

Develop an Idea-Response Process

There are 4 elements to a successful employee suggestion program, which is ultimately an idea-response process because the suggestions are meaningless unless something is done with them. They are: management support, program structure, program visibility, and recognition.

Management Support: First, you must ensure that all of your management team is invested in the employee idea-sharing processes. *If you have management that are resistant to it or feel threatened by it, you need to address this cultural issue within your organization, which is beyond the scope of this course.*

Has your organization had a similar suggestion system in the past? If so, what went well and where were there shortcomings?

Are there any problem areas with certain departments, managers, or overall cultural resistance to change?

You want your management to understand the benefits of encouraging employees to share ideas, which we've addressed throughout this course. And, you want them to know the importance of their role in ensuring a culture of open idea-sharing and creativity is established, as it is the quality and speed of the responses to the ideas that is the key to success.

What benefits would an idea-sharing program have for your organization?

What role would you want management to take in this program and how would you express its importance to them?

Program Structure: Then, you need to support your management by providing a concrete process for them to follow when receiving feedback from employees. Both managers and employees should understand the policy and what to expect. Create guidelines for submitting and responding to ideas:

- How will ideas be submitted? (For example, through a suggestion box, on a public bulletin board, through a phone line or voicemail system, through email, or by posting on a website.)
- What types of suggestions or ideas are encouraged? Consider having a pre-made card or sheet with prompt questions to help whoever is submitting the idea to include desired detail.
- Are ideas anonymous or should they include their name? Or both?
- What is the timeframe for responses? (Such as 24 hours for an electronic submission and a week for paper submissions)
- How will the employee receive feedback or a response?
- If an idea is going to be pursued, what steps will be taken?
- If an idea is not going to be implemented or pursued at this time, how should managers respond?

Program Visibility: Suggestion systems should be publicized and promoted and the method questions are to be submitted should be visible and easily accessible.

Based on the method(s) of submission you've identified above, where and how will the system be displayed or promoted?

Recognition: Not only should ideas be responded to, and in some cases implemented, they should also be recognized publicly. Recognizing and rewarding innovative ideas or ones that improve workplace moral, processes, or save the company headaches reinforces the importance of sharing ideas. Some organizations honor those who have contributed to the company at annual dinners or other reward systems.

In what ways could your organization or management team recognize employees who either provide meaningful feedback regularly or whose ideas lead to positive company changes?

However, you do want to be cautious that reward systems that are implemented without thorough analysis can unintentionally lead to jealousy or resentment among employees who are not rewarded for their efforts. One way to reduce the possibility of employees blaming management for acknowledging one idea over another is to delegate the task of recognition to either an outside position, such as HR, or to a committee of some type.

What strategies can you offer your managers so that they are prepared to honor all ideas, not only the ones that end up being implemented, and avoid appearing to play favorites?

What other strategies can your organization implement to prevent tension, such as the example given above regarding the responsibility being placed on a committee or HR?