

Memorandum

To: Roberta Dickson, Division of Water Resources, Santa Clara Rose County

From: Bridge-the-Gap Consulting Group

Date: February 28, 2007

Re: Award and Recognition of Employee Efforts

At every level of the Water Planning Division of Santa Clara Rose County are people who have the potential and ability to shape the work atmosphere, as either decision makers or implementers of these decisions. Yet, the current work environment is filled with distrust for higher management, frustration about professional growth, and lack of appreciation. The intent of this memo is to help better the work environment in a way that nurtures the skills that each individual has to offer to the Division. In doing so, we will communicate the strengths and weaknesses of your division's organization and work design, while offering potential solutions to rectify the aforementioned challenges.

We understand that this department is a government agency bound by complex merit system personnel regulations compliant with administrative law and existing budgetary constraints beyond your control. As such, the scope of practical and effective recommendations is limited to your division specifically, as we focus on the work that the Division does well and potential areas of improvement. The recent periods of transition in the work atmosphere is stemming worker motivation, morale and productivity. This is a rich and complex environment, and while we do not pretend to understand all the issues involved, we will present practical and effective solutions to help you improve the work performed at the Water Planning Division.

Analysis

While the intent of the merit raise process is to increase work productivity by rewarding strong performance, the merit process has had the opposite effect of

decreasing productivity at the Division of Water Resources. The current limited award system is a demoralizing process for staff that undermines managerial credibility. While the failure to properly utilize a financial reward system is an immediate and superficial challenge, there are many other challenges lowering performance, hindering shared vision and deluding the morale of the team.

Integration and Loyalty Issues—Where's the Teamwork?

The staff's major asset, its personal loyalty to each other, is also a major liability. Being a "close-knit group", the staff does not possess any loyalty to the department. Staff are known to address issues in strictly technical terms, rather than using county-wide, interdepartmental approaches. Lateral forms of communication and coordination are lacking and many staff are working in silos.

The team's strong sense of personal loyalty, connectedness and accountability to each other appears to be an untapped asset with huge potential benefits for morale and production. Ideally, the team's sense of accountability to each other could be extended to their work environment, the mission and a common team goal, furthering the goals of improving water quality and preserving hydrolic resources for Santa Clara Rose County. While introducing mid-year feedback sessions have helped employees gain a better sense of individual job expectations, the division has yet to fully engage employees in envisioning how their individual jobs can and do contribute to the larger strategic goals of the organization.

Inappropriate Incentives

The existing financial reward system has lacked appropriate funding. Staff are unclear on the criteria for merit raises. The perceived weak relationship between

performance and reward invalidates the reward system, rendering the incentive ineffective, and ultimately lowering productivity and morale. Research shows that while merit pay can have a positive effect on individual job performance, the positive effects can be attenuated if pay increases are not clearly linked to employee performance or are not viewed as meaningful (Shafritz, Rosenbloom, Riccucci, et. al., 2001).

Conversely, recent new non-financial mid-year feedback sessions at the division have provided employees with guidance on work performance and a sense of managerial interest in their work and have created positive results, both in work performance and staff morale.

Weak Job Design

Staff have complained about a lack of promotion and professional development opportunities, as well as limited autonomy and job responsibility challenges. These complaints point to the possibility of poor job design. Limited productivity due to weak job design might be further exacerbated by the fact that the workforce characteristic is one of lengthy service terms, sometimes exceeding ten years, and potentially creating increased likelihood of boredom within the job.

Recommendations

The Water Planning Division has a limited extrinsic award system, but can offer long-range, innovative, meaningful solutions to bolster staff morale and increase productivity. We recognize that effective solutions must be specific to the division and work within the constraints of a larger bureaucracy, but will take time to be fully implement.

The Immediate Answer

According to the immediate needs, we suggest that you honestly approach your staff again with the top three nominees (Eric Hansen, Leslie Malina, and Dave Davis) and ask them to nominate an award nominee to receive the merit award. With mutual agreement between yourself and the staff, this approach can be best received as a transparent and democratic process. Though not a permanent solution, it will solve your immediate need to provide a merit award.

Work Groups

To better resolve integration at work, we propose using work groups as a vehicle to increase interaction amongst members of your group, removing barriers that exist in lateral communication. Surveys can be distributed to determine levels of interests in joining work groups, participating in task reassignments, and determining how this year's merit pay should be awarded or spent. Each work group will be mission-focused, directly working towards the company-wide goals and can include: improving water quality, preserving hydrologic resources, policy implementation and procedure development. Work groups could meet on a regular basis and collectively decide their assignments and goals. "The central idea is assigning to groups of people responsibility for a meaningful whole with ample autonomy and resources and collective accountability for results" (Bowlman & Deal, 2003).

In an effort to grow and fully utilize their skills sets, we recommend having Team Leaders for each work group. Establishing Team Leaders allows opportunities for individuals to gain leadership skills and express strategic thinking. In order for work groups to be highly successful, individuals must possess ample group skills, a potential challenge and barrier for the success of this recommendation. Given the history of your

division staff working in silos, it is quite possible that the lack of strong team management skills will be a negative factor. While there may be challenges at first, this is a good starting point to begin developing group skills.

Incentive Programs

Although the monetary merit raise process has been ineffective in increasing productivity, new incentives can be explored to potentially increase work performance between 25 to 44 percent.

The incentive program can be administered by first assessing the differences between the company's goals and employees' performance. Adopting a quota-program is the next step in order to provide everyone the possibility of earning incentives. Providing realistic benchmarks is crucial because workers have the possibility of reaching and exceeding their proposed goals. Training support and regular communication are essential in order to confirm that people are on the right path. The organization needs to encourage workers' performance goals and provide incentives fairly. The program must be analyzed against performance objectives with information recycled in order to modify future programs (Clark, Condly, Stovitch, 2005).

The staff is strong, experienced, and talented; however, since they are not harnessing that talent toward the goal of the organization, the incentive will be a great technique to have the staff take strides at achieving goals that will produce positive results toward the organization. In addition, the goals that the incentive program establishes will challenge staff members who are bored and feel unchallenged.

Another positive aspect is that the lack of motivation that the staff currently has will be reduced because the incentive program will provide them with the motivation they need

to meet and exceed the goals that are implemented. The staff will be motivated because they will take pride in seeing the goals established for them met and exceeded. The incentive program will also help the workers become mission focused since the goals that are going to be set up for them should be directed toward achieving the department's mission. The workers will start to develop knowledge of how everyone's job is interdependent.

The negative aspects of the program are that it may be time consuming. Time should be set aside to develop and execute the program. Revisions should be made in a timely manner in order to ensure that the program is effective. In the beginning, the staff may be skeptical of the incentive process and may not be open to the incentive program.

Job Enrichment—"Wanting to Work" instead of "Having to Work"

Improving job design facilitates meaningful and challenging work, promoting job value and loyalty that ultimately can lead to improved overall job satisfaction and productivity (Bolman & Deal, 2003). An effective job design will work within role constraints, satisfying the essential requirements of the task and can "include job characteristics model, job enrichment, quality of work life, and the Japanese style of management" (Baytos & Kleiner, 1995). Key elements to promote intrinsically rewarding work are to provide additional opportunities for professional development, increasingly challenging tasks, and autonomy to complete their work. Additional strategies can include cross-training employees in disparate skills, task reassignment, allowing workers the chance to lead projects, and allowing members to lead internal trainings based on strengths/interests.

Furthermore, we encourage you to continue work reviews with staff, as it provides necessary transparency and feedback for employees to adjust performance. Continue guiding your workers on their long-term goals and professional objectives, which is especially important for “high growth needs” employees who prefer higher quality work as opposed to simply more work. One potential caveat to job design is that workers with enriched jobs tend to have a higher opinion of themselves and consequent increased demands—greater extrinsic compensation, more benefits, and career opportunities (Baytos & Kleiner, 1995).

Conclusion

While the recommendations set forth do not provide many immediate solutions for the challenge rewarding employee efforts, our analysis of the situation showed that short-term solutions would not sufficiently address the deeper, long-term challenges that have faced the department. The history of passive and inconsistent management has left an indelible mark on the staff morale and production. Innovation is needed to harness the immeasurable talent, experience and social cohesion of the staff team towards new goals and levels of success in public service. As the division must function within the complex and sometimes stifling bureaucracy of local government, Bridge-the-Gap Consulting Group sought to provide practical and sustainable solutions tailored to the unique assets of the division staff and limited to the scope of bolstering operations and production within the department alone.

References

- Baytos, K. & Kleiner, B.H. (1995). New Developments In Job Design. *Business Credit*, 97(2), 22—25.
- Bolman, L.G. & Deal, T.E. (2003). *Reframing Organizations-Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* . Jossey-Bass, San Francisco
- Clark, Condly, Stovitch. (2005). *Incentives, Motivation, and Workplace Performance*. SITE Foundation, New York.
- Shafritz, J. M., Rosenbloom, D. H., Riccucci, N. M., et. al. (2001). *Personnel Management in Gvernment: Politics and Process*. 5th Edition. Marcel Dekker, Inc., New York.