

A Tiny Inequity

A tiny inequity. That's all it takes sometimes to shift an employee's enthusiasm for their work. What's a tiny inequity? It's a slight injustice or bias as *perceived* by the team member.

Perceived being the key word in that last sentence.

What are some examples? A home health aide in a focus group I conducted shared that her supervisor never remembers her name, but recalls other people's names. A dietary aide huffed that the owner thought he was "too good" to talk to her. Why? Because he would drop into the kitchen to chat with the chef about how the Yankees were doing, but wouldn't talk to anyone else.

When I was an administrator, on the first of each month I would send any staff member with a birthday that month a card. One month a nursing assistant shared with me she was hurt when she didn't get a birthday card for her birthday like everyone else. It was the third of the month and her birthday had been two days previous. Because I sent the card on the first, it simply hadn't arrived yet, but it didn't matter. She felt slighted by my poor timing.

Tiny inequities. Small moments with a big impact.

Having your every move under a microscope probably makes you want to throw your hands up and yell, "Why bother?!" If you can't do anything right in the eyes of the team members, than why even try?

I know that's certainly how I felt when these tiny inequities would come to light for me.

Frustrated by having even my kind acts placed under an incredibly powerful microscope I had two choices: stop doing whatever it was that people perceived as an inequity or fix the inequity and be grateful that I learned about the perception that some people had.

The answer would depend on the situation, but most of the time I chose the latter.

In the end, does it matter? Does fixing these perceived tiny inequities make a difference?

Without a doubt, it does! They impact the individual and your organization. Team members that feel slighted don't put forward their best effort. **One participant that I had in a focus group said it best when she shared, "If I felt like I was appreciated I could do all the work in this building...by myself!"**

No doubt an exaggeration, but an important idea to remember nonetheless. When employees feel like they are valued and acknowledged, they feel like they can accomplish anything!

Tiny inequities equal big opportunities!

But too often we think about the pizza party instead of the tons of little moments we have to make a difference. As much as I love pizza (and boy do I LOVE pizza!) nothing says “I really put no thought into this and don’t want to spend any time or money,” like a pizza party does. Please for the sake of everyone, except the pizza industry, come up with something a little more creative!

Those little moments are a big deal for team members. Saying hello in the hallway. Inquiring about their children. Checking in how they are feeling after being ill. All these little moments have the ability to inspire and motivate. Unfortunately, because they are such a big deal, they also have the ability to do the opposite and are perceived as inequities when we are not consistent and uniform in our interactions.

Always remember the big picture! This isn’t only about the tiny inequities. It’s about creating a culture where team members are engaged and stepping up to the plate to get things done. Ready to take on this small but mighty issue? Try these tips out:

1. When someone shares with you an inequity welcome the input. Don’t fight it! Listen, absorb the information and thank them for sharing their thoughts with you. Promise them you’ll reflect on it and get back to them about what they mentioned. I can’t stress enough: **DO NOT FIGHT THE INPUT!**
2. Live up to your promise and take a moment to reflect on what the person shared. Do you only say hello to some employees and not each one of them when you are walking around? Do you greet only some people by name? Chances are there is some grain of truth to what you heard. That’s fine. Now that you know better, you can do better.
3. Remember the first point above? The part where you promised to get back to the team member who shared with you that there was an inequity? Yeah that. Do it! Thank them again and share with them what you’ll be doing. “Thank you, Marie, for letting me know that you felt badly that you didn’t get your birthday card on time. Because of what you shared with me I’m going to start sending the cards a little earlier. I appreciate you letting me know that because I didn’t realize it was happening.”
4. Resist the urge to say, “The heck with this all! I’ll say hello to no one. Speak to no one, and never do another kind thing for an employee!” It’s tempting but in the end, everyone loses: you, your team members and your organization.

This article was written by Drive President, Denise Boudreau-Scott.