

A summary of staff perspectives, observations, and opinions expressed during focus group meetings.

# Focus Group Summary Report Regarding A Respectful Atmosphere

February 2022

Pinellas County Human Resources

---

# Focus Group Summary Report Regarding “A Respectful Atmosphere”

Pinellas County Human Resources

## *Background:*

During the Employee Voice Survey conducted in 2021 employees were asked to rate Pinellas County in general as an employer, as well as rate their department, workgroup, supervisor, and Appointing Authority on a series of 60 metrics. The survey statements were designed to measure the following dimensions from The Great Place to Work® Trust Index©, a tool used to assess and rate workplace culture through an employee perspective:

- Credibility (14 metrics)
- Respect (19 metrics)
- Pride (7 metrics)
- Camaraderie (9 metrics)
- Fairness (11 metrics)

Although there was only a -4% reduction in the overall positive rating for the “Respect” dimension within Human Resources (HR), survey results indicated a significant negative score related to one item in particular; “A respectful atmosphere” which had a positive rating of 41% representing a significant drop from the 82% positive rating recorded during the last employee voice survey conducted in 2019.

## *Purpose of the Study:*

This study was intended to explore, clarify, and understand employee perceptions and ratings for the employee voice survey item; “A respectful atmosphere”.

## *Method:*

Through a series of focus group sessions HR employees were asked to share their perspectives regarding the following questions.

- What are your thoughts about being treated respectfully by peers, co-workers, and management?
- What are your thoughts about being treated respectfully by customers (outside of HR), employees, retirees, citizens?
- In your opinion, what are the elements needed to create a respectful work atmosphere?
- Moving forward – thoughts, suggestions, action items for successfully addressing the issue.

Participants were informed that focus group meeting notes would not include information that attributed comments to a specific person. Participants spoke openly and candidly expressing their experiences, thoughts, and suggestions. Their perspectives are very much appreciated and are summarized here.

# Focus Group Summary Report Regarding “A Respectful Atmosphere”

Pinellas County Human Resources

## Results:

An assessment of the focus group discussions revealed six primary themes that address interpersonal experiences within HR and interactions with customers from outside of the HR department.

### Theme #1: Feeling Connected and Communication:

Across all of the focus groups, participants expressed a desire to feel more connected and to be “in the loop” regarding events and decisions that are impactful for our staff. Many of the participants referenced a need for more communication and transparency. Participants expressed satisfaction with information shared during our informal weekly department huddles but pointed out that there are information gaps for staff that are not present during a huddle. There were observations regarding a need to adjust to changes in how information is shared. For example, some feel that communication has become more linear (shared through the HR Officers), and that some communications would be better received if they came from directly from Kimberly rather than through the Officers. Several participants expressed a desire to develop a genuine connection with Kimberly. Concerns were raised that HR Officers may not deliver consistent information across the HR Centers of Excellence (COEs) regarding decisions made and thoughts expressed during HR leadership meetings, Appointing Authority meetings, Etc. In some situations, information travels “through the grapevine” and reaches team members before they hear it from their manager.

### Theme #2: A Foundation of Trust:

Focus group participants discussed a variety of factors that influenced their feelings about trust. Some respondents mentioned a desire to feel that “management has their back” regarding interactions with customers rather than assuming that the customer’s criticisms of the employee are accurate and valid. Questions were raised about how HR staff are perceived, what (if any) influence did Appointing Authorities opinions have on our new HR leadership, were existing HR staff characterized negatively by other Appointing Authorities? Is the low employee voice survey participation rate (69%), an indicator that employees don’t trust that their responses are anonymous? Another perspective proposed that staff members may feel more comfortable sharing their feelings, and frustrations with coworkers rather than their manager. Discussions also included the expectation that HR needs to set the standard by understanding and recognizing the value of building trustworthy relationships through open communication among our entire team. Some expressed that trust is a foundational element and that a respectful atmosphere is built upon a foundation of trust.

### Theme #3: Positive and Negative Experiences Regarding Respect:

Many participants mentioned feeling respected by customers. Respondents said that most customers are respectful however, there should be support from HR management and consequences for those customers (active employees) from other departments that resort to personal attacks during interactions with HR staff. Some participants shared concerns about HR managers or co-workers who express negative comments about other HR employees behind their back. A few participants shared feelings about favoritism indicating their perception that certain COEs or certain staff members are more favored than others which leaves them feeling less important. Regarding being respected by other Appointing Authorities there are mixed results. Most participants said they feel HR is respected by other agencies however, some participants shared feelings of being disrespected in the past and on occasions when it appears that an Appointing Authority may disregard recommendations from HR.

# Focus Group Summary Report Regarding “A Respectful Atmosphere”

Pinellas County Human Resources

## Theme #4: Respect and Inclusion:

During discussions with several focus groups there were opinions, experiences, and observations shared regarding diversity and inclusion and influences on feeling respected. Some participants mentioned that respect may look different to each of us. Everyone has an important role as part of the team, and we need to recognize that people have different work and learning styles and it’s important to understand each other’s differences. “We have to consider the generational and cultural differences that we have”. “If things are more inclusive we can gain from hearing other coworkers’ perspectives that helps us understand these issues”. Some participants mentioned being treated differently by customers because of their appearance or because they may speak with an accent. Several participants mentioned a desire for HR to take action regarding diversity and inclusion rather than continuing to talk about it, “we have to walk the walk on diversity and inclusion.”

## Theme #5: Respect and Recognition:

Similar to the linkage with inclusion, participants in several focus groups shared thoughts and observations about recognition and influences on feeling respected. A few participants mentioned feeling very respected within their COE but when suggestions or recommendations are shared outside of the COE the suggestions seem not to be valued in the same way. In other words, “ideas become marginalized outside of the COE”. Some participants felt that recognition is needed for time and effort, “value” that staff contribute to various efforts. In addition, there was an opinion that efforts might be ignored and not discussed. “Sometimes it’s like the effort never happened”. It was mentioned that some staff are in roles that involve little ability to discuss the work that they do, and as a result Kudos/recognition may not be forthcoming. Some participants felt that high performers are recognized/rewarded with more work and low performers may not be carrying their load which contributes to a feeling of disrespect.

## Theme #6: Bridges and Barriers to Team Building:

All of the focus group discussions included thoughts and opinions about team building. Some feel that respect among employees is good, but we could do a better job of building bridges across COEs. Some expressed a desire to spend more time visiting with others and shadow what they do in order to understand more about them and the amount of effort that goes into the work they do. Along with the willingness and desire to participate in team building activities, participants mentioned some challenges. Surprisingly, there was no mention of remote work as a barrier to team building even though the HR team spent many months being apart from one another during the COVID-19 pandemic. In every focus group there were participants that mentioned the physical barrier between staff on the first floor of the Annex building and staff on the fourth floor as an impediment to team building.

## *Recommended Action Items:*

Focus group participants offered a variety of suggestions as follows:

### Communication:

- Share frequent updates about what's happening with some of our recruitments.
- Share more information about what's happening operationally within the department.
- Provide additional insights regarding the vision for the department.
- Provide information about discussions from HRLT meetings and Appointing Authority meetings.
- Conduct more frequent employee opinion surveys within HR.

# Focus Group Summary Report Regarding “A Respectful Atmosphere”

Pinellas County Human Resources

## *Recommended Action Items: (continued)*

### Trust:

- Be open to suggestions and to constructive criticism.
- Empower employees at all levels by trusting their judgment.
- We need to understand our actions and the impact they have on the people around us. Be aware of our behavior.
- Revisit and build upon the recommendations provided from the cross functional groups.

### Respect:

- Managers need to confront negative behaviors such as staff members that complain about other HR staff.
- Treat all team members with dignity and respect.
- More learning opportunities for managers about building a respectful atmosphere.
  - Learn about transformational leadership.
  - Perhaps have managers completed the Certified Public Manager program.

### Inclusion:

- Develop plans to address the inclusion issues in terms of people, processes, policies, and practices.
- Provide learning opportunities about bias and unconscious bias.
- Develop measures of inclusivity related to hiring, promotions, and turnover.

### Recognition:

- Explore opportunities to use the “Praise” app that’s available in MS Teams.
- Encourage peer to peer recognition and gratitude.
- Gain an understanding of how each person prefers to be recognized, we all have preferences.

### Team Building:

- Pursue opportunities and activities that are fun and useful for building trust.
- Whenever possible, promote the use of cross functional teams to enhance team building.
- Explore opportunities for staff to participate in team building activities outside of work.