

Strategic Planning Guidebook

Workplace Characteristics Important to Staff

2011 Great Colleges to Work For Survey The Chronicle of Higher Education July 2011

Overview

External surveys of staff attitudes about the colleges or universities where they work are not very common. In fact, the annual survey conducted by the Chronicle of Higher Education may be one of the only public surveys of this kind. Nevertheless, as we embark on the exercise of defining the characteristics that staff value in their workplace and that will make Cabrini a college of first choice for staff, it is important to attempt to discover and understand what those factors are that distinguish a great workplace culture. The following summary provides some insight into what matters most to staff and faculty.

Abstract

Each year since 2008, The Chronicle of Higher Education invites all accredited colleges and universities in the United States to participate in their annual survey of faculty and staff on the characteristics of the workplace that make a college a great place to work. They publish the results, recognizing those schools that score highest on those dimensions mentioned most by the respondents. The 2011 survey received the largest ever response, although Cabrini did not participate. A total of 310 institutions responded to the survey, including 245 four year institutions and 65 two-year colleges. Nearly 44,000 people responded to the survey. Approximately 20,000 were faculty and 14,000 were professional staff members, including about 8,000 administrators. The assessment was administered by ModernThink LLC, a human resources consulting firm based in Wilmington, DE and was sent to almost 111,000 people with a 40% approximate overall response rate. A number of representatives from higher education made up 'a panel of experts' that adapted the survey to reflect unique issues surrounding colleges and universities.

The process consisted of two parts: a multi-page questionnaire about 'institutional characteristics' as well as a questionnaire about individual evaluations of their respective institutions. It also included an analysis of demographic data and workplace policies at each participating institution. The survey was administered online in March and April 2011. It contained 60 statements that respondents rated on a five point scale from 'strongly agree to strongly disagree'. Additionally, they were asked to rate satisfaction with 18 different benefits, offered by their institutions, respond to two open-ended questions and answer 15 demographic questions. The responses were categorized into 12 dimensions, each representing a Great College recognition category.

One of the highest scoring statements in the survey was “I understand how my job contributes to this institution’s mission.” Over 56% of respondents strongly agreed and only about 1% strongly disagreed. Another high scoring statement was “I am given the responsibility and freedom to do my job.” Again, more than 53% indicated strong agreement while about 2% strongly disagreed. On the other hand, only about 13% strongly agreed with the statement “My department has adequate faculty/staff to achieve our goals.” And 23% merely agreed.

The top-rated benefits were, in order of ranking: vacation and personal time off, retirement plans like 403(b) or 401(k), tuition reimbursement for employees, medical insurance, and tuition reimbursement for family members. Programs employees rated important but less than the above included: housing assistance, post retirement medical benefits, professional and career development programs, work/life balance programs, and clarity in the tenure process.

The outstanding institutions, those that did well in many categories indicating general excellence and were selected for the Honor Roll, demonstrated that it is possible to overcome the weaknesses. They rated higher in institutional culture, in general view of the college and how well it is run. For example, the statement “This institution is well run” garnered 63% of employees’ positive responses overall and 80% for Honor Roll institutions. These and other responses identified a variety of features that produced a positive reaction to the overall statement “All things considered, this is a great place to work.”

Faculty and staff statements were organized into 12 categories, each becoming a criterion for ‘Great College’ recognition. While the specific breakdown of ratings for all of the dimensions is not available, the following is a list of the characteristics cited most often and rated highest by the majority of those who responded, particularly among staff and administration.

Collaborative Governance

Professional/Career Development Programs

Compensation and Benefits

Facilities, Workspace and Security

Job Satisfaction

Confidence in Senior Leadership

Supervisor Relationship

Respect & Appreciation

Diversity

Implications for Cabrini College

While these criteria are admittedly a construct of the Chronicle of Higher Education, they are instructive for us as we attempt to define more specifically the definition of a 'first choice college' for staff. Clearly, the dimensions cited above have resonance for us as well. But there may be other characteristics we consider important to a great workplace culture. Whatever we decide, it is these dimensions that will be our 'yardstick' against which we can measure our success in becoming our own 'Great Place to Work.'