

HOW TO MAINTAIN COMMITMENT DURING TOUGH TIMES

The Government's budget that promises tough times for the next three years has passed. The Government has introduced legislation that would freeze wages for selected organizations and non unionized employees and has served notice on public sector unions that there is no money for compensation increases.

All this negative news for employees and their representatives plus increasing pressure to work harder and with clients' increased demands for more services has created a tremendous amount of stress in the public sector. This often leads to loss of confidence and trust in leadership that than impacts negatively on employees' commitment to the achievement of the organizations' mission and strategic objectives. Some of the signs that commitment has deteriorated are:

- Higher than usual attrition rates. Within this statistic look for the exodus of valued employees.
- Increased absenteeism especially related to stress.
- Increased "presenteeism" demonstrated by lowered productivity, increased complaints and a decrease in civility.

Maintaining commitment may appear to be impossible under these circumstances. However, while you may not always be able to create a happy or positive workforce you can still significantly minimize the negativity by taking the following actions. While every organization must determine what works best for them, here are some generic ideas that will help maintain commitment:

- Communication. Without timely, frequent and honest communication that speaks specifically to employees and their representatives, there is little hope of retaining commitment. If a communication vacuum is created it will be filled with rumours which generally paint a picture far worse than the reality.
- Inclusion. A wise person once said "people don't resist change: they resist change imposed on them". Whatever plans are being created to manage the tough times, leaders should create opportunities for employees, and their representatives', input. This inclusion will make change more acceptable and maintain commitment.
- Recognition. Often during tough times recognition programs are eliminated or reduced to save money. There are many ways to recognize contributions made by employees that do not cost much. Develop opportunities consistent with the organizational culture to recognize contributions such as, public acknowledgement with something like free coffee, or acknowledgment in all staff e-mail or other communication vehicles.
- Development. Nothing says "I believe in you" as much as a developmental opportunity during difficult times. Again, these initiatives need not be costly. Assignments to grow an individual will have benefits for both the employee and the organization.

There appears to be tough times ahead with lots of uncertainty, particularly for those in the public sector. Keeping the commitment of employees will be key. The four suggestions listed above are a good start.

At Pesce & Associates, our consultants have years of experience in developing programs to support the engagement and retention of employees. For more information, please visit our website at www.pesceassociates.com or contact Elizabeth Hill, Managing Partner, at 416- 491-1501 extension 23 or at ehill@pesceassociates.com.