



## WHAT YOUR STAFF ISN'T TELLING YOU

A legal secretary in a small law firm worked on a major contingency-fee case. The work dragged on for years, during which she typed and retyped reams of correspondence and court documents.

After a lot of time and effort – including lots of after-hours work by the secretary – the firm won and received a large fee. But when it came time to “celebrate,” the attorneys asked the secretary to answer the phones and close the office instead of including her in the celebration.

### BAROMETERS OF POOR STAFF RELATIONS

According to experts, when employers have poor staff relations, they pay the price in employee turnover, poor work product, low employee morale, lawsuits, a higher rate of absenteeism, workers' compensation claims, and poor client service.

While lawyers may realize that a happy staff is more productive, many have trouble translating the idea into action because so few have experience running a business. To compound the problem, many lawyers are oblivious to whether staff are happy and productive. But there are warning signs – the biggest and most expensive of which is high employee turnover. Other danger signs include:

- lack of respect shown to staff by lawyers;
- frequent misunderstandings and communication breakdowns;

- inconsistent or unfair enforcement of firm rules and policies;
- inadequately trained staff;
- infrequent or nonexistent staff meetings;
- unkept promises and goals;
- management by intimidation.

### HOW TO ENSURE GOOD RELATIONS

To help ensure a productive workplace, you can take these steps:

- Hire people who fit your work style and can support your goals.
- Hold regular staff meetings and seek input from the entire staff. Make the process democratic.
- Offer perks such as flexible work hours, vacation time, or sick leave and provide opportunities for advancement.
- Recognize exemplary performance immediately – don't wait for the end of the year.
- Include staff members in each hiring process.
- Provide staff training, including information about the areas of law in which the staff is working.

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