

# EMPLOYEES Speak THEIR Minds

In fall 1990 Georgia-Pacific took a step forward in its efforts to evaluate how it communicates with employees and how those communications might be improved. G-P retained Roller Marketing Research to conduct an independent research project, which included 10 group discussions and 22 personal interviews with randomly selected salaried and hourly employees across the country.

Why does G-P care about what its employees think? Because you are the ones familiar with the procedures that run the company, you are the ones with ideas to improve the efficiency of the workplace. And ultimately, you are the ones who control the company's bottom line.

Research results suggest that Georgia-Pacific has done an excellent job communicating the philosophy that "the shareholder is number one." The perception is that other corporate goals, such as those related to safety, quality production, the environment and the company's responsibility to its employees and its communities, haven't been as effectively articulated.

Employees across all geographic and facility locations readily discussed their concerns about lack of communication with management, suggesting that this issue is, by far, one of the most critical issues facing the company.

While employees appreciate the status that goes with working for a large company such as G-P, they are beginning to question their place within the organization.

This research also suggests that Georgia-Pacific might improve its work environment by developing localized communications programs that include regular meetings with employees, an open-door policy and a plan for recognizing employees' achievements.

Employees emphasized the importance of honest communications and the need to establish trust. When asked if they wanted to know negative information, such as whether or not they were at risk of losing their jobs, they answered unquestionably "yes," stating that it was important for them to plan for their future. Without any communication, one employee said, "You don't know what to do."

In the research, employees, both hourly and salaried, said their primary sources of information tend to be other employees, supervisors, mass media or the union. Based on my research for other major corporations and general research conducted on employee communications, it isn't unusual for employees to rely on unstructured forms of communication, such as the rumor mill.

This research identifies numerous opportunities for Georgia-Pacific in the area of employee communications. Those areas include emphasis on the company's corporate values, such as commitment to employee safety and renewal of relationships between management and employees as well as G-P and the communities in which it serves. The details needed to shape and execute such a program will be the focus of future quantitative research.

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*Editor's Note: We would like to take this opportunity to once again thank those employees who participated in this research project.*