



Strong people practices lead to healthy, growing churches

Best Christian Workplaces Institute survey helps congregations identify performance issues, improve staff morale and achieve productivity.

Performance management, 360-degree reviews, merit pay, winning strategies and managerial training are perhaps not the first images that come to mind when thinking of growing, influential churches.

Nonetheless, “best practices” relating to each of these issues were identified in each of the “2007 Best Churches to Work For” as integral to church health. Ultimately, visionary churches that focus inwardly to serve their employees are in turn equipped to reach their goals of outwardly serving their communities with excellence.

Three churches, finalists in this year’s recognition from Best Christian Workplaces (BCW) Employee survey, are described with the intent of sharing approaches that might be used by other congregations who want to improve their morale and work practices.

United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, Leawood, KS, took the BCW Employee Survey in 2004 and they admitted to receiving abysmal results. While there had been a performance management system in place, the survey sparked their interest to research further and begin a culture change that three years later would prove a great success.

High scores achieved

The 2007 BCW survey affirmed that there had indeed been a shift, and Resurrection was not only named as a finalist in the church category, but scored highest among churches in every dimension of the survey: Culture of Character, Capability and Competence, Commitment to Learning, Compensation and Climate for Action.

Subsequent to their first survey, Resurrection recognized that most people in key management positions were not hired because they were good at management but instead because they were talented in music ministry, youth ministry, etc. Not an uncommon phenomenon in the church world, these people were promoted based on excellent ministry skills, not necessarily because they were great managers. Resurrection, first project was to find out what tools were needed for these individuals to become more effective as managers.

Dan Entwistle, managing executive director for Programs and Ministries at Resurrection, walked through their process of establishing a comprehensive three-part annual review that would

change the face of Resurrection: “We needed feedback from a broader range of people, so we began to utilize a 360-degree review process. We started by looking internally to find who in our organization was doing well and what commonalities existed.

“Then we based the 360-degree review on this set of identified ‘performance attributes.’ An email is sent to 5-8 contributors

THE UM CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION, LEAWOOD, KS

Attendance: 7,200 in worship, plus 1,100 children in Sunday school.

Affiliation: United Methodist

Senior Pastor: Adam Hamilton

Executive Pastors: Dan Entwistle, Brent Messick

Staff: 170 on payroll plus 80 preschool and nursery workers; 133 full-time equivalents. Volunteers: two unpaid staff in official staff roles; 5,000+ total volunteers

Distinctives: Vision: changing lives, transforming the community, renewing churches. More than two-thirds of members were not active in a church before visiting Resurrection. The focus is on reaching thinking people who may have been turned off of religion at some point, yet they have a hunger for a meaningful relationship with God and to be a part of making a difference in the world.

Internal reward/benefits program: The church strives to be generous in benefits because most staff gave up higher paying opportunities to work at the church. The church provides excellent health coverage and retirement plans. Other benefits: dental, vacation, automatic Life/ADD insurance, personal days, mission leave (every employee gets one week beyond vacation time to serve the needs of others).

Performance evaluation structure: 360-degree review annually, mid-year review, continual supervisor/employee feedback. Raises are tied to performance.

Quote: “We’re an unlikely selection. This isn’t an easy place to work; we work hard, we’re perennially understaffed, we push the envelope, and we do ‘whatever it takes’ to make ministry happen. Two years ago our survey results were pathetic, but we turned things around with a tremendous team of folks who wake up grateful to be a part of what God’s doing.” (Dan Entwistle)

Contact: www.cor.org

to give feedback for each employee. That feedback comes back to his/her supervisor, who randomizes the comments and makes sure they are anonymous. The 360-degree report offers a well-rounded perspective of the attributes of that employee.”

Employee goals reviewed

The second portion of the review consists of an >>

By Emily Jamieson

evaluation of the employee's goals that are agreed upon between the employee and supervisor at the beginning of each year. The third element of the review involves employee feedback of how they are doing against the staff covenant. The covenant, which was established soon after the initial survey in 2004, clarifies the work environment at Resurrection. "We needed to define our culture," Entwistle comments, "and we now use that covenant in our hiring process, on retreats, in team meetings, and in informal conversations with staff."

Since the initial survey in 2004, a major restructuring of almost everyone on staff led to different job responsibilities, new reports, and redefined titles at almost every level. Prior to the restructure, five executive directors being managed by the senior pastor had resulted in five different working cultures operating under the same umbrella.

The restructuring resulted in two managing executive directors who oversee resources and ministry. The senior pastor then provides vision, teaching and overall direction. The recalibration of existing staff was imperative so that they were in a place better suited for them, and the new structure produced greater unity and satisfaction among staff.

As a result of the BCW survey, the church has also changed the hiring process significantly. Now, when new staff are hired at Resurrection, they are warned about the unique aspects of working at this particular church. For example, potential employees are



Mary Jones, director of Member Connections at Resurrection church, confers with Managing Executive Director Dan Entwistle.

counseled about the intense learning culture at the church and are admonished, "If you are someone who would be undone by constructively critical feedback, there might be another place that would be a better match for you."

Staff from volunteer ranks

During the final interview, Resurrection attempts to talk potential hires *out* of the job. As a result, individuals who are on staff are personally driven toward learning and highly aware of the joys and challenges of the culture. Entwistle shares that they tend not to hire people out of the church world; most of them have come from the volunteer ranks. "If you can observe someone as a volunteer, you will already know if you can entrust them with greater ministry responsibilities. Ultimately, trying to teach people the DNA of this place is our biggest challenge, so we are diligent about the people we hire."

Resurrection also holds to a compensation philosophy that pays a competitive rate. However, they acknowledge that if they are going to be a learning culture and do what is best for the church, they shouldn't always pay so much that it dissuades individuals from leaving if another ministry or working culture would better suit them.

Admittedly, there was a significant pushback when they first introduced the annual review process. Entwistle explains, "We are really about being followers of Jesus Christ. So the question was, is it possible to evaluate performance in a quantifiable and measurable way? What we are really holding ourselves accountable to is simply following through on established goals. We measure our performance by being faithful to perform the actions God has called us to do and then we let the results be the Lord's."

A prime example would be that of Resurrection's strategic objective to increase in small groups from 5,100 to 6,500 people by the end of this year. "Ultimately we will not hold ourselves tightly to the number," says Entwistle, "but instead we will ask the question, 'Did we do everything we could (research, leadership development, marketing, launch, etc.) in order to cooperate with what God would have us do, so that we have not become the limiting factor?'" >>

Resurrection recognized that the negative survey response three years ago was not a result of having people that could not be trusted, but instead there were some systems that were undermining that sense of trust.

With the implementation of the new annual review, thoughtful restructuring, and more face time with the executive team, Resurrection proved successful in establishing a renewed culture. "My job is to drive a consistent culture across all our ministries," Entwistle says. "Five years ago we were conflict avoidant. We now engage in healthy con-

CROSSROADS COMMUNITY CHURCH, CINCINNATI, OH

Attendance: 8,000

Affiliation: Non-denomination

Senior Pastor: Brian Tome

Executive Pastor: Darin Yates

Staff: 83 full and part-time staff, 1000 volunteers

Distinctives: Mobilized to serve the Kingdom of God

Internal reward/benefits program: From the beginning, we have followed three core principles in the handling of money (which includes all ministry spending, salaries and comprehensive benefit packages): **(1)** bless people, **(2)** base your budget on what God wants to happen not based on what you might get, and **(3)** money is a tool for a church to use; therefore, it should be spent and not saved.

Performance evaluation structure: Each individual should have a development plan agreed upon by the direct supervisor that includes performance expectations, professional development expectations, and spiritual development expectations. There should be periodic feedback provided based on these expectations. There is no standard format or timeline.

Quote: "We are proud to be recognized but we strive to love our team more. Working in a faith-based organization should be as rewarding as it is challenging."
(Darin Yates)

Contact: www.crossroadscommunity.net

flict and we do so in a way that does not undermine people but instead promotes growth. Healthy conflict can be used by God to improve our ministry."

"Ultimately, our success comes out of a very strong sense of our purpose and mission. What you find is that people continually love to give themselves to this purpose because they understand what we are doing together as the local church. Every person on our staff would be able to quote verbatim our purpose and our vision"

Maintaining morale under tough circumstances

Taking good care of their people is a principle that Crossroads Community Church of Cincinnati, OH embraces wholeheartedly. According to the Best Christian Workplaces (BCW) Employee survey, employees believe the church effectively rewards top performers and has a winning strategy to meet the needs of those they serve.

Historically the church has rewarded diligent employees by granting staff raises, bonuses, time off, trips to rejuvenate themselves and their families as well as simple and informal encouragement. Darin Yates, executive pastor, insists that notwithstanding all they have invested in their people, they would love to be doing more.

With cramped space and a vision for expansion, Crossroads moved into a new building about 18 months ago, making cash tighter than usual. Despite salary freezes and significant changes to medical insurance coverage due to increasing costs, the Crossroads staff has demonstrated resilience and loyalty. "It all comes back to vision," claims Yates. "Our staff believes in what God is doing at this church and in Cincinnati. They are sold out to do whatever they can to serve God even if that means they have to make adjustments in their lives."

Because the church has demonstrated commitment to its people in this season of transition, staff is demonstrating higher levels of employee engagement than ever. "For example, we have top performers working for free because they feel that is what God is asking them to do. >>

WOODDALE CHURCH, EDEN PRAIRIE, MN

Attendance: 5,000 in seven weekend services

Affiliation: Multi-denominational

Senior Pastor: Leith Anderson

Executive Pastor: Ken Geis, Executive Pastor, Ministry Program and Bruce McNiel, Executive Pastor, Ministry Support

Staff: 120 full-time and part-time paid staff; thousands of volunteers

Distinctives: Wooddale Church is comprised of a diverse cross-section of the community. It includes old and young, believers and seekers, new believers and mature Christians. We have many with varied denominational, economic, ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The church is very outreach oriented, yet at the same time is a family that loves and cares for each other.

Internal reward/benefits program: We prepare an annual salary and benefits survey of 40 churches of similar size and ministry to Wooddale Church. Our goal is to keep our salaries and benefits in the top 25 percent of those participating in the survey and we are generally in the top 10 percent. We offer a comprehensive benefits package and periodically give bonuses to those that have taken on temporary additional responsibilities or have given a significant extra effort.

Performance evaluation structure: Evaluations consist of frequent one-on-one sessions with the immediate supervisor throughout the year and a formal year-end review that includes a self-evaluation. All annual reviews are made available to the senior pastor and board of elders.

Quote: "Wooddale Church is a great place to serve. We have a wonderful team of dedicated staff and volunteers working together to honor God in all we do." (Ken Geis)

Contact: www.wooddale.org

"We have others leaving staff so that they can have more freedom in their schedule to devote to doing the ministry they are called to here. At the same time, some of our people are in stages of life with real financial needs. We do our best to alleviate that burden as best we can."

'Shopping mall' approach

At Wooddale Church, of Eden Prairie, MN, they have a unique perspective on meeting the needs of those they serve. Fred McCormick, adults ministry pastor, explains, "We often refer to Wooddale Church as being like a shopping mall with the major 'anchor stores' (major 'staple' programs that meet the majority of people's needs like worship services, children, and youth and adult programs), as well as the 'boutique stores' (very specific programs and ministry initiatives that meet specialized needs of people such as ministry to developmentally disabled, job transition ministry, and grief support group). We seek to communicate to our employees the high value of being as immediately responsive to people's needs as possible."

Certainly, this outlook puts a new spin on "customer service." However, before one can focus outwardly, there need to be the "right people on the bus" to quote best-selling business author Jim Collins. Wooddale holds to a philosophy on hiring that relates to gifts and talents and particularly the issue of "fit." "We regularly talk about "fit" when interviewing potential employees," says Bruce

McNiel, executive pastor.

"Our leadership is constantly evaluating staff based on their fit for the tasks and nature of the ministry that their roles encompass. For pastoral staff candidates, we use a Christian industrial psychologist to help us with the fit. For all candidates, we look closely at spiritual maturity, team orientation, aptitude and attitude and then provide or supplement skills as needed."

It is clear that Wooddale places a high value on providing opportunities for employees to learn and grow according to their 2007 BCW Employee survey. Wooddale grants freedom for employees to move into other areas of ministry within the organization that will provide a new challenge and growth for the employee and thereby enhance that particular area of ministry. "We have many employees who have remained with Wooddale



Leith Anderson, senior pastor
at Wooddale Church.

Church (pastoral, program and support staff) and have changed roles either when they are ready for a new challenge or when their own personal growth has better suited them for another staff role. We want to help people succeed, grow and enjoy new challenges and opportunities."

Once people are in the right roles, how is it that they are involved and kept accountable to the tasks at hand? Across the board, employees desire autonomy in their jobs along with opportunity for involvement in the decision making processes of the organization. Churches are no different. The executive team at Wooddale describes a process they are beginning of enlisting ministry enhancement teams to address areas of Wooddale's opera-

tions that could be improved or changed. McNiel says, "When developing new ministries, or reshaping current ministries, staff members and volunteers related to those areas are involved in the evaluation process.

"Generally these are led by pastors, department heads or management, but they seek to involve other staff in the process as well. Teams of pastoral staff now meet regularly and often work on shared projects."

For example, he says they are currently working through a major decision to select new church management software. A software selection team of 10 to 12 program, support and pastoral staff have been working for a number of months visiting other churches, interviewing software vendors and defining the necessary attributes needed in the new software system. These individuals will play key roles in helping us migrate to the new system once selected." CE



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HOW YOUR CHURCH CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE 2008 BEST CHRISTIAN WORKPLACES EMPLOYEE SURVEY



Church Executive is working with Best Christian Workplaces, Mercer Island, WA, to expand the participation of larger congregations in this annual survey.

Churches who wish to participate can do so between Oct. 1 and Nov. 30, 2007.

Churches must have a minimum of ten employees to participate.

Included in the survey:

- 56 general diagnostic questions
- Three open-ended questions, eight demographic questions
- Up to five questions customized for your organization; responses are based on a one to five scale
- A powerful diagnostic report that enables the church to identify areas for potential improvement strategies
- One-hour consultation to review the church's reports and develop an effective action plan.

For information on cost, reports and registration visit www.bcwinstitute.com or phone (206) 230-8111.