

Disconnect:

Exploring Emotional
Connection to Jobs



A year ago human resources consultancy Towers Perrin created quite a stir when it revealed its newest study showing the deep emotional connection that workers have with their work—and clearly documented just how negative those emotions are for most workers.

But as the glimmer of an economic recovery continues to emerge, can we assume that our workers are going to become more positive about their work life?

Not likely, according to Towers Perrin analysts, who see the negative factors as being more deep and durable than could be explained by simple economic uncertainty.

“Companies dependent on their people’s skills—as most are today—may face real risk when the economy improves and top talent begins looking for greener pastures,” says Donald Lowman, a managing director of Towers Perrin.

Managers have to be more focused than ever on keeping the right people, and keeping their team motivated as the economy begins to turn around.

Strong (and Mostly Negative) Emotions

Using sophisticated market research techniques that actually measure the intensity of emotion, Towers Perrin surveyed 1,100 workers in mid-sized and large companies. So instead of the usual “strongly agree” or “strongly disagree” scales, workers’ feelings toward job recognition, for example, could be directly compared to their feelings about their workload.

Overall the study showed that workers have a tremendously strong emotional connection to their job—both positive and negative. More importantly, the overall emotional balance was negative, and one-third of the emotional content was “intensely” negative. The key factors were:

UNLIMITED POTENTIAL



**HERDLINGER
ASSOCIATES**

“Turning potential into performance”

P.O. Box 20389
St. Simons Island, GA 31522

912.634.9300
877.626.2960 (toll-free)
potential@herdlinger.com

Herdlinger Associates provides the vehicle to help people expand and develop the skills and attitudes necessary to achieve a higher degree of success both personally and professionally.

Our programs incorporate attitude development, goal setting and skills development into a process that results in greater utilization of the potential inherent in all people.

We help people create a plan that enables them to balance the profit motives of their business with the personal motives of their lives.

Our professional staff is committed to a common purpose:

**Developing People
to
Achieve Their Full Potential
...That’s What We Do!**

Learn more about Herdlinger Associates at our website...

www.herdlinger.com

- An excessive workload
- Concerns about management's ability to lead the company
- Anxiety about the future, particular longer-term job, income and retirement security
- Lack of challenge, which intensified the frustration about the workload
- Insufficient recognition for the level of contribution and effort, and concern that pay isn't commensurate with performance.

Of course, it's not all bad. Workers had strongly positive emotions around their sense of self-esteem that comes from their work, from other people at the workplace, and from their ability to see the results of their work. Though these factors were overshadowed by the negative ones, they were nevertheless strongly positive and added significantly to the overall emotional content of people's relationship with their jobs.

How to Redirect This Emotional Energy

What can you do to redirect this emotional energy from the negative to the positive side of the ledger? For starters, get your own emotion "antennae" tuned into what's going on with your workers.

In order to assess just how in touch managers are with their workers, Towers Perrin also surveyed 300 managers for their *predictions* of how their employees would respond. The managers predicted fairly accurately just how negative the workforce is, and they accurately gauged the workload issue. But they missed most of the rest of the important factors—both positive and negative—and often by a mile. You have to make sure you aren't falling into that gap with your own assessment of your workers' attitudes.

The bottom line? Make sure you aren't falling into that gap with your own assessment of your workers' attitudes. And look to ways to bridge the gap, for the benefit of you, your workers and your company.

Bridging the Gap

Here are some pointers gleaned from the disparities between how workers feel and how managers expected them to feel:

Focus on ways to build self-esteem in your workers. *The study showed that workers can feel intensely positive about their jobs from the self-esteem they get through feeling connected and competent in their work. While that ought to be obvious, the managers in the study predicted that this would matter little.*

Developing skills and a career path are critical. *In his forthcoming book More Than a Cog, author David Baron urges workers to envision themselves on a career path, regardless of their "job," as the critical first step to achieving superior performance. The survey results reinforce that message while showing that management seems to undervalue this factor.*

Do more to build in recognition in your workplace. *The Towers Perrin study indicates that we still don't "get" the importance of recognition in employee retention and performance. The managers in the study predicted that this factor would be only half as important as it was to the workers. Part of the problem may be that our recognition efforts are misdirected. Effective recognition is positive, immediate and specific about what is being praised. But many recognition programs fail to meet these tests, leading managers to underestimate the value of recognition to their workers.*

The future isn't as important as you think. *Workers are concerned about the future, but not nearly as much as managers expected. Again, it's not clear what you can do about this issue, but be careful not to telegraph too much emphasis on the future—in either direction.*

You're not as important as you think, either. *And that's good. While the workers ranked management as a negative factor, it was one of many. Managers, however, predicted that management would have been much more important—on the negative side! So while you expect to bear the brunt of your employees' negative feelings toward work, they may be cutting you more slack than you realize.*