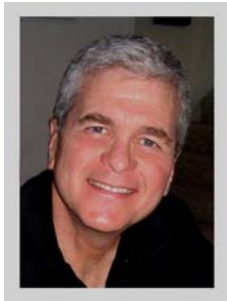


Employees Who *Feel* Important Are Important



by Leigh Branham

(Adapted from guest column that appeared originally in THE KANSAS CITY STAR.)

A few years ago, a *Kansas City Star* business columnist dismissed a research report from The Conference Board that revealed "an overall job satisfaction drop of about 20 percent" since the survey was initiated in 1995. The columnist commented that such surveys are "irrelevant to the human experience" and concluded that working Americans should just be happy to have jobs.

While I agree that in a down economy those who have jobs are indeed fortunate, and that it is not realistic to expect everyone to be perfectly happy in his or her job, I am not so cynical as to believe that business should just accept lower levels of worker satisfaction. Yes, the poor shall always be with us, and so too shall the dissatisfied, but that does not mean that their numbers cannot be lessened.

The main reason businesses need not accept declining job satisfaction levels is actually a self-serving one—most happy workers are also productive workers. There are exceptions to this, of course—we all know satisfied workers who are happy to take their employers' pay without having earned it. But the overwhelming body of employee engagement research comes to a conclusion what should be self-evident—that companies with higher percentages of engaged workers (i.e., those who are most satisfied and committed to the organization) outperform companies with lower percentages of engaged workers. This should not come as a news flash to anyone.

Skeptics need look no further than the world of professional sports. Dick Vermeil, former head coach of the Kansas City Chiefs and the last one to boast a winning record, proved that success on the NFL gridiron goes hand in hand with caring about the welfare and satisfaction of his players. During his time as head coach I never got the impression that Vermeil's players were grouching to one another, or to anyone else, about their jobs.

Chiefs players were lucky enough to have a coach who refused to accept the proposition that they needed to just put up with job dissatisfaction. Vermeil believed that his players should actually be having fun, an attitude that seemed to also breed success. When they won on Sundays, he gave them Mondays off. When they went into their bye week, he gave them the whole week off, which was unheard of. He invited his players over to his home for dinner. He wore his emotions for his players on

