

Myths Employers Continue To Accept About Their Workers

PURCHASE, NY — Employers' common misconceptions about their own employees are destroying the enthusiasm of their workers, according to a new book.

Most employees experience a measurable decline in their enthusiasm for their jobs after they have been working for an organization for six months, and this deterioration continues to worsen as they gain additional years of experience. Why?

“It’s hard for employees to be enthusiastic about an employer that is not enthusiastic about them,” says David Sirota, lead author of new book, *The Enthusiastic Employee: How Companies Profit By Giving Workers What They Want* (Wharton School Publishing/Pearson, February 2005, \$26.95).

The book reports the results of survey research of more than 30 years, covering millions of employees at all levels and in all industries. The research shows a consistent pattern: employers who genuinely value their employees have fewer customer complaints, higher quality, productivity, and revenue, and lower worker turnover.

“At most companies, management unwittingly de-motivates their employees by treating them as disposable as paper clips. At the first sign of business difficulty, employees – supposedly a company’s ‘most important asset’ – become expendable,” said Sirota.

And, many companies treat the majority of their employees as lazy and unreasonable in their demands (“they want the world”), instead of addressing just the small percentage of them – about 5% – who actually are.

The reason management continues to go down this errant path, the authors bluntly suggest, is because employers continue to buy into myths about workers. These myths include:

- **Employees will never be happy with their pay.** On the average, 40% of workers rate their pay as "good" or "very good," 23% rate it as "poor" or "very poor," and the rest (37%) rate their pay as middling.
- **Employees object to the large difference between their earnings and those of senior management.** Workers are upset by this discrepancy only when a company that is doing poorly financially demands wage and job cuts from most employees, while upper management remains unaffected. Employees at superior-performing companies don't complain about upper management's high salaries when most workers are also benefiting.
- **Complimenting employees on a job well done goes to their heads and increases their demands for more money.** Recognition by management is one of the most powerful

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motivators of continued good performance and high morale. It is the *lack* of recognition that depresses most people's natural desire to want to do a good job.

- **Companies that have no hesitation laying off workers perform better than those that go to great lengths to keep their workers employed.** “Research shows that downsizing companies outperformed the S&P only slightly during the 6 months following news of a restructuring, and then lagged badly, netting a negative 24 percent by the end of 3 years. The theory of keeping a company ‘lean and mean,’ then, may really only be making it mean,” said Sirota.
- **Most employees are lazy and need to be controlled.** The authors’ research definitively shows that the overwhelming majority of employees are industrious, want to do a good job, and derive satisfaction from their work.
- **Most employees resist change, whatever it is.** Employees resist changes that they see as harmful to themselves or their organizations, such as speeding up the pace, which hurts work quality. However, they gladly welcome changes they see as helpful, such as new equipment that helps them do their jobs better. Employees are also resistant to changes that management secretly develops without their input and springs on them at the last minute.

“Instead of continuing to perpetrate these myths, management policies need to be directed toward satisfying the three primary goals that matter most to all employees,” said Sirota. These are: **equity**, or to be treated fairly; **achievement**, or to be proud of one's job and company; and **camaraderie**, or to have good, productive relationships with fellow employees.”

Employees who work for companies where just one of these three factors is missing are **three times less enthusiastic** than workers at companies where all elements are present. They also receive more customer complaints, have higher employee turnover, and lower quality.

About The Book's Authors

The lead author, **David Sirota, Ph.D.**, an industrial psychologist, has been engaged in behavioral science research and its applications in organizations for over 40 years. Since founding Sirota Consulting in 1972, he has established an international reputation for improving the performance of individual executives, senior management teams, and total organizations.

Co-author **Louis A. Mischkind** is Senior Vice President of Sirota Consulting, and has been engaged in organizational effectiveness research and applications for over 35 years.

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About Sirota

Founded in 1972, Sirota Consulting (www.sirota.com) specializes in attitude research. Headquartered in Purchase, NY, Sirota has conducted thousands of attitude surveys around the world that have helped organizations build strong, productive relationships with their employees, customers, communities, opinion leaders, investors, suppliers, and other publics.