HAPPY EMPLOYEES = HEALTHY BUSINESS

The whimsy you see (to the right) is not just for the camera. I can say with confidence: Our employees are happy. The health of any company is directly correlated to the happiness of its employees, and it has never been more important for the floral industry — an industry that is all about customer service — to keep employees happy and motivated. Keeping morale up can be tough, especially as many businesses have had to let people go or forgo annual employee compensation increases. Many believe that employee happiness pivots around getting a smaller workload or better pay; it doesn’t.

Money will always be a reason people go to work — and a solid compensation plan helps attract and keep the best employees — but in many cases, more money is not enough to keep employees happy and engaged if your business has other flaws. Think about it: Would you change careers for a bigger paycheck if it meant 40-plus hours a week doing something that bores you or induces stress?

In fact, many surveys show that having stimulating work and feeling appreciated rank as high or higher than money in a list of workplace motivators. Most florists provide employees interesting work, but when I hear about the industry’s challenges to find and retain good workers, I wonder if we’re missing opportunities to mentor and create a positive environment. Here are three ways we try to nurture our team at Arizona Family Florist.

Engage Employees’ Feedback
Ask employees for their perspectives. This shows you value their opinion. Also, they may see the business from a slightly different point of view than the owner or manager, and can offer an idea to boost productivity or profitability that may have eluded you. Many employers have excellent ideas, but leaders recognize that others do, too.

Our managers are trained to ask questions, listen to answers and — most importantly — implement them. Too many businesses ask for ideas and do nothing with them. This has the same effect as not asking at all, or saying “no” over and over.

Employees will view this as lip service and eventually shut down. Asking for their candid is a simple, but sometimes painful process, if employers are not up to hearing truthful information that may be bad. But realize: Like owners and managers, employees want to see their organization succeed, so that’s the motivation behind their comments. Engaging employee feedback — and thanking them for it — can develop innovative thinking as well as improve the work environment.

Recognize and Appreciate
Acknowledging and praising your employees for their efforts and achievements. A simple but meaningful “thank you” or “great job” can build loyalty and encourage people to keep working hard. Another effective form of recognition is applause, a public signal that you are proud of your employee. Calling attention to an employee’s achievement in front of their coworkers is a great way to boost their happiness.

Many companies recognize employees with the use of “wooden applause,” better known as “Employee of the Month” plaques. While these are often effective, employees may more fully appreciate you taking the time to offer a unique reward that matches their special accomplishment. The key is prompt timing. Don’t delay recognition; the impact of praise is best when the achievement is fresh on everyone’s mind.

Team Spirit
Creating a team environment is important to overall employee happiness. But it requires giving employees the opportunity to socialize, during offsite events, such as a weekend retreat or a night out on the town. Or you could institute some “controlled chaos” in your shop, such as ordering in pizza for lunch or having a holiday-themed dress day. Finding ways to break up the everyday routine will help create team spirit and ultimately add to your positive work environment.

No matter what they can afford for payroll, owners who focus on employee happiness can expect productivity to increase. Just know: Not every employee is motivated in the same way, and it is the manager’s duty to find out what inspires each member of their team. Start by asking your team for suggestions — then implement them. Remember to be consistent and, most importantly, have fun.

Cheryl Denham is president of Arizona Family Florist in Phoenix, winner of Floral Management’s 2012 Marketer of the Year. She and her husband and co-founder, Brad Denham, boast a team of dedicated, productive and, yes, happy employees. Cheryl@azfamilyflorist.com.