

WORKFORCE HORIZONS

Planning Tomorrow's Workforce Today

Louisiana Department of Civil Service

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In This Issue:

- ✓ Common myths about work and employee motivation – p. 1
- ✓ What employees can do to guarantee success on the job – p. 2
- ✓ Multitasking – Myth and Bad Practice – p. 3

COMMON MYTHS ABOUT WORK AND EMPLOYEE MOTIVATION

Every supervisor or manager has his or her own beliefs about what motivates employees and how they should be treated in order to get the best performance from them. There is also a mountain of literature available proposing various theories of motivation and advocating different management practices to take advantage of them. However, most of these beliefs and theories are untested and unproven and much of the literature is not supported by thorough or objective research. So what is the truth?

Sirota Consulting is a company that has been doing attitude research since 1972. A recently published book [The Enthusiastic Employee: How Companies Profit By](#)

Giving Workers What They Want¹

summarizes the results of thirty years of survey research covering millions of employees in all industries and types of work. The research identifies and dispels 33 myths that are entrenched in the minds of managers and human resource professionals. These beliefs are widespread and when applied to a typical employee and work situation are *wrong*.

For example,

Myth # 22: There are major differences between generations in what people want from their jobs.

We have all been inundated with information about the alleged differences in motivation between generations, with various terms such as Generation X, Generation Y, Baby Boomers, Millenials, etc. being used to categorize the groups. But according to the Sirota research, there are no major differences between generations in what people want from their jobs.

According to David Sirota, chairman emeritus of the company and co-author of the book, “Much of what is written about generational differences (‘Gen X’ being less concerned about job security and more resentful of authority)... is bunkum.” There

are also no significant differences by occupation, industry, gender or culture.

The research did reveal three main goals that the overwhelming majority of workers have in common regardless of generation, gender, occupation, or industry. These are

1. To be treated with respect and to be treated fairly with regard to pay, benefits and job security
2. To do something that matters and do it well, to be proud of their own accomplishments and proud of the organization they work for, and to be recognized for their accomplishments.
3. To have friendly and cooperative relationships with others in the workplace.

Some other myths revealed by the Sirota research:

Myth # 4: To a significant degree, praise can be a substitute for money.

Myth # 13: Most people dislike work of any kind.

Myth # 14: Most people don't care whether they do a quality job.

Myth # 15: Professionals are much more concerned about doing a quality job than are non-professionals.

Myth # 17: If they are not supervised closely, most workers will try to get away with whatever they can.

Myth # 19: It is the immediate manager or supervisor that is the cause of most employee morale problems.

Myth # 24: Young people today are much less concerned with job security than were previous generations.

Myth # 31: Most employees resist change, whatever the change is.

For more information on the results of the survey go to

www.enthusiasticemployee.com

¹Sirota, D., Mischkind, L., and Meltzer, M. *The Enthusiastic Employee: How Companies Profit By Giving Workers What They Want*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Wharton School Publishing, 2005

Note: the information presented here was taken from a white paper "Sirota Myths and Findings Report 2005" published by Sirota Consulting that summarizes results of research detailed in the book.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"The main question for management, then, is not, 'How can employees be motivated?', but rather "How can management be deterred from diminishing – even destroying – employee motivation?" – *Dr. David Sirota*

WHAT EMPLOYEES CAN DO TO GUARANTEE SUCCESS ON THE JOB

We hear a lot about what supervisors and managers can do to motivate employees. But what can an employee do if he or she wants to be considered a top performer? Here are four guidelines adapted from Dr. Alan Zimmerman's article "Building Positive Attitudes: 4 Positive Employee Behaviors That Will Lead You To Guaranteed Success."(Source – HR.COM)

Positive employees know hard work is good for the soul. It should be done not just for rewards and promotions but also because it gives you a sense of personal competence and self-worth

Positive employees decide to enjoy their work...no matter what. No job is perfect.

You can always find something to complain about. But winners decide they are going to like their work.

Positive employees see the good in every situation. Like everyone else, positive employees can see things that are wrong. But they don't dwell on that. They focus on seeing the good in a situation and how they can make it better. By contrast, negative employees obsess on some minor annoyance and wallow in it, preventing any progress and often making things worse.

Positive employees ask how they can do more than is expected. Positive employees are never satisfied with getting by or delivering the bare minimum. They always try to exceed expectations. Whether providing service to customers or helping a co-worker, they always focus on doing more, not less.

If you are hiring or promoting, look for these characteristics in your applicants or employees. If you are an employee who wants to move ahead, demonstrate these characteristics.

WORKFORCE PLANNING MAXIM OF THE DAY

“A financial analyst once asked me if I was afraid of losing control of our organization. I told him I've never had control and I never wanted it. If you create an environment where the people truly participate, you don't need control. They know what needs to be done and they do it. And the more that people will devote themselves to your cause, on a voluntary basis, on a willing basis, the fewer hierarchies and control mechanisms you need.” – **Herb Kelleher, chairman, president and CEO of Southwest Airlines, called the best CEO in America by Fortune Magazine.**

MULTITASKING-MYTH AND BAD PRACTICE

With the demands of today's workplace, many people believe they need to develop multitasking skills. Multitasking, or performing two or more tasks simultaneously has become a prevalent practice. Four out of five people claim to do it and 67% think they do it well according to a survey by Apex Performance² (a leadership development and performance training company).

But, research into how the brain works shows multi-tasking to be a myth and attempting to multitask to be a bad practice that lowers productivity. What people really need to do is develop skills in focusing on one task at a time.

According to Dr. Louis Csoka, founder of Apex Performance, the human brain is wired so that it can only really focus on one thing at a time and there is no such thing as multi-tasking.

Jordan Grafman, chief of the cognitive neuroscience section of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke supports this view stating “What's really going on is a rapid toggling among tasks rather than simultaneous processing.”³

Dr. Louis Csoka goes on to say, “Multitasking is not a skill that can be developed or applied. Being able to control one's attention requires the ability to direct attention totally to the task at hand – regardless of distractions. This is a key skill managers need to improve performance and productivity. When people multitask, they are actually reducing the quality of their performance in all of the things they are doing.”

Dr. Csoka advises that managers need to help employees focus their attention and concentration. He states, “Effective concentration is about attending to one thing at a time. This is how good performers become great performers”

The conclusion that workers trying to multitask perform less accurately and more slowly than they would if they focused on each task until it was finished, is supported by a University of California study of work flow of high-tech employees, a Microsoft Research Labs study, and a study of 1,000 office workers and managers by Basex, an Information Technology research firm.⁴

Attempts to multitask really result in an inability to focus and lowered productivity. David Meyer, director of the University of Michigan’s Brain, Cognition and Action Laboratory states “If you’re trying to listen to someone speak while you’re writing an e-mail, you might only get the gist, but not the details of what’s being said.”⁵

So, if you don’t multitask how do you handle the multiple projects or activities the modern workplace demands? One way is to schedule blocks of time to devote to each task. In order to minimize the amount of switching back and forth, blocks of hours rather than minutes are preferable. Even tasks such as reading email should be scheduled for several specific times a day rather than just reading each one as it comes in. Multitasking, interruptions or anything that breaks concentration on one task and causes you to switch to another, diminishes efficiency.

Linda Stone, a former executive at both Microsoft and Apple, who coined the term “continuous partial attention” to refer to multitasking, offers hope on the horizon via evolving trends in technology and culture

that will emphasize depth over breadth. “This can be accomplished by replacing wide webs of devices that demand constant changes in focus with tools that aggregate and simplify incoming data, sort and prioritize communication, and help users deepen their concentration rather than fragment it.”⁶

²This data and all quotes in this article from Dr. Louis Csoka were taken from the online article “*Multitasking is a Myth Yet 85% of People Do It,*” HR.COM – The Human Resources Portal. For more on this, go to www.hr.com.

^{3, 4, 5, 6}Data and quotes taken from Averill-Snell, Jo. “Is Multitasking Counterproductive?” Trend Watcher, Issue 346, January 26, 2007, from researchdept@hr.com

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Comments and submissions: We welcome questions about workforce planning and suggestions for improvements to the newsletter as well as submissions of articles about what your agency is doing in workforce planning. Questions, comments, and requests to be added to the distribution list for the newsletter should be sent to the editor.

Current and Back Issues are accessible under “Workforce Planning Newsletter” in the HR Reference section of the Civil Service web page at www.civilservice.louisiana.gov