

Happy workers are safer workers

Job satisfaction makes safety a priority



Brookfield, WI-based Hunzinger Construction has won numerous awards from Associated General Contractors of Greater Milwaukee and has ranked first multiple times in *Wisconsin Builder* magazine's "Job Satisfaction Survey."

By Audrie Armes, associate editor

Everyone in the working world has seen the type. They walk around moping about being at work and spend most of their day clockwatching. We write them off as disgruntled workers, but do we think about how they could affect our safety?

Studies have shown a direct correlation between job satisfaction and worker safety – the happier the worker, the safer the worker. One study, which was conducted by researchers from the Department of Social Psychology at the University of Helsinki in Finland, focused on the link between employee perceptions of workplace safety and job satisfaction.

The study, reported in the *International Journal of Occupational Safety and Ergonomics* (Vol. 11, No. 3), specifically examined the relationships between job satisfaction

and worker compliance with safety management policies and accident frequency. It found workers who perceive a positive safety climate within their organization were safer on the job. Workers who perceive job insecurity, anxiety and stress exhibit a decline in safe behaviors.

Researchers also noted that when workers believe their employer cares about their well-being and satisfaction, they exhibit safe behaviors. "The perceived level of support by an organization will turn out to be closely associated with safety climate and other organizational social factors which are important for safety," the study stated.

Researchers pointed to the psychologically based social exchange and reciprocity theories stating that "expressions of positive affect and concerns for others created a feeling of indebtedness and a corresponding sense of obligation to respond safely in return." In other words, workers who

5 ways employers can create a satisfying work environment

Jim Loehr, CEO of the Human Performance Institute, Orlando, FL, offered these tips for encouraging job satisfaction.

- Build employees' competence and self-confidence through training, feedback and recognition.
- Communicate the value of the organization's products and services, and the role the organization plays in the markets where it operates.
- Encourage and reward thoughtful risk taking.
- Encourage positive workplace relations.
- Encourage meaningful rest breaks and light diversions.

perceive a high level of concern and support and are satisfied with workplace conditions, feel indebted and need to reciprocate in terms that will benefit the organization.

Yueng-Hsiang "Emily" Huang, a psychologist at Liberty Mutual's Research Institute for Safety in Hopkinton, MA, defined the safety climate of an organization as "employees' shared perceptions of the safety policies, procedures and practices, as well as the overall importance and the true priority of safety at work." She elaborated that prior research has shown safety climate is related to safety-related outcomes. "I believe that safety culture/safety climate has an important impact on the way workers view their jobs," she stated.

Jim Loehr, CEO of the Human Performance Institute in Orlando, FL, conducted his own research measuring employee energy management and work-life balance. "There is a very close relationship between high job satisfaction and feelings of effectiveness on the job," Loehr said. "People with high job satisfaction report an extraordinarily high sense of mission, vision and passion for their work." Loehr also found that people with high job satisfaction desire to try novel approaches, face challenges and perform problem-solving. They also report good feelings regarding their bosses and co-workers. This all translates to being a safer worker.

A theory in motion

Hunzinger Construction is an example of a business putting this theory in motion. The family-owned company, based in Brookfield, WI, was the first contractor to partner at a five-star level with OSHA through the CHASE-WISC program, a construction health and safety excellence agreement. The company also won 11 first-place safety awards from Associated General Contractors of Greater Milwaukee.

Further, the company has been ranked first multiple times in *Wisconsin Builder* magazine's "Job Satisfaction Survey" for general contractors.

What makes Hunzinger's employees so satisfied? Kevin Sandkuhler, safety director, said safety comes from the top down. "Ask any of the owners what's most important, and they will say it's safety – not profits," he said. "I have their complete backing on everything, and full authority to remove a worker or contractor from a project who isn't being safe." Sandkuhler said this focus on safety goes so far that the CEO, John Hunzinger, will go out into the field to see where the workers are eating to make sure it is a clean and comfortable environment.

"We have a lot of employee events, so the employees get to meet everyone in the company on a personal level," Sandkuhler stated. He said Hunzinger management will go out into the field and get their hands dirty with the rest of the employees. On "Swap Day," everyone in the company takes a turn working different jobs in the field.

Sandkuhler asserted that safety is a line item for every project in which the company is involved. He is involved very early in the project planning process so he knows what safety equipment might be needed for the particular job and how many employees will need personal protective equipment. He has implemented daily safety planning where crews meet for a hazard analysis of the jobsite and where new employees are recognized, because most accidents happen to new employees. He also has implemented a stretching program to keep employees limber so they have fewer injuries.

"Our goal is zero accidents and zero injuries," he said. With only six recordable injuries in 300,000 man hours and no lost-time injuries in 2005, Hunzinger can show that the more a company's employees are cared for, the safer they will want to be.

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Feature at a Glance

Studies have shown a correlation between job satisfaction and worker safety.

Key points

- Satisfied employees comply with safety policies.
- Workers who positively perceive an employer's safety climate are more satisfied in their jobs.
- Workers who believe their employer cares about their well-being do more to be safe.