

CASE STUDY | If Your People Survey Results are Dreadful, What Should You Do?

Situation

- The setting for this Organizational Performance project was the Eastern U.S. Region of this international consulting firm—a region that comprised 10 states, 200 partners, and 2200 employees.
- The Regional Managing Partner—when relatively new to the region—was handed some dreadful People Survey data, which showed his region to be the poorest performing region in the country.
- These results were wholly unacceptable to a firm that aspired to be the world's premiere professional service firm.
- The region was being taken to task for its survey results in such areas as integrity, teamwork, mutual respect, and accountability.

Objectives

- The Regional Managing Partner (RMP) would settle for nothing less than having himself and his partners live the firm's Core Values on a daily basis.
- The view was that the partners must accept total ownership of the historic problems and of the ultimate solution.
- The RMP expected substantial progress within 18 months.

Solutions

- The first step was to conduct an Organizational Audit—one-on-one confidential interviews were conducted with 75 partners and 95 staff members.
- The powerful findings were cascaded throughout the region—at first the RMP was given a daylong briefing; then all partners attended a one-day retreat; and finally, a 35-page distillation of the findings was presented to every staff member.
- The RMP was coached on how to convert his command-and-control management style to a more collaborative and empowering style.

- The professional staff was invited into the change process, and several dozen of them volunteered for spots on the three Task Forces that were constituted—Core Change Teams. Partners participated on all Teams, but none was led by a partner.
- The Core Change Teams identified eight fundamental themes—for example, work/life balance, mentoring, and performance feedback; all deliverables were based on these eight themes; and each of the themes had a combination of short-, intermediate-, and long-term solutions.
- Prior to the launch of the eight thematically-driven initiatives, the Core Change Teams presented their findings and recommendations to the entire region, in a series of presentations.

Results

- The Core Change Teams identified 55 objectives, and 48 were accepted—30 short-term, 10 intermediate-term, and eight long-term.
- (The seven that were not accepted were cited, and a specific reason was given—most were already being implemented in a similar form.)
- Two years later progress was assessed—substantial progress had been made on a host of fronts:
 - People Survey data had dramatically improved.
 - Work/life balance was measurably better. The region had staffed up in key areas.
 - A successful Ethics and Diversity program had been integrated into the life of the region. Results were being seen in recruiting and in promotions.
 - Financially, the region was doing better than ever, and morale was strong.

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Results *continued*

- Professional staff was found to be talking about integrity and Core Values on a regular basis.
- An Ombudsman role had been implemented and was having a strongly positive impact on morale.
- A 360° performance enhancement process was initiated and was being warmly received.
- Turnover had significantly reduced. Bench strength was noticeably improved.
- Most of the partners agreed that the RMP had made good strides in muting his heavy-handed management style.
- All this in an environment that was best described as desperate and under siege just 24 months prior.