



2021 Employee Survey Summary and Follow Up Recommendations

Survey Purpose

In 2011 Carmel Area Wastewater District (CAWD) contracted with CSI Human Resources Group (CSI) to conduct an employee survey and interviews. The survey results and recommendations were then shared with CAWD management, the Board of Directors and employees. One recommendation was to conduct follow-up surveys every few years to assess the progress of CAWD and the management team in implementing the recommendations for improvement. The Board of Directors and the General Manager decided at that time to conduct an employee survey approximately every two to three years. With major leadership changes and the pandemic the surveys have been conducted approximately every four years. Surveys have taken place in 2011, 2013, 2017 and 2021.

The purpose of every survey has been to:

- Measure employee's perception of their work environment
- Identify areas of strength and areas for improvement
- Identify job satisfaction levels
- Identify organizational structural issues

The survey gathered information about employee satisfaction in eight different areas.

- Job Satisfaction
- Communication
- Supervisors and Management
- Quality and Teamwork
- Employee Appreciation and Morale
- Miscellaneous

Every survey has also offered an opportunity for employees to provide their own comments. As with the prior survey in 2017 approximately half of employees decided add comments.

Prior to conducting every survey, the survey statements are reviewed with the General Manager. In the prior surveys, there was feedback regarding some of the statements (that the wording was confusing). We have not received any negative feedback regarding these survey statements. There were no significant content changes made to the statements.

We will make some results comparisons to prior surveys, but really this can be seen as a snapshot in time.

Methodology and Response Rate

Based on feedback from prior surveys and in an effort to increase efficiency and maintain anonymity we decided to make the survey completely electronic. The survey was created on a third-party website (Survey Legend). Employees were then individually invited via an emailed link to participate in the survey. The survey was set up with no identifying indicators unless the employee chose to reveal themselves in the comments section.

This method of conducting the survey was very successful and efficient.

We allowed two full weeks for employees to complete the survey. Email reminders were sent out every week.

After conducting the survey, in person interviews were conducted by Beth Ingram to gain further knowledge regarding the areas of concern that were brought to light during the survey. All employees were interviewed (with the exception of the two employees). Interviews were conducted during December and January. There was concern from a couple of employees that they feared some sort of retribution if they were completely honest in their feedback/comments on the survey and in the interview.

It was reiterated to the participants that their interviews and comments were completely anonymous and would be kept confidential (barring anything illegal being revealed). The results of the interviews supported with more insight than what the survey had indicated. The intention was that common themes and comments would be communicated and integrated into the feedback and recommendations.

The meetings were conducted in the breakroom at CAWD's plant and in the board room at the administrative office.

The averages reported are for all of CAWD employees combined (Administration, Operations, Maintenance and Collections). Survey statements were presented utilizing a five-point Likert system. Employees were asked to evaluate statements from #1 being Negative/Strongly Disagree to #5 being Positive/Strongly Agree.

COVID – 19

We would be remiss if we didn't mention the pandemic in talking about the survey results. As you are well aware, the pandemic could have had an effect on every single category in this survey from job satisfaction to employee appreciation and morale. Is the pandemic to blame for some areas that need attention? Of course. We must not forget that at the time CAWD employees took this survey, we had been in the pandemic for two and a half years. We certainly won't solidly blame the pandemic for all of the issues CAWD has but we cannot ignore it either.

Please note, the following list is some of the precautions that were taken as part of the COVID protocol which would directly affect the different categories:

No in person meetings (all meetings were held via Zoom) or if in person were held outside and socially distanced

Social distancing at all times

No employee gatherings (bbqs, celebrations, holiday parties)

No eating lunch together unless social distancing

Masks worn inside and out

No going to the admin office unless absolutely necessary and vice versa

Employees who were able telecommuted

No attending conferences or trainings

Temperatures taken every morning prior to shifts starting

Operations and the lab added a split shift so employees could be separated in case of a break out

Job Satisfaction

The results in job satisfaction section are a great indicator as to what the attitude and culture was like at the time of the survey. Personal satisfaction and enjoyment of performing their actual day to day activities is 4.192 out of 5.00. Understanding the requirements of their position is at 4.120 out of 5.00 as is I clearly understand the requirements of my position. Employees are clear on what is expected of them 4.192 out of 5.00. Employees think the Mission/Purpose of CAWD makes me feel my job is important 4.00.

Communication

Communication is always a work in progress. Considering this survey was taken during the pandemic when basically all COVID protocols discourage good communication the numbers are positive.

Communication within departments is effective 3.962 out 5.00. Communication via the superintendents is strong 4.20. Communication of policies and procedures was 3.320 out of 5.00. This number is directly related to the employee handbook not being completed. This fact was brought up by multiple employees and in all three of the past employee surveys and during the interviews.

Supervisors and Management

It is clear that employees are being encouraged to be team players 4.077, works well together as a team 4.115 and feels responsible for meeting its objectives successfully 4.308. They are receiving regular safety training 4.480 that is relevant and informative 4.240. It appears a little work could be done with conflict resolution between departments and co-workers. Employees are receiving the training they need and have the materials and equipment they need to perform their jobs effectively 4.308.

Employee Appreciation and Morale

Employees are feeling appreciated by their direct Supervisor 4.120, Superintendent 4.20 not as much by the General Manager 3.304 and the Board of Directors 3.125 and on the whole 3.480.

Morale within CAWD is 3.250. Like communication employee morale is something we should always be working on. There are many ways to improve upon this. It is worth mentioning that the pandemic certainly didn't help. The isolation of people being on split shifts, not having regular gatherings, socially distanced meetings could all be directly related to morale.

CAWD offers amazing benefits and we work hard with our broker to communicate our benefits. Employees understand what benefits are available to them 4.20 which is great since the benefit package is complicated.

Employees are feeling that their jobs are secure 4.00. During this tumultuous time this is a very important. While many people experienced job insecurity during the pandemic our employees were feeling secure.

Summarized Interview Comments

As noted above, there were a few common comments/themes during the interviews:

The employee handbook needs to be completed.

Several employees brought up their performance reviews were very past due.

Employees expressed concern re: retirements that were on the horizon over the next several years and there are no succession plans in place.

The board and GM have repeatedly stated they would like to be the best of the districts of our size. Employees are frustrated because without committing the money for staff/resources to do this it is not possible. The expectation should be adjusted if the resources won't be made available.

Employees feel they are being asked to do more with the same resources. There is only so much they can do.

GM continuously says that the board will not support hiring any more staff.

Some employees believed that there should be a longevity step and additional opportunities to increase income (certifications).

Several employees brought up the structure of the Operations department and that the structure should be reconsidered. Some thought the current structure encouraged competitiveness among the operators (not in a positive way).

There was a couple of employees that expressed that some other employees weren't honestly participating in the survey/interviews because they were concerned that it wasn't confidential and there would be retribution.

Some employees think that the General Manager and the board are out of touch with the employees. Many employees are living paycheck to paycheck and could never afford to purchase a home in this area.

Benefits negotiations are not a negotiation.

The GM doesn't represent, support the employees to the board.

There is a divide between the admin office and the plant.

GM doesn't know what happens at the plant on a day-to-day basis and should spend more time there.

Recommendations

We must focus on the positive, forward thinking and on continuous improvement. As with the past improvements it will take a commitment. Attitudes, mind-sets and approaches need to be examined and tweaked from the top down. As with any organization, this should be constantly on the minds of the management. Positive movement forward.

Employee Handbook

Completing the handbook has not been made a priority and the latest draft has been waiting to be reviewed since June of 2021.

This subject is a sore one with many employees and has been brought up in every single survey that has been given.

In addition, it has been brought up by multiple employees during the interview process (and on a regular basis outside of the survey process) in 2011, 2013, 2017 and 2021.

It has been a recommendation each year. The fact that this project is being ignored is an issue. It is unnecessary, unfair and causes confusion, frustration and resentment and in my opinion which directly effects morale.

Performance Reviews

After the 2017 Employee Survey timely performance reviews were made a priority. A lot of work and energy went into making sure reviews were done on time.

Unfortunately, this is an area that has back slid in some departments.

In an effort to make this process easier, we made adjustments to the review form so that it was in a simpler format. That has helped some, but the same departments continue to lag behind.

Reviews must be done on a regular basis (once a year at a minimum) and in a timely fashion for all employees with no exceptions (including management).

This is a performance issue and should be addressed in the manager's own performance review.

It is a common viewpoint if the employee is at step E there isn't any point and/or urgency in completing their performance review. Just because the employee is at the top of their pay scale doesn't mean they don't need feedback on their performance. Regular feedback should be given on an ongoing basis.

When people receive their review six, eight, twelve months late or more, it is disheartening even to the most dedicated employee. This problem has a direct impact on morale. This issue was brought up by several employees during the interviews. Some employees brought it up in reference to co-workers reviews (in other departments) that were late not their own. Clearly this has a ripple effect.

This needs to be made a priority.

Succession Planning

Many employees have brought up a concern regarding the lack of succession planning. With several upper management employees looking at retirement on the horizon a solid succession plan should be put into place for each position.

Succession planning is a must for the General Manager position and for any other upper management positions that will be retiring from the company within the next several years. A bird's eye assessment should be made of these positions and to determine if there needs to be any staff added and/or reorganization.

Management Training/Mentoring

Management training/mentoring was recommended after the last survey. While the top managers did start a leadership program with Leap Frog Consulting – Catherine Hambley it appears that the program came to a stop during COVID. The progress in this program should be assessed and whether it would be beneficial to finish it.

There have been some employees over the last few years who have taken on new supervisory roles in upper management. Unfortunately, during COVID their supervisory training was put on hold. Ongoing management training for all managers and supervisors is recommended. With an immediate focus on the “new” managers.

CAWD needs to give their managers and supervisors the tools to succeed and manage their employees.

Communication

Communication is a continuous work in progress and a challenge.

All three Superintendents are great communicators and meet regularly with their teams. They have also implemented weekly Superintendent only meetings.

One on one weekly meetings between the General Manager and each Superintendent needs to be formalized and put onto the calendar. These meetings can be a quick check in.

Currently the GM is having a weekly meeting with the Superintendents. Each week is dedicated to a different subject. The last meeting of the month the GM is supposed to shadow one of her direct reports. This is a great idea and should continue.

After receiving feedback, the Maintenance Superintendent has started attending some of the Operations morning meetings. This is something that was brought up by multiple employees in both Operations and Maintenance departments interviews that they thought would be helpful for both departments.

Employee Appreciation and Morale

There should be an all staff gathering at least once a quarter. BBQs and celebrations should continue on a regular basis. This is great for morale. There are many inexpensive way to show appreciation and boost morale.

The Superintendents are great at recognizing and putting together celebrations when there is an occasion to celebrate. Small tokens of appreciation go a long way.

General Manager

As suggested in previous surveys, the General Manager needs to work on building her relationships with the employees. Specifically, on gaining trust and building morale.

She should make time to come to the plant on a regular basis. Walk the plant, ask questions and engage the employees in conversation.

Trust is built over time.