



The Secret to Happier Employees: Do Good

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By Zack Anchors



Conserve energy and you just might see other bottom-line benefits as well, like lower costs and valuable tax breaks. But recent research by Ante Glavas and Matt Bloom, management professors at the University of Notre Dame, suggests environmentally responsible business practices offer another, previously overlooked benefit: satisfied and engaged employees.

The research: [“Business for the Greater Good”](#)

The findings: As far as motivating factors go, money or other traditional carrots often aren’t enough; employees also want to feel that they’re part of a company that does good in the world. “We’re finding that one of the best ways companies can create productive and engaged employees is to offer them a way to bring their values to work,” says Glavas. “The more they embed social and environmental values and missions into their business, the more successful they’ll be at creating a contented workforce.”

As part of the research, Glavas and his colleagues studied companies in the dairy industry, which produces 2% of the nation’s carbon emissions. They looked at numerous businesses throughout the supply chain — from farms and processors to some of the largest retailers — that are taking steps towards reducing carbon emissions. “We looked at a number of metrics, such as productivity, engagement, creativity and overall well-being,” Glavas says.

Employees expressed two key desires: The ability to align their own values with the values of their company, and to find meaning in the work they do. “People have traditionally found meaning in their lives outside of work — such as through family, community involvement, or

spiritual practice - however, we now have more of a need to find that meaning in the work we do.”

Erin Fitzgerald, vice president of sustainability for Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy, says anecdotes from management and workers in her industry support Glavas and Bloom’s findings. As an example she cites a program implemented by HP Hood that encourages truck drivers to monitor and reduce fuel consumption. HP Hood saved money with the program, but drivers found “a renewed sense of control and an increased sense of job pride and contribution,” Fitzgerald says.

While Glavas’ study of the dairy industry focused on sustainability, he’s found through related studies that socially responsible business practices combined with philanthropic projects can have an even greater positive impact on workers — but it requires a deep commitment. “The easy path is to make changes on the periphery — donating to charities,” Glavas says. “It’s more difficult to embed a social mission in your business, but once you have it, employees tend to be much more engaged and involved,” says Glavas.

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