

# Increasing Retention, Productivity, and Satisfaction

By Dr. Kimberly Alyn

Every fire department grapples with trying to improve these areas. What many leaders fail to recognize is the need for “connection.” A Gallop study of over 80,000 employees in different sectors revealed twelve dimensions that were directly related to higher employee satisfaction, higher retention, and higher productivity. Every one of these twelve dimensions requires you to stay connected.

**Dimension 1: Knowing What's Expected.** Followers want to know what leaders expect from them. They need clear communication and that requires staying connected enough to relay those expectations on a regular basis. Relaying expectations in a job description is not enough. People need and want ongoing clarification and communication face-to-face and not just in an email.

**Dimension 2: Materials and Equipment.** Employees indicated that in order to be successful, they needed the appropriate materials, tools, and equipment to do a great job. Staying connected with your followers will allow you to be in continual communication about what they need. When you provide the tools they need to succeed, they will help you succeed.

**Dimension 3: Doing What I Do Best.** If you have firefighters assigned to committees and tasks that don't fit their skills, talents, and passions, they will not fully succeed or fulfill their true potential. Followers want to know leaders care enough to put them in a position to do what they do best. If you don't stay connected with your followers, how will know what areas they excel in off the fire ground? An investment of time, energy, and connection is needed to accomplish this.

**Dimension 4: Recognition or Praise.** Personal praise from leaders is shown in many studies to be at the top of the list for employee satisfaction. Instead of general praise like “You're doing a great job“, try very specific praise like “I was so impressed with the way you handled that angry member of the public. You set a great role model example of our department core values.”

**Dimension 5: My Supervisor Cares about Me.** It would be pretty tough for followers to feel like you cared about them if you didn't stay connected to them. Battalion chiefs who glue themselves to their desks make it very difficult to connect with the troops and a result, people often feel as if you don't care.

**Dimension 6: Someone Encourages My Development.** Followers want to be mentored and coached by their leaders. Spending the time to develop people in their jobs and their careers requires staying connecting.

**Dimension 7: My Opinions Seem to Count.** Employees want to know that leaders value their opinions. This means seeking out the opinions of your firefighters and demonstrating that their input is actually taken into account when making important decisions, especially decisions that directly affect them.

**Dimension 8: My Organization's Mission, Purpose, and Values.** As I discussed in earlier articles, firefighters need to know the mission of the department as well as the core values. Staying connected allows you the opportunity to be in ongoing discussions about these key issues. Continual communication will reinforce the mission, purpose, and core values.

**Dimension 9: Doing Quality Work.** People need that sense of satisfaction that comes from producing quality work. This is much easier to accomplish when very clear communication has taken place as to what a quality outcome looks like.

**Dimension 10: I Have a Best Friend at Work.** Having quality relationships in the work place is a key element for employee satisfaction. While most leaders cannot be the best friend in the workplace, they can certainly be an important element in the quality relationship factor. Additionally, leaders can encourage followers in their relationships and work with them to ensure healthy workplace relationships are taking place.

**Dimension 11: Talk to Me about My Progress.** This is often facilitated by annual performance reviews. That is just not enough for people. An annual or even semi-annual performance review should be nothing more than a written confirmation of what you have discussed with your firefighters throughout the year. What employees really want is ongoing conversations about their progress, where they can improve, and where they are excelling.

**Dimension 12: Opportunities to Learn and Grow.** People have an innate drive to learn and grow. Leaders have a large responsibility to provide an environment where growth and learning can flourish. By staying connected to your followers, you can discover the specific areas of interest for growth and learning for each and every one of your followers.

These twelve dimensions that employees need to consider themselves in the midst of a quality work environment can all be facilitated by an effective leader. Staying connected to your firefighters in all of these areas communicates a deeper care and concern that they need to thrive. The investment of time and energy that it will require will be well worth it.

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