



ANGELA SINICKAS

## Connect issues identified in surveys with ongoing and new initiatives

# CONNECTING SURVEY RESULTS TO CURRENT NEWS

Recommendations arising from surveys often take months to be developed, budgeted and implemented. So changes usually occur long after communicators have finished writing about the survey and moved on to other topics. Here, Angela Sinickas explains why it's up to communicators to do a better job of engaging employees by strategically highlighting survey outcomes throughout the year before the next survey is launched.

The perception that nothing happens as a result of surveys could be our fault as communicators. Too often we report news or changes at our organizations without providing context for why changes were made.

For example, new training courses might be offered that relate to a low rating on a survey about the quality of performance reviews. We should be the ones to say: "This change was initiated in part due to what employees said in the annual survey five months ago." The person managing the course might not even know why his or her VP of HR asked for the course to be created. It's up to us to provide that corporate "memory" that connects this current news with the old news of the survey findings.

This is a way for communicators to encourage employee engagement. We need to be familiar with all the issues identified in our employee and customer surveys, to the point of skimming through the reports again as we plan the next newsletter or Town Hall meeting. Then we can be far more strategic in our communication, rather than just passing on bits of news that don't seem to be connected to anything else.

### Providing a change forum

Many issues surface from employee surveys that don't naturally lend themselves to a corporate solution. For example, if employees don't feel they're

treated with respect, it's unlikely there will be a "respect" initiative launched to fix it. Solutions to problems like this need to happen within work groups, changing how people interact with their peers and their own supervisors.

Solving these work-group issues offers an opportunity for communicators to foster dialogue about the problem and to share best-practice ideas for solving them. For example, we can create a forum for employees to share examples of behaviors that feel disrespectful and ideas for addressing them. Different work groups could share stories of what's worked for them, giving other groups ideas to try themselves.

### When surveys are "wrong"

A tricky aspect of post-survey communication is the occasional need to explain why the perceptions expressed might not match reality. Executives often sound defensive when they try to convince employees that their opinions are wrong. When survey results show that our audience's opinion might be based on incomplete or out-of-date facts, executives should be more open about the information that is not known or is misunderstood.



Angela Sinickas, ABC, is president of Sinickas Communications, Inc., an international communication consultancy specializing in helping corporations achieve business results through targeted diagnostics and practical solutions. For more information visit: [www.sinicom.com](http://www.sinicom.com)

One of the lowest ratings on HR surveys is always on how well employees feel they're paid. It's extremely unlikely that any employee would want management to think that everyone is happy with pay for fear that pay increases might stop or slow down even further.

I've seen these same low scores at companies where an independent salary survey shows that their employees are at the 90th percentile of pay in their industry or in their geography, with only 10 percent of other companies paying better. Communicating the results of such salary surveys would help improve future survey scores about pay.

Companies often keep employees in the dark about other information, such as the results of customer satisfaction surveys (for fear the competition will find out and use it against them) or about financial results in a privately held company. If a company finds negative opinions about an issue where they feel employees don't have the full set of data, the company should provide that data as objectively as possible, without necessarily tying this information to past survey results.

### Last chance to share results

Finally, even if there hasn't been a thorough report-back on a previous survey's findings or actions taken as a result, we have one last communication opportunity – launching the next survey. This is a perfect opportunity for us to ask subject-matter experts – on issues that were rated low on the last survey – about any changes made over the last year that are related to those topics. As part of the launch, we can summarize some of the tasks that were accomplished to address low-scoring items and the actions that were taken to maintain levels of satisfaction on high-scoring items.

This technique also works to increase the response rate on the next survey, because survey invitees reading the summary are likely to think, "I guess I did see all these changes during the year. Maybe management does listen to what we say. Maybe it's worth my time to take this survey too."