

JACK WILEY

BRENDA KOWSKE

Recognition *Exciting work*

Security *Pay* *Education*

Conditions *Truth*

RESPECT

A hand in a dark suit sleeve is shaking hands with another hand. The background is a solid blue color. The word 'RESPECT' is written in large, bold, orange letters across the middle of the image.

Delivering Results by Giving
Employees What They Really Want

To my wife, Rhonda, whose unflinching support over the past thirty-seven years has made it possible for me to pursue my career dreams.

Jack Wiley

To my husband, Aaron, who never questioned my decision to write a book during our first year of parenthood, and to my daughter, Sophie, who is quickly learning what my parents taught me while rocking out to the Rolling Stones— you can't always get what you want, but if you try, sometimes you find you get what you need.

Brenda Kowske

Table of Contents

Dedication

Title Page

Copyright

List of Figures and Tables

Preface

Acknowledgments

Chapter 1: What Employees Really Want

Recognition

Exciting Work

Security of Employment

Pay

Education and Career Growth

Conditions at Work

Truth

How to Use This Book

Chapter 2: Why You Should Care

How Does Giving Employees What They Want Help Organizations?

RESPECT Engages Employees

RESPECT Supports Superior Performance
RESPECT Means Satisfied Customers
RESPECT Shows Us the Money
RESPECT—It Is Simply the Right Thing to Do

Chapter 3: Recognition

The Importance of Feedback and Recognition

Is Ann Receiving the Recognition She Deserves?

Recognition: A Key to Great Management

How to Stop Worrying and Love the Millennials

Providing Recognition the Right Way

How to Diagnose Your Organization's State of Recognition

Guiding Principles and Concrete Actions for Improving Recognition

Chapter 4: Exciting Work

Is William Getting the Chance to Do Exciting Work?

Finding Excitement at Work

What Makes Work Exciting

Why Exciting Work Matters to Your Business Success

Influencing Job Satisfaction and Work Excitement the Right Way

How to Diagnose Your Organization's State of Job Satisfaction and Work Excitement

Guiding Principles to Foster Job Satisfaction and Work Excitement

Concrete Actions to Improve Job Satisfaction and Work Excitement

Chapter 5: Security of Employment

What Makes Employees Feel Secure in Their Jobs?

Building Trust

The State of Job Insecurity

How to Diagnose Employees' Current State of Job Security

Guiding Principles and Concrete Actions Organizations Can Take to Create Job Security

Chapter 6: Pay

The Pay-for-Work Exchange

How Much Is Enough?

The Compensation Package

Is Chen Happy with His Pay?

Why Money Matters to Employees

Executive Compensation

Why Fair Compensation Is Good for Business

Factors That Influence How Employees View Their Pay and Benefits

Diagnosing Your Organization's Issues with Pay and Benefits

Guiding Principles for Fair Compensation

Chapter 7: Education and Career Growth

**In Pursuit of Learning and Advancement
Is Katia Receiving the Development She
Needs?**

**Why Career Education and Growth Matter
to Your Employees**

**Why Career Education and Growth Are Good
for Business—Now and into the Future**

The Glass Ceiling

**Influencing Employee Education and Growth
the Right Way**

**How to Diagnose Your Organization's
Education and Growth Issue**

**Guiding Principles to Ensure Education and
Growth Opportunities**

**Actions to Improve the Employee
Experience of Education and Growth**

Chapter 8: Conditions at Work

The Condition of “Conditions”

**Are Miguel and Susan Comfortable and Safe
in Their Workplace Surroundings?**

Are Workplace Conditions Improving?

Where Workers Feel Safe and Productive

**The Right Way to Influence How Employees
View Their Workplace Conditions**

Physical Working Conditions

Guiding Principles to Improve Physical Workplace Conditions

Actions to Improve Physical Working Conditions

Social Working Conditions

Diagnosing Problems

Guiding Principles

Actions to Improve Social Working Conditions

Chapter 9: Truth

Telling the Truth

Is Maren Receiving the Communication and Feedback She Needs?

The Management Credibility Gap

Trickle-Down Information

Delivering Honest Feedback

Feedback for High Potentials

Opening the Lines of Communication and Telling the Truth

Diagnosing Your Organization's Culture of Truthfulness

Guiding Principles for Building a Culture of Truthfulness

Actions to Build a Culture of Truthfulness

Chapter 10: RESPECT: A Key to Your Future Success

The Leadership-Employee RESPECT Disconnect

[The Bureaucratic Organization](#)

[The Dynamic Organization](#)

[Do's and Don'ts for RESPECT](#)

[Dynamic Organizations and the Coming War for Talent](#)

[Appendix A: Identifying RESPECT Levels Worksheet](#)

[Appendix B: About the WorkTrends Study](#)

[History](#)

[Online Sampling Procedures](#)

[Appendix C: Discovering the RESPECT Taxonomy: The Method](#)

[The Sample and the Sorters](#)

[Devising the Taxonomy: The Initial Sort](#)

[Checking the Taxonomy: The Retranslation Sort](#)

[Finalizing the Taxonomy: The Consensus Meeting](#)

[Notes](#)

[Notes](#)

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[About the Authors](#)

[Index](#)

RESPECT

Delivering Results by Giving
Employees What They Really Want

Jack Wiley and Brenda Kowske

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List of Figures and Tables

- Figure 1.1.** Global Results: What Employees Really Want
- Figure 2.1.** The Impact on Employee Engagement of Organizations Providing What Employees Want
- Figure 2.2.** The Impact on Operational Performance of Organizations Providing What Employees Want
- Table 2.1.** The RESPECT Index Items
- Figure 2.3.** RESPECT and Customer Satisfaction
- Figure 2.4.** RESPECT and Financial Performance
- Figure 2.5.** RESPECT and Quarterly Changes in Stock Price
- Figure 3.1.** Employee Satisfaction with Recognition by Global Industry
- Figure 3.2.** The Impact of Employee Recognition on Views of Managerial Performance
- Figure 3.3.** Employee Perceptions of Recognition by Generational Group
- Figure 4.1.** Work Excitement by Global Industry
- Figure 4.2.** Work Excitement by Global Job Type
- Figure 4.3.** Work Excitement Under Different Employment Conditions
- Figure 5.1.** Country Ranking on Organizational Layoffs Within Last Twelve Months
- Table 5.1.** Global Employee Ratings of the Drivers of Job Security
- Table 5.2.** Driving Job Security Through Building Trust
- Figure 5.2.** The Impact of Employee Layoffs on Employee Engagement
- Figure 6.1.** Impact of Rating of Pay on Intent to Leave
- Figure 6.2.** The Compensation Components Employees Most Want, by Country
- Figure 6.3.** Gross Annual Minimum Wage (International Dollars)
- Table 6.1.** Executive Ratings of Pay Under Different Performance Conditions
- Figure 7.1.** Impact of Career Opportunities on Intent to Leave
- Figure 7.2.** Percent of Baby Boomers in the Labor Force
- Figure 7.3.** Views of Career Opportunities by Global Generational Groups
- Figure 7.4.** Proportion of Men and Women in Management Positions
- Figure 7.5.** Views of Career Opportunities by Men and Women at Different Managerial Levels
- Figure 8.1.** Ratings of Physical Working Conditions in the United States, 1990-2010

- Figure 8.2.** Management Concern for Employee Well-Being in the United States by Selected Job Type, 1995-2010
- Figure 8.3.** Organizational Support for Work/Life Balance in the United States by Selected Job Type, 1993-2010
- Figure 8.4.** Country Ranking on Physical and Social Working Conditions
- Figure 8.5.** Impact of Trust and Cooperation on Feeling Part of a Team
- Figure 9.1.** Truthful Communication Employees Want
- Figure 9.2.** Management Credibility in the United States, 1988-2010
- Figure 9.3.** Knowing the Direction the Organization Is Headed: Global Job Type Comparison
- Figure 9.4.** Feedback for High Potentials vs. the General Employee Population
- Figure 10.1.** Comparison of RESPECT Index Scores for Senior Leaders and Individual Contributors (Non-Management)
- Table 10.1.** The Do's and Don'ts of Delivering RESPECT
- Table C.1.** The Genesis and Evolution of RESPECT

Preface

In 1985, I was the director of organization research services for Business Advisors, the consulting firm subsidiary of the former Control Data Corporation. In that role I was responsible for overseeing the delivery of employee survey systems to both Control Data and to our various corporate clients. This was relatively early in my professional career (see the picture that follows from that time period and compare it to the one you find on the inside back flap of this book). While it may seem incredible now, during that era employee survey instruments of 150 to 200 questions were commonplace. What were we thinking?



Even then, during my early data-obsessed days, I must admit the notion of such incredibly long employee surveys seemed a bit ridiculous. Those surveys would often take the average respondent 45 to 60 minutes to complete. Then, when the results were compiled, what do you do with the resulting mountain of data? How do you make sense of it all? That got me to thinking: What is it that we really want to know? If we view the survey as a communication channel with employees, what is it that we really want to learn from them? Instead of asking employees about every possible organizational topic “under the sun,” why not just ask them the things we really want to know that we cannot otherwise determine?

But what was it that we really wanted to know? Back then, employee surveys were almost always “employee satisfaction” surveys. I know, thankfully, that our employee survey purposes and tools have progressed a long way since then. But in the 1970s and 1980s surveys were primarily undertaken to help personnel executives and managers, first and foremost, and secondarily, line executives and managers, to better understand what made employees satisfied. But if that was the case, why not just ask them about the elements of organizational life that most drove their levels of satisfaction? Certainly that would not take 150 to 200 questions.

Enter WorkTrends™. About that time, I developed and implemented a survey program that eventually became known as WorkTrends. Its initial purpose was to create a true national normative database of employee opinions on topics most typically asked in employee surveys. We conducted WorkTrends with a sample drawn from a panel of households in the United States, reflective of the nation's population of working adults. Because of the way the panel was constructed and the sample drawn, we had a representative sampling of worker opinions for every major industry group and job type. We also ensured it was representative of all age groups and of both genders.

WorkTrends was created to give us national norms we could use as a benchmark against which we could compare client results. Since we controlled the content of the WorkTrends survey, it could also be used as a research tool. Aha. Why not use WorkTrends to ask employees about what they really wanted? Certainly we could use the answers to that question to help us build a framework for building more efficient employee satisfaction surveys. So that is what I did. Beginning in 1985, I added to WorkTrends this open-ended question:

“As an employee, what is the most important thing you want from the company for which you work?”

Knowing we would need samples from more than one year to draw reliable conclusions about what employees really wanted, I decided to simply grow the database. I knew eventually we would analyze these data and build our framework for a more efficient employee satisfaction survey.

Life happens. Along with my boss at the time, Gail Gantz, we purchased the assets of the survey business from Control Data Corporation and founded Gantz Wiley Research, which opened its doors December 1, 1986. We took WorkTrends with us. With that, my priorities changed. Now I was a company owner with clients to serve, employees to pay, and a business to grow. Although Gail left the company in 1990, the company fortunately continued to grow and expand. Eventually I sold the business to Kenexa, my current employer, in 2006. The now twenty-year-old WorkTrends survey and database came with me.

Over the past two and a half decades, guided by a variety of different influences, employee surveys have changed dramatically. There were several practitioners both inside and external to organizations who helped bring that about. We are glad employee surveys evolved. That became the topic of a book I published last year entitled *Strategic Employee Surveys*.

While all of that was going on, though, I was still collecting answers to my question. In fact, with Kenexa's deeper R&D pockets, we began asking employees in several countries about what they most wanted from their employers. Finally, it was time to do something with that growing mound of data. Along with my co-author, Brenda Kowske, and one of our research associates, Rena Rasch, we analyzed the data. What we learned is revealed in this book.

While I started this effort with an entirely different purpose in mind, I hope you will find the outcome worthwhile. We

have learned at least two things: (1) what employees really want and (2) why it matters. Those organizations that pay attention to employee needs are the ones that prosper the most and outperform and outlive their competitors. We invite you to consider our analysis and our conclusions. It boils down to this: all employees are “askin' for is a little r-e-s-p-e-c-t.” Find out why it matters so much to them and why it should matter to you.

July 2011

Jack Wiley
La Fontaine, Indiana

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to several colleagues and co-workers. I mention first my former business partner, Gail Gantz. Very early in its existence, Gail invested in and helped establish and grow the WorkTrends survey, without which there would be no mountain of data to analyze and no book to write. Many of my former colleagues at Gantz Wiley Research also helped keep alive this special research program, especially Bruce Campbell, Scott Brooks, and Kyle Lundby.

Since I joined Kenexa, several colleagues have provided great operational support and assistance, including Jennifer Meyer, Louise Raisbeck, and Mary Ellen Weber. One co-worker who deserves special attention is Rena Rasch. Rena's research skills proved invaluable in determining the correct research methods for data analysis, and she also generated great research insights, helping us shine a light on what otherwise may have remained hidden. The contributions of two external researchers, Jennifer Elving and Megan Ciampa, also proved quite valuable in the writing of this book.

Several Kenexa executives provided the needed organizational context and support to complete this project. Special recognition is due to Rudy Karsan, Troy Kanter, Don Volk, Sarah Teten, and Eric Lochner. Without their belief in this project and ongoing investment, the database might still be awaiting analysis. I also want to thank Tony Cockerill, who helped us frame our recommendations for future leaders, and John Galvin, who played a very important editing role for this book.

Of course, this book would not exist without the participation of over 175,000 employees from around the world who have completed our surveys.

Finally, I want to thank Brenda Kowske, who proved once again the old adage that two heads are better than one. The opportunity to work with Brenda introduced novel ideas and different ways of discussing our research findings that help animate the main points of this book. For that, and for many other contributions from Brenda, I am very grateful.

Chapter 1

What Employees Really Want

Here's a scenario that almost any manager, at any level, can relate to. You have a project due and it's requiring a big push from everyone involved. Millions in revenue are at stake. Your career, and your team's success, depend on the project being completed on time and in perfect condition. No problem, you think. You've done this before, but now one of your key team members—a direct report—is threatening to quit. The team member feels undervalued, underappreciated, and underpaid for what's being asked. If you lose this employee at this time, your project is doomed. What next?

Finding a replacement who can do the job on such short notice is out of the question. You need to fix this. You *have* to fix this. The project's success depends on it, and your own career depends on it.

But *how* do you fix it?

This turnover drama is no small matter, and it's one that is played out every day, in every industry, in every country around the world. In nearly every organization—be it small businesses, non-profit organizations, or multinational companies—human capital costs can exceed 40 percent of corporate expenses.¹ Employees represent a massive investment, one that leaders know needs to be protected. It's not simply about avoiding the cost, distraction, and hassle of finding new employees—although those are valid issues. Making sure employees are fulfilled at work isn't just about simple human decency either, although that's also a great argument.

The fact is that managers and organizations that give their employees what they want *outperform* those that don't. As we'll see in Chapter 4, the evidence for providing employees with what they want is incredibly compelling. Figuring out exactly what it is that employees want can be more challenging, but that is exactly what we've spent the last twenty-five years getting to the bottom of. In the process we have amassed a research database unlike any other, and it all started with this simple question:

“What is the most important thing you want from the organization for which you work?”

Beyond that original and fundamental question we've since added over one hundred additional items that probe topics like leadership effectiveness, employee engagement, diversity practices, turnover and retention, the impact of layoffs, union vulnerability, and job satisfaction. We have answers from all corners of the world, from all job types, from men and women, and from employees who span the working generations. Since we started our research, we've heard from over two hundred thousand employees. In our most recent survey alone, we heard from more than thirty-five thousand employees who work in some of the world's most powerful economies, including Canada, China, Brazil, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Russia, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The survey's geographic reach actually expands even further, but these countries alone account for an incredible 71 percent of the world's gross domestic product (GDP).²

It's not just geographic diversity that we're after. We surveyed employees who work in every major industry, from food to finance, from heavy manufacturing to health care, from retail to pharmaceuticals, and from energy to electronics. We heard from senior U.S. executives in the restaurant business and from construction laborers in Italy. We surveyed retail managers in India and banking

managers from the United Kingdom. Our database lets us compare how retail sales associates in, say, Japan match up against those in Canada—or against the rest of the world. How do government workers in Australia feel compared to their counterparts in China? We have that, too.

Not only has this mountain of data been subjected to ongoing and rigorous scientific analysis, but after two and a half decades of compounded knowledge it has allowed us to reveal the basic truths about employee needs and desires.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T: “Find out what it means to me”



All I'm askin'

Is for a little respect....”

Business books don't generally begin by singing along with the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, but frankly we couldn't have come up with a better entrée—or a more perfectly suited acronym. Your employees are definitely singing this tune, and we don't mean at karaoke night. If you've hired the right people, then you know they have what *you* need. But what do *they* need? The answer can be broken down into seven fundamental desires that include:

Recognition: A pat on the back from managers and the organization at-large

Exciting work: A job that's interesting, challenging, and fun

Security of employment: Job security, you may not want to talk about this, but employees do

Pay: Fair compensation for a day's work

Education and career growth: Opportunities to develop skills and a career