

SPERDUTO & ASSOCIATES

Increasing Participation in Employee Engagement Survey Feedback Meetings

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Full participation is a key ingredient to a successful survey feedback meeting. It is critical to producing behavioral change and improving organizational results. Meetings must be structured and compelling so employees feel empowered and work toward the success of the process. Participation means all employees are actively engaged and welcoming of new ideas.



Full engagement in the problem resolution phase generates enthusiasm that leads to action. It also allows leaders to identify issues that did not surface from the survey, but that need to be resolved.

Over the last 20 years, in working with hundreds of clients, we have gathered accumulated data confirming departments that engage and involve all employees in the feedback meeting achieve measurably better and longer-lasting results. Sperduto & Associates, in conjunction with hundreds of health care organizations, has developed an employee feedback methodology that involves the application of scientific principles to increase the desire to participate in the meeting and, more importantly, to stay engaged and working on the plan over the next year. This process, which includes scripting, audio visuals, and action-planning materials, has been proven to produce 1/3 more behavioral change than using other methods. While the full details of this process are beyond the scope of this report, there are a few things you can do to increase engagement and meet organizational goals.

Although it would seem employees would be excited to participate, it may be the case that they are reluctant or apathetic. Whether this is caused by their previous experience with surveys, their natural personalities or other variables, you can increase their willingness to participate by following a proven process. Below are some of the components of the action process you can employ to increase participation during your employee feedback meeting. Many of these strategies can also be used for future department meetings.

Tips for Increasing Participation in Feedback Meetings

- ✓ Communicate to employees that the feedback meeting is mandatory. Establish your expectations for participation.
- ✓ Let employees know in advance that, if they miss the “team” meeting, they will be required to attend a make-up meeting.
- ✓ Thank employees for completing the survey and for coming to the meeting.
- ✓ Express to your group that their input will be used to make positive changes.
- ✓ Explain their participation will make this a better place to work and all employees have responsibility for the success of the meeting.
- ✓ Consider the logistics. Have the meeting in a room with comfortable seating, with adequate space, and where you can avoid potential distractions.
- ✓ Do not forget support items, such as a flip chart, pens, action-planning forms, copies of the deviation-from-the-norm charts, and evaluation forms.
- ✓ Require everyone to contribute at least one bright idea during the meeting and post it on the flip chart page.
- ✓ Involve a member of HR or other key player if needed.
- ✓ Establish ground rules (leave rank at the door, no whining, no side bar communications allowed, identify problems and focus on solutions, leave with a sense of accomplishment, expect work outside of the meeting through subgroups and task forces, etc).

- ✓ Reward participation with positive feedback.
- ✓ Be enthusiastic about positive change. If you are not enthusiastic, department members will not be.
- ✓ Provide a snack during the meeting.
- ✓ Assure confidentiality. Explain to employees that no one saw their surveys or knows their ratings. Communicate that the only data you see is the summary provided by the consulting firm as well as a summary of the written comments.
- ✓ Ask specific questions. Pause and allow employees to have a chance to respond.
- ✓ Encourage employees to come speak to you individually if they do not feel comfortable saying something during the feedback meeting.
- ✓ Train someone to be a record keeper before the meeting.
- ✓ The quickest and most effective way to deal with someone who is involved in a side conversation is to openly acknowledge their behavior. Ask if they have anything to share with the group. If they do not, ask them to save their discussion for the end of the meeting. If they do, tell them you appreciate their comments, but to please wait until the previous person has finished speaking.
- ✓ Think about the dynamics of the group beforehand. If you have a very vocal or negative member who may sidetrack discussion, speak to them before the meeting or consider asking him/her to be the record keeper. You can also redirect discussion to other members. For example, you might say, "John has made his opinion clear. Does anyone else have something to add?"
- ✓ Think about how previous meetings have gone. What has worked in the past for your group?
- ✓ Break larger groups down into subgroups to increase participation among those who may be more introverted or hesitant about participating. Ask questions to those employees who tend to be more reserved.

Increasing Participation in Feedback Meetings: Scenarios & Possible Solutions

Scenario 1: *Employees are worried about confidentiality, so they do not want to participate. What do you do?*

Possible solution → First, express to your group that their input will be used to make positive changes. Explain that all employees have responsibility for the success of the meeting. Be sure to ask employees for their opinions in a non-threatening way, and encourage employees to come speak to you individually if they do not feel comfortable talking during the feedback meeting. Also, explain to employees that no one saw their surveys or knows their ratings. Communicate that the only data you see is the summary provided by the consulting firm as well a summary of the written comments. Reward those who are participating and accept feedback graciously. Finally, use self-disclosure as a way of encouraging others to participate.

Scenario 2: *You have two employees in your department that dominate conversation during meetings. The majority of the others tend to be silent. What do you do?*

Possible solution → Redirect the discussion to other members. For example, you might say, "John and Sue have made their opinions clear on this topic. Does anyone else have something to add?" Then, ask specific questions to silent members. For example, you might ask, "Janet, you have been rather quiet to this point. Do you have an opinion on the treatment issue?"

Scenario 3: *You have a very large department consisting of several shifts. How do you create an action-plan incorporating the opinions of the entire department?*

Possible solution → Conduct more than one feedback session for your department. At the first meeting, accomplish as much as you can but, at least, be sure to create the list of areas on which to focus. The second group should review survey results, read the issues listed by the previous group, add any items which are not on the list, and finish the action plan. All employees in your department should see and have input in finalizing the action plan.

Scenario 4: *Although you have a high response rate in your department, group members tell you they do not feel this way about a particular category and that the data must be wrong. What do you do?*

Possible solution → Emphasize the fact that, although the data is accurate and views reflect overall views, their individual responses are important to you. Ask them to see you after the meeting to discuss the issue. You may also have to explain to your employees that although the statistical data can be considered valid and reflective of the feelings of the entire group due to the high response rate, you do realize several weeks have passed since the survey took place, and the situation may have changed. Base your action plan on the discussions from your feedback meeting and the priorities established by your department.

Scenario 5: *Employees are reluctant to participate because they say that nothing was done last time. What do you do?*

Possible solution → Explain to your department that this feeling was generally shared by other employees in the organization, as seen by the low scores on the Previous Survey factor (if applicable). Mention that this is why leaders are putting a great deal of energy into the survey process this year. The data is going to be taken seriously, and their input will be used to make positive changes going forward. Explain that their participation will make this a better place to work. You must demonstrate your enthusiasm and commitment to change.

Scenario 6: *The category in which you received the lowest scores was Supervision and/or Department Head area. You feel that employees may be reluctant to be open and honest with you during the meeting. What do you do to encourage participation?*

Possible solution → You want to do whatever you can to encourage honest and open feedback. Consider asking a member of HR to be present during the meeting. When various issues are open to discussion, explain you will be leaving the room for the time being and that the representative from Human Resources will finish conducting the session.