

# Employee Satisfaction and Recognition Promote Quality Work: San Mateo County Quality Matters

PATRICIA TORRES

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study describes the San Mateo County Human Service Agency's Quality Matters Employee Satisfaction Survey and Staff Recognition, including the background, development, and implementation of an Employee Satisfaction Survey and how staff recognition is expressed in San Mateo County. The case study also examines the outcomes of both endeavors and makes recommendations for implementation in the San Francisco CalFresh Program. Staff satisfaction and recognition should be included in any agency's goals and commitments. Agencies

thrive when they have productive, satisfied, valued, and accountable staff. "Organizations are social systems where human resources are the most important factors for effectiveness and efficiency; they need effective managers and employees to achieve their objectives. Human beings decide the success or failure of an organization, thus management is concerned with this human resources issue. In other words, a company's human resources can be the differentiating factor between success and failure."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ([www.scribd.com/doc/6371006/Relationship-Between-Leadership-Styles-and-Staff-Satisfaction](http://www.scribd.com/doc/6371006/Relationship-Between-Leadership-Styles-and-Staff-Satisfaction))

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## Introduction

Job satisfaction has been the subject of many studies in the field of management. Across counties, human service agencies are met with cutbacks in service delivery, employment decreases, budget cuts, and pay decreases that in turn have taken a toll on the morale and engagement of staff. When performance has been affected, it ultimately affects customer service. All counties are faced with these challenges and have had to make difficult decisions in an effort to make ends meet. An agency's workforce defines its past, present, and future successes. Staff members are the face of every program that exists. Who better to ensure satisfaction and engagement with clients and customers than those who operate customer service counters and phone lines or who work in lobbies, interview areas, and phone lines? Without happy, satisfied, and productive people, an agency cannot function and customer service suffers.

The San Francisco (SF) CalFresh Program has undergone many changes over the last seven years. The program pioneered and implemented a Call Center, Document Imaging, a Task Management Tool, and is currently piloting Telecommuting. These endeavors were implemented shortly after CalWIN became the new computer system. The SF CalFresh program has transformed immensely in a short period. SF CalFresh staff has valiantly worked through trial and error to administer every implementation. I believe that asking staff if they are satisfied, if they feel supported and valued, and what their needs are, is important to ensure that they continue to follow and support an agency through future changes.

San Mateo County prides itself on ensuring that they implement best practices agency-wide, so they implemented an Employee Satisfaction Survey. The survey was to be used to obtain baseline information for measuring changes in employees' opinions over time. Following the survey, a report was written that documents staff concerns and includes recommendations. Another quality initiative implemented was a project called 30 units in 30 days, which was initiated by Agency Director, Beverly Beasley Johnson. As a result of the "30 in 30" project, an all-staff event took place. It was one way in which employees were recognized off-site for their efforts. By acknowledging that staff satisfaction is an important factor in an agency, it demonstrates to employees that they are recognized and valued.

## Employee Satisfaction Survey

San Mateo County received an Accreditation Award in 2008. "Accreditation is the process of evaluating practice against national standards to ensure that an organization's service delivery has integrity, authenticity and soundness."<sup>2</sup> The Policy, Planning and Quality Management (PPQM) staff of San Mateo County keeps the organization current on changes in standards that affect their program and manages the re-accreditation process every four years. One of the requirements for accreditation is to have an Employee Satisfaction Survey (ESS) as a best practice standard. The focus points are to:

- Identify organizational strengths,
- Measure rates of personnel satisfaction,

<sup>2</sup> ([www.coastandards.org](http://www.coastandards.org))

- Address potential root causes of job challenges, and
- Identify opportunities for improvements from the employees' perspective

It took a six to nine month timeframe in order to process the survey which had been developed through an extensive staff-involved quality improvement process. Members of the PPQM unit did it in-house. They developed a list of survey questions and presented the questions to the directors. They then went to staff, shared the draft with them, and asked them what questions they wanted represented in the survey. Once approved and finalized, the survey went out online using Survey Monkey. The survey was given a two-week timeframe in which employees could voluntarily complete and submit it. Staff was informed that their identities would remain anonymous and the PPQM unit could only identify the answers by program.

The Employee Satisfaction Survey (ESS) covered the following areas:

- Demographics
- Work Environment
- Support
- Communication
- Training
- Workload
- Policies and Procedures
- Appreciation
- Satisfaction

Out of 725 staff members in the San Mateo HSA, 45.5% took part in the survey. The survey was sent to staff in January 2010, and the ESS results report was released to staff in September 2010.

### Employee Recognition

A staff recognition event was implemented because of a project called “30 units in 30 days.” “30 in 30” was an endeavor the agency director implemented. When she became agency director five years ago, she knew that her staff was always committed to the work they did, but it had never been documented. It

became apparent to her that she needed to hear from staff and get in touch with how they were feeling about work and how she and other staff could assist them. Beverly stated that “leaders need to read their environment and that can only be done by direct contact.” She decided to visit 30 units in 30 days. Beverly believed people were less likely to speak in large group settings so she would do it on a smaller more intimate scale. Some of what resulted from the “30 in 30” were simple requests like GPS fixtures in the city cars to assist in locating outreach destinations, a bench outside one building, fast traks, all of which were considered items that could be addressed quickly. Many who participated in the “30 in 30” suggested an all-staff event. Staff wanted the opportunity to unite, talk, and laugh, away from the workplace with colleagues. Donna Woche, of Human Resource Development, and others headed the planning and implementation of the All Staff Event to recognize and appreciate staff. The event consisted of remarks from Beverly, remarks from the Board of Supervisors, keynote speakers, a talent show, certificates, prizes and an enjoyable feast. Management served and entertained staff for the entire event.

### Outcomes

San Mateo County HSA is comprised of five program areas. The highest percentage of staff who responded to the survey was direct service staff. Lowest participation came from management and administration, and every other entity fell somewhere in between.

Some key findings were:

- Many did not finish the survey due to the length of questions.
- Staff that felt that the confidentiality issue was not safeguarded may not have taken the survey.
- Overall Satisfaction—This section's result provided the agency with insight regarding employee happiness at work, direct contact with management, on the level of morale, communication levels, and staff being heard and appreciated.
- Supportiveness—This section's result provided insight regarding support from management,

supervisors, resources, handbook updates, program policy updates, and training.

- **Staff Appreciation**—This section's result provided the agency with insight regarding recognition and appreciation, morale level, feelings about budget issues, leadership responsibilities, and pressures that are faced.
- **Work Environment**—This section's result provided insight regarding workload fairness, climate control, restrooms, break rooms, parking, and mechanical support.
- **Communication**—This section's result provided insight regarding changes that occur, transparency, staff input, town hall meetings, timely updates, interaction, work expectations, performance evaluations, technology use, and instruction practices.
- **Conclusion**—Three main areas emerged as areas of concern, improving communication, access to leadership, and staff recognition.

At the end of the results report, there are suggested practices for each section of the survey for management and supervisors to put into practice.

Because of the survey and the “30 in 30”, employee surveys will continue to be conducted annually with hopefully, an increased response rate. Staff recognition events were implemented and are planned to be continued. The cost for the All-Staff Event was about \$20,000, which includes the keynote speakers fee, travel and accommodations, food, supplies, and venue.

## Recommendations

Job satisfaction is related to the feeling of employees and can be influenced by factors such as the quality of their relationship with their supervisor or employer, the quality of the physical environment of which they work or the degree of fulfillment from their work. Job satisfaction is not the same as job motivation; rather, job satisfaction gives an indication of an employee's well-being related to the job (Michaelowa, 2002). San Francisco HSA CalFresh

program's goal has always been to serve clients with dignity and respect. In order to continue to accomplish that, it is important that management check in with staff to ensure staff are productive, happy, and satisfied where they work. San Mateo County used their employee survey as a key resource in determining program improvement changes. Through the use of in-house staff to plan, organize, and develop the ESS, the county was then able to use Survey Monkey as a tool to distribute the survey. When looking at this endeavor in terms of costs for San Mateo (the time and staff it took to complete this project) it totals about five to ten thousand dollars. San Mateo County shared that although the results and outcomes of their survey were informative and a great success in finding out the perception of staff satisfaction, they did look into other ways of conducting future staff surveys.

While a Child Welfare League of America (CWLA)/University of Texas “National Benchmarking Project: Employee Engagement.” “CWLA's National benchmarking study will not benchmark outcome but the degree of employee engagement.”<sup>3</sup>

It is recommended that the SF CalFresh program and, possibly, later on, other programs in SF, use the CWLA/University of Texas Employee Satisfaction Staff Survey. This endeavor cannot be successful or promote buy-in from staff unless a commitment is shown from the management team. It is also recommended that within a reasonable amount of time, results be reviewed and reported back to staff with a response plan to address issues occurring as a result of the survey. CWLA provides a general array of questions concerning the areas of work, information, accommodations, personnel, and organization. Agencies can modify or add to the questions unique to their agency. CWLA member's agency base fee is \$950 and \$1.25 per email address they link to the survey. Non-member's base fee is \$1250 and \$1.25 per email address they link to the survey. For agencies with less than 50 staff, CWLA offers a special flat fee

<sup>3</sup> ([www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org))

of \$500. Agencies can set up free email accounts and have staff complete the survey in designated areas to cut down on the cost per email address. Using CWLA, “agencies will be able to compare their performance to nationally compiled results for other agencies providing similar services.”<sup>4</sup> Agencies work with the University of Texas on an individual basis to set up and conduct the survey. The survey occurs in the spring and fall of each year. Standard reports agencies receive include:

- Agency-wide Executive Summary
- Agency-wide all data report
- An executive summary and all data report for service area and level
- An executive summary and data summary for each individual agency service code
- Excel file containing summaries of data by item, construct and additional item
- CWLA national data sets which come after the end of the survey period

The survey can also be used to set strategic plans and be used to measure improvement. CWLA offers to repeat the survey in two to three years to see if improvement has been achieved.

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## References

San Mateo County Policy, Planning, and Quality Management Team

San Mateo County Agency Employee Satisfaction Survey Report 2009/10

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4 ([www.cwla.org](http://www.cwla.org))