

South Tahoe employees consider workplace average

By Kathryn Reed

A C-plus – that’s the grade South Lake City employees gave their employer and overall work environment.

City Manager Tony O’Rourke is not surprised by the results of the survey 92 percent of the 198 employees took in early December. Results are being disseminated to staff this week, with directors having received the report late last week.



Of the 72 questions, the one receiving the lowest overall rating was: City management considers the interest of employees when changes are made in the city that affects my work. Sixty-seven percent disagreed, while 5 percent agreed with the statement.

“Anything that received less than 50 percent needs addressing,” O’Rourke said.

He wants change to be a collaborative effort between staff and management.

What role his management style played into the results would be hard to ascertain. When the survey was taken Dec. 6-7 he had been at the helm for four months – enough time to influence opinions, not enough to be responsible for engrained beliefs/attitudes.

The firm doing the analysis wrote, “Particularly in these economic times, adequate staffing levels is an enormous challenge and rarely do we find organizations where employees feel the staffing is adequate. Limited staff and high demand for services can also mean the leadership time and attention

required for effective two-way communication and inclusive decision making and collaboration across departments can wane. This ultimately affects morale and productivity as evident in the results of the assessment and reflected in the written comments.”

In the 45-year history of the city, no employee survey has been taken before. O’Rourke wants to use this one prepared by Alta Mesa Group as a benchmark. His plan to conduct a survey each year, see if weaknesses have been addressed and what new issues may need to be resolved.

“We need to treat employees as well as we treat the customers,” O’Rourke said. His mantra since Day 1 has been all about providing quality service, treating customers (aka the public) with respect.

The areas city employees had the highest remarks for were:

- I feel a high degree of responsibility for the work I do;
- I work in an environment that is free from drugs and alcohol;
- I have the skills and knowledge necessary to perform my job;
- I know what is expected of me in my job;
- The people in my work group work hard to do quality work;
- I have a great sense of personal satisfaction when I perform my job;
- Employees are treated equally regardless of race, national origin, age, gender, sexual preference, marital status, physical handicap, medical condition, veteran status, or religious affiliation.

The areas people had the lowest remarks for were:

- My department is adequately staffed;

- Suggestions for improvement are taken seriously;
- City management considers the interest of employees when changes are made in the city that affect my work;
- City management promotes a team environment within and among departments;
- City management sets attainable goals;
- In general, this organization is better to work for now than it was a year ago;
- City management genuinely cares about employees' welfare.

How the 57 supervisors-managers responded compared to the 126 line employees was about the same. Usually management has a higher regard for the institution.

The consultant wrote, "A focus on communication, leadership and citywide policy issues amongst city managers and supervisors may create a significant opportunity for improvement in the organization, and will likely be noticed by line employees."

Underlining the issue with communication is the fact 75 percent of employees say they understand issues the city faces, but only 19 percent trust what the city tells them.

Only 12 percent believe management takes their suggestions seriously. Twenty-one percent feel comfortable saying what they think.

For the question: City policies and standards are applied consistently to all employees – 57 percent disagreed and 16 percent agreed.

The City Council on Jan. 25 will have this survey and the community survey at its disposal while discussing the strategic plan.

“The council will have to prioritize services,” O’Rourke said. “I want the process to be public and transparent. It needs to be tied to action plans and assessments.”