

Fire Up Employee Suggestions

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Tapping into employee ideas allows your cooperative to deliver more value to your members while boosting employee morale and motivation. Each day your employees encounter challenges at work as they interact with your customer members. Each challenge can spark an idea for the cooperative to become more efficient or provide more value. The manager's challenge is to harvest those ideas to improve the cooperative's performance.

When an employee is able to provide suggestions on the cooperative's systems and procedures they become more engaged. They also feel that they have an opportunity to positively impact the organization. Employee suggestion systems create a sense of ownership and increase employee engagement and motivation. A well designed employee suggestion program can even build team spirit and encourage employees to collaborate on fleshing out and implementing suggestions.

Employee suggestion systems run the gambit from a simple suggestion box to a full blown program involving a cross functional suggestion review team, and a program of rewards and recognition. I have some suggestions for getting useful suggestions. My first suggestion is to create a list of specific topics and seek ideas on one topic at a time. For example, start off by asking what the cooperative could do to improve the safety culture. You actually get more suggestions when you limit the topic. A regular schedule of suggestion topics creates a deadline. Soliciting suggestions on a specific topic also helps to generate ideas that align with the cooperative's goals. The single topic format also makes it easier to provide feedback which acknowledges all of the contributions, while perhaps highlighting the top suggestions. Feedback on employee suggestions is very important. Employees will quickly tire of participating if they don't perceive that their suggestions are being seriously considered.

Next week I'll share some more pointers on getting actionable suggestions that can create real value.