d) After their start up @ \$500k-3million
- e) Post IPO @ \$100million or more when you buy them out!?

From 'The Circle of Innovation' By Tom Peters

4. Settling on Chinese whispers for communication

Chinese whispers does not help morale, nor does chewing on about how important staff are when in truth you exclude them from what is going on. A flawless communication strategy is especially important in times of change. Holding interviews to scare staff that are on thin ice, listing the business for sale without telling employees or mentioning if their jobs are safe, holding secretive meetings and giving mixed messages are beautiful examples of what NOT to do.

Hostile workplaces where employees are too scared to speak up about things brings huge disconnect to the team. Just because *management think* there is an open office does not mean staff are comfortable talking to you. Open door policies only work if the manager really does care and is willing to listen – only your staff can judge if an open office really exists.

50 percent of almost 2,000 people surveyed, claimed that their only source of company information is conversations they have with colleagues at the water-cooler. 80 percent of these employees also said that internal communications were lacking at work, with 41 per cent thinking that even their managers didn't know much about the workplace. Source: Talent2 March 2007

5. Avoiding the yucky bits

Every workplace has issues, it is how they are dealt with that is important. For every issue management is aware of there are probably another two hiding under the desk. Staff surveys are a great way to dig up issues and problems that are concerning staff - **if** you are willing to address what comes out. Staff love the opportunity to have their say - they hope they will really be heard and action will be taken to improve things.

Surveys that deliberately overlook burning issues are destructive. It is those burning issues staff will be desperate to comment on. Some businesses really go all out to 'avoid the yucky bits' by crafting their survey so that no matter what, the business comes up smelling of roses. Focusing too much on the good parts leaves no time for honesty or change. It means missing a huge opportunity to **really** transform the workplace in a way that **only** the scary parts can.

REAL LIFE EXAMPLE OF A NICHE FORECASTING CLIENT:

A team finally had the opportunity to speak up about the raging temper of their manager and how it scares them to the point they avoid dealing with him at all (not good for business, communication or morale).

→ What condition is your workplace in?

Pinpointing which businesses could benefit most from employee insights is tricky - businesses that seem perfect on the outside often spring forth the biggest number of issues that hinder performance and are desperate to be solved. Some symptoms of workplace problems are:

-  low productivity
-  high staff turnover
-  low sales and profits
-  poor customer service
-  tension within the team
-  lack of engagement and motivation
-  'them vs. us' between management and employees

92% of managers think they do an excellent or a good job, however, only 67% of employees feel this way about their managers.

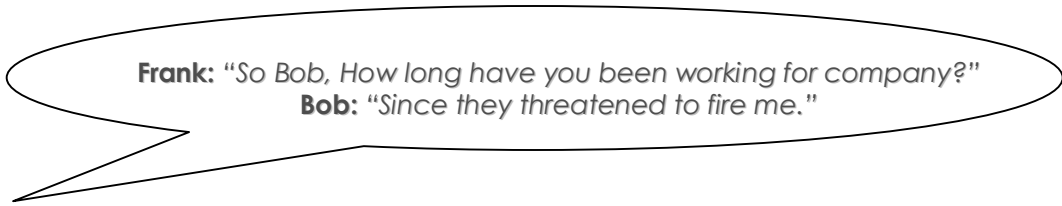
Source: Hudson New York April 2007

Employees who say they're not respected by their managers are three times more likely to resign within two years than their peers.

Source: Sirota Survey Intelligence April 2007

25% of workers surveyed do not believe management has a clear vision and half stated their managers don't inspire them to do a better job.

Source: The Work Foundation January 2007



Which list sounds most like your workplace?

Issues
Stress
Tension
Dramas
Secrecy
Struggle
Boredom
Problems
Criticism
Grumbling

OR

Drive
Action
Results
Passion
Synergy
Laughter
Retention
Productivity
Achievement
Communication

→ What transforms workers into passionate high performers?

To transform workers into passionate high performers all managers need is a fully operational pair of ears - the bigger the better. It is the knowing how to use them that trips most managers up.

 **Where are you now?**

The first step is to figure out where your workplace is now – ask employees questions that dig for the real truth. Find out what it is *really* like and where the problem areas are. The only reason the businesses in 'Niche Forecasting Real life Examples' learnt what they did was because they were not performing very well and they needed to find out what and where the problems were. Surprise! Asking the employees uncovered all sorts of stuff management had no idea about! It started a whole new chapter for the businesses and their performance.

Amazing staff:
Have some control + responsibility
Are informed + heard
Have proof they are valued
Are connected to the vision and values

"Most people work just hard enough not to get fired and get paid just enough money not to quit" **George Carlin, American Comedian**

What questions should you ask?

- ? KPI's not being achieved? Ask what rewards they really want.
- ? Are you suffering high turnover? Ask why everyone is jumping ship.
- ? Is productivity low? Ask what is going wrong and how it can be fixed.
- ? No idea where to start? Ask what problems and issues they want addressed.
- ? Are expenses through the roof? Ask staff how they think you could save money.
- ? Do staff question your management? Ask what you are doing right and wrong.
- ? Are your customers dwindling? Ask them how clients could be better cared for.

When it comes to workplace surveys one size doesn't fit all - it depends on what you are trying to find out. They need to be customized based on your challenges and issues. For examples of questions visit www.nicheforecasting.co.nz

How do I facilitate a survey?

Send it home in a pay slip. Hand it out and give everyone some time, space and a pen! Upload it to your intranet. Get a touch screen thingamagig. Scatter them from the height of a hot air balloon - the important thing is you do it and remember to explain:

Why you are asking - their views are vital to improve and grow the business.

What you are trying to achieve - lower turnover, get morale up, increase sales etc.

Your ears are well and truly open - to their honest feedback.

Individual written surveys dig up more honest information than a quick few questions thrown around at the end of a meeting. For best results they should be totally anonymous - get a third party to collate the responses. Nameless doesn't work - you know you know the handwriting. If you manage your own survey you will probably get defensive about comments then put staff members in the doghouse - not constructive!

What do I do with the info?

If you have asked the right questions and dug deep enough you will hopefully totally transform your business with the info! When the responses are collated, read over and highlight the most pressing things that need to be addressed. Tell the staff what the survey uncovered and what you intend to do about it.

*You do more damage to the business and morale by doing a survey and **not** acting on it than by not doing one in the first place.*

Part of having big open ears is being prepared to address what comes up and finding a way to act on the feedback. The important thing is telling your staff they have been heard, that you sincerely care about the responses and keep them in the loop about action to be taken. Deal with the results and start taking action ASAP, it is no good getting the team hyped up and hopeful that "*things are FINALLY gonna change around here*" only to disappoint by putting it in your "*I'm too busy/yeah I'll get right onto that/I'll sort it out next week*" file. "Pfffft! Typical!" you will hear your employees sigh!

Commit to big, open ears
Commit to the survey process
Commit to your staff
Commit to changes and improvement

Because your staff are the focus of this process (and because you've done such a great job committing to them, understanding their issues and keeping them in the loop) ask them if there are any projects from the survey they would like to contribute to. They are after all their ideas so they are probably keen to get on board and help transform their workplace.

“Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress, working together is success” - Henry Ford

Owning a pair of fully operational ears and sharing the company steering wheel with staff creates an amazing open, team culture and according to valuesatwork.org culture is **eight times** more important than strategy. Do not be one of *those* businesses that just say “our staff are #1” – prove it!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



Allison Toner is the director of Niche Forecasting - a Christchurch based company that uses staff insight to improve business performance. She fell into transforming workplaces after spending 5 years in one with a nasty culture where management claimed they had huge, open ears, yet they were never actually prepared to switch them on. There are further resources available at www.nicheforecasting.co.nz (including examples of survey questions). Allison welcomes all feedback and questions - phone 03 9422618 or email allison@nicheforecasting.co.nz