

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS AUDIT REPORT
FOR
THE CITY OF CELINA

September-December, 2023

Prepared by:

CLEMANS, NELSON & ASSOCIATES, INC.
6756 Goshen Road, Suite 2
Goshen, Ohio 45122
(513) 583-9221
www.clemansnelson.com

INTRODUCTION

Throughout September - December 2023, Clemans, Nelson & Associates, Inc. assisted Celina in conducting an employee relations audit within multiple departments.

An employee relations audit is a basic communications tool which provides employees with the means to express their concerns about their employment and to provide input into the organization and operation of his/her respective departments.

Interviews were voluntary with the length of each interview lasting approximately thirty (30) minutes to one (1) hour. In order to encourage participation of the employees who were interviewed, all individuals were assured their comments would remain private and confidential to the extent possible. The interviews conducted during the employee relations audit allowed each employee to discuss any issues they wanted to, and then the conversations revolved around several major areas which included job classifications, policies, discipline, complaints, communications, working conditions and a general summary.

For the most part, the employees interviewed were very forthcoming and the input received was fairly consistent. Many of the comments appear to be department specific.

Prior to reviewing the employee responses, it is important to note that this report deals with perceptions as well as facts. Even though these perceptions are only opinions and not necessarily fact, these “perceptions” need to be addressed. If a sufficient number of employees perceive something to be true and continue to discuss it with other employees, perceptions can have the same impact on morale as if they were true.

This report will first explore employee answers in the major areas described above, along with any Consultant recommendations. Then, specific individual topics that were addressed will be outlined before additional recommendations and conclusions are presented.

JOB CLASSIFICATION/ASSIGNMENT

An employee must have job duties that are clearly defined and provide sufficient responsibility and challenge. These duties may need to be revised and updated as the position changes, so the employee retains job proficiency and management can properly select and evaluate employees based on current duties. The questions asked regarding job classification and assignment included:

1. Are your job duties clearly defined in your position description?
2. Name three (3) things you like about your job?
3. Name three (3) things you dislike about your job?

Most employees stated their position descriptions adequately reflected their job duties. Several accounts were made of the Administration ordering employees to do jobs outside of their duties, such as mowing, demolition work, watering plants or junk patrol. Though it was acknowledged by many that Supervisors or Administration could ask employees to do any number of odd jobs, it was widely accepted that many of these jobs could be done by others, leading many to believe the assignment of odd jobs was often a sign of control over the employees or retaliation/discipline.

When discussing what employees liked about their jobs, the most common responses were: coworkers; working where they live; helping the community; and the variety of the work. The most common responses regarding things employees dislike about their jobs were: communication and leadership concerns with supervisors and/or Administration; lack of trust and a feeling of not being respected/cared for by supervisors and/or Administration; pay, and staffing levels. These topics will be discussed more in detail below.

While some employees were satisfied with the training opportunities received for their job, many safety services employees were in agreement that on the job training was difficult for various reasons including limited space and denied opportunities to do onsite training for liability concerns per Administration. Also, many spoke about lack of promotional opportunities either due to training or department structure.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that a review of position descriptions continue to occur so that proper updates can be made. Proper position descriptions are crucial to efficiently performing the work but also ensures employees are qualified to do the work and to address any particular accommodation needs that may arise over time.
2. Supervisors should not only review job duties of employees, but consider alternatives or best use of resources when city maintenance functions need to be completed.
3. It is recommended that a specific review of supervisor qualifications and training be reviewed. Pay of supervisor positions should also be compared relative to the market to

make internal promotional opportunities more enticing. Long-term training and mentoring plans should be considered to help ensure there are qualified candidates when supervisory positions become open.

4. As mentioned below with communication, administration should look at ways to improve methods of communication when relaying information such as denied training opportunities. Providing rationales or chances to explain can deter employees from developing their own perceptions such as a feeling of retaliation or lack of caring.

PERSONNEL POLICIES/DISCIPLINE

Sound personnel policies and procedures are the foundation for good employee relations. Management has the responsibility to convey and enforce policies and rules in a consistent and fair manner. The announcement and fair application of personnel policies contribute to an employee's feeling of security. A Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual makes clear what the Employer expects from its employees and also what the employees can expect from the Employer.

Discipline is essential to an organization because it keeps the Agency and employees working well. Agency rules and policies are established to ensure that employees are treated fairly and that the Agency runs smoothly; whereas, employee discipline is a regulation or condition imposed in order to correct or prevent behaviors that are detrimental to an agency.

The questions asked of employees regarding Personnel Policies and Procedures included the following:

1. Are you familiar with the Agency's policy manual? Is it followed?
2. Are policies and work rules administered fairly and uniformly?

Overall, there were few concerns with the City's current policies. The most common comment was the feeling that the policy manual was outdated and may need to be reviewed/updated. Certain areas employees would like the City to review are sick and holiday leave policies, and equal enforcement of policies between supervisors and non-supervisory employees. A few employees stated they either don't know where to locate a policy manual or supervisors have them sign acknowledgment of receipt but do not familiarize themselves with the manual.

Some employees perceive a sense of favoritism by management towards the employees who have not upset the Safety Service Director at some point in their careers. They believe that those that 'do whatever the Safety Service Director wants' will be treated more favorably than others. One example cited was a recent retiree who violated some department rules and it seemed to be ignored. It was mentioned to others by Administration that if the retiree had been a younger employee he would have been fired.

A concern was noted in the fire department that preferential treatment of employees by supervisors and Administration occurred previously but hasn't been much of a problem lately. It was noted that certain employees who were favored by the Safety Service Director and/or former Chief were less likely to be given maintenance duties not related to the job or even not disciplined for major offenses.

In the police department, it was mentioned multiple times that the Chiefs, especially the Assistant Chief, are 'hands-off' supervisors. This has created some concerns when employees feel a Chief should handle some sort of discipline matter but the Chiefs pass it back to the employees to handle. Also, it was stated by many employees that the Safety Service Director holds grudges against individuals who may speak out against him. The employees cited to a number of discipline actions over the years, change of duties and shift rotations they perceive as

unnecessary or too severe, and only implemented as a form of retribution for past incidents involving the Safety Service Director.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The consultant recommends all employees re-familiarize themselves with the official City policies.
2. The consultant recommends supervisory training be given to all supervisors, especially new supervisors, in the City to ensure understanding and consistent, appropriate application of all policies. This includes Administration meeting regularly with department heads to ensure supervisors are on the same page on administrating policies within their respective departments equally across the whole City.

COMPLAINTS

All management personnel must recognize the responsibility to build good employee relations by establishing a problem solving environment. Such an environment exists when employees recognize and are encouraged by their supervisors to bring such problems, concerns, and questions to their supervisor's attention. Recognition of the problems and questions that are dealt with in a timely manner will encourage employees to resolve minor problems at the earliest stage possible.

These questions were asked regarding complaints:

- 1 Does the Agency have a complaint procedure? Is it ever used?
2. Do you feel free to discuss a complaint with your supervisor? What would happen to such complaint?

A significant majority of employees in each department stated the employees feel comfortable discussing issues and complaints among each other. There is a sense that many of the employees do not feel comfortable approaching the Department Heads and Administration with complaints. A common feeling among all departments was a sense that a target would be placed on anyone who went above their Department Head (to Administration to include the Safety Service Director and/or Mayor).

In the police department, there is an order to follow the chain of command and therefore many officers do not approach the Chiefs and up to discuss complaints which may account for most of that feeling. Similarly, the chain of command in the fire department kept many employees from taking a complaint above a Lieutenant under the previous Chief, however, all find the new Chief to be more approachable and responsive to the employees.

Most of the employees also stated they are not aware of the outcome of complaints. For example, in the police department, it was felt that when the Chiefs meet with the Safety Service Director and/or Mayor on issues important to the police officers, the Chiefs will return with one of three answers most of the time: Either, that the Administration simply says 'No' with no reason; Administration provided no response; or Administration will make a decision and the Chiefs place the blame on Administration for going in that direction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. If complaints can not be resolved, employees should be informed of the reason. Employees, and people in general, want their issues to be taken seriously and the first step to accomplishing this is feedback from supervisors. It appears basic supervisory training regarding how to hear and resolve employees' complaints would be beneficial to the administrative staff.

COMMUNICATIONS

Good communication is perhaps the single most important tool in directing an organization, or a department within an organization toward establishing and accomplishing its objectives. Good communication practices serve to directly and indirectly upgrade or enhance an organization's morale, efficiency, and productivity. On the other hand, poor communication practices adversely affect the relations among employees as well as between employees and management. Communication is a two-way process that is the key for opening the door to improving these relations.

The questions in this section included:

1. Are you given all the information necessary to do your job?
2. Does your supervisor check with you regularly to see how things are going? Do you have a chance for input?
3. Do you feel that management is responsive to the needs of employees? Explain.
4. Generally speaking, do your fellow co-workers communicate well with each other during the workday to resolve problems or discuss client problems?

Most employees City-wide feel at some level communication is adequate within respective departments. It is when information is attempted to go up to Administration that a majority of employees feel it is a struggle to be heard or get a respectful response back from Administration.

In the police department, some employees indicated that information is not flowing from the top down and they believe that to be due to the Chief being indecisive. They view the Chief being inefficient due to seemingly always needing the Safety Service Director's approval on matters, not taking initiative and therefore delaying things being communicated to the rest of the Department.

Also, several departments agreed that they do not see nor hear from the Safety Service Director, Mayor or Council on any regularity, and in some instances their own supervisor. This inaction is perceived as a lack of leadership by the employees. Though it was noted by different departments that the Safety Service Director has asked employees not to go to the Mayor or Council without getting permission.

Nearly all police employees spoke of their disappointment that there are not regularly scheduled meetings. They mentioned that department wide meetings only occur if something major happens. And meetings between Chiefs and Sergeant almost never happen, and the majority believed that this should be occurring at least monthly. Some employees felt that due to no structure or regularity in meetings leads many to hear second or even third hand recent directives from the Chiefs, only to later discover that they heard wrongly. Employees want to be told directly from Chiefs matters important to the entire department, and not from officers who happened to be working the shift with the Chief when the matter came up.

There were no concerns in the fire department about regular meetings and the sharing of information between shifts.

No system of employee evaluations exists in the police department. Nearly all employees stated they have never been evaluated and have no clue if Administration thinks they are performing well in their duties. Many also stated no positive feedback is given or commendations for good work done. If any feedback is given it is mostly negative or concerning an action in which they are instructed to do better. Similar comments regarding no positive feedback or praise from Administration were made in other departments.

Many employees do not feel Administration is responsive to their needs. For example, training opportunities are denied frequently; concerns for staffing (recruitment and retention) seem ignored, and comments made in Council meetings appear inconsistent with their perception of particular matters. Also, many employees feel Administration and Clemans Nelson representatives show no empathy for employees during union matters (negotiations or a discipline procedure) either by ignoring them or speaking rudely to employees. The examples of poor or no communication with some department heads and Administration is perceived as poor leadership and a lack of appreciation towards employees.

Employees indicated that communication could be improved by: Chief/Sergeant meetings, department wide meetings, mass emails only when appropriate (not when it should be to just one person regarding corrective action) and more communication from the top down.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Supervisors may need to evaluate the frequency and need of internal meetings and adjust to maximize the production of these meetings with little time wasted. Supervisors should have time for employee feedback on matters, and provide responses to employees in a reasonable manner and time.
2. The Consultant recommends that the City consider some form of evaluation system for each department, including evaluation of Supervisors. Consistent feedback on job performance can be beneficial to environments with low morale.
3. The Consultant recommends that the supervisors obtain training on the role of a supervisor.
4. When there is an absence of trust in the workplace, the team suffers. When trust has been violated, people begin to question the organization's values, their leadership's integrity, and their own commitment to the organization. This often deteriorates the very structure of what defines teamwork, such as cooperation and collaboration. To rebuild and repair trust within the workplace, the Consultant recommends Administration do the following:
 - a. Continue to acknowledge the activities the employees notice and are calling attention to such as the staffing issue.

- b. Accept responsibility for any actions that may have led employees to feel their trust has been violated.
- c. Continue to be transparent with employees regarding relevant topics.

WORKING CONDITIONS

Employees who enjoy where they work have increased job satisfaction and tend to remain with their Employer longer. These questions focused on the equipment and conditions provided, such as:

1. Are there any supplies or equipment you need in order to perform your job more effectively?
2. Are the building and your work area adequate?

The FOP's published statement on August 4, 2023 referenced poor working conditions for the dispatchers. The employees were asked about this comment and the consultant was given a tour of the dispatchers working area. Employees recalled Administration starting to remodel the dispatchers work area about two years ago. The remodel involved removing some flooring, ceiling and walls. No work has been done since to repair or update the area and employees are uncertain if the work area is safe or not. Supposedly quotes were obtained to begin work this summer, but it was said to be too expensive to begin construction now.

Additionally, the dispatchers complain of dusty conditions due to the inability to clean around much of their equipment because any movement will cause connection issues. Also, requests to get elevated desks so as not to sit all shift have been denied.

On the police side, many of the employees complained of bad equipment, mostly concerning computers. Many of the computers fail to upload important information concerning cases such as video.

In the fire department and the water/wastewater departments, employees feel they have received excellent equipment. However, the employees in these departments cited numerous complaints with their facilities. Complaints concerned age and size (too small) of buildings, not enough bathrooms or showers available, and a concern with air quality. Additionally, employees felt these concerns have been brought to the City's attention but not addressed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Consultant recommends that regular communication updates be provided on the status of any building projects, such as the Dispatcher's room and any air quality testing. Similar equipment updates/purchases that are needed should similarly be communicated either by Administration or supervisors, so as to keep departments updated.

SUMMARY

The summary section provided the employees the opportunity to cover any concerns previously not expressed. The questions were more open-ended to provide employees wide latitude for expressing their opinions. The questions were:

1. How would you characterize the atmosphere in your department/unit? What could be done to improve it?
2. What is the most serious problem in your department/unit today?
3. Do you believe any favoritism is shown by management to certain employees? Give examples.
4. If you were in charge, what would be the first three (3) items on your agenda for improvement?

While some employees spoke very highly about working in the city and with their department, the majority of employees characterized the atmosphere as having the lowest morale ever. The biggest problems/perceptions affecting morale are:

1. Pay –
 - a. Police - as detailed in the FOP's published statement from this summer, the employees restated many of the same themes as to their pay relative to surrounding areas. Wages is a matter for collective bargaining and will not be addressed in this report. However, the morale impact is still a matter for concern. The perceptions of low pay is impacting morale in two ways. First, low pay is a primary reason individuals are leaving the department, adding to an already short-staffed department. (staffing will be discussed more below) Second, the employees state they see no response or effort by Administration to address their concerns over pay, and this adds to many other examples that the employees perceive Administration does not care about the police employees.
 - b. Fire – since negotiations with this department had recently concluded, concerns about current pay was not such a factor for low morale as much as the combination of the increase in the ability to lateral transfer to another department with more pay AND less hours worked (due to less overtime).
2. Administration does not care about employees – Most of the employees feel that administration does not care about them as a result of multiple interactions over the years that include dismissive or demeaning comments, most of them by the Safety Service Director. Some of the more recent comments include how easy employees are to replace, when discussing pay and retention issues; and openly critical and inconsiderate of employees' efforts to enhance recruiting. Other comments have been directed at the Union's supposed 'lack of effort' during negotiations. Additionally, (as mentioned above) there is the perception that Administration does not listen to employees' concerns (ex.

Pay), says ‘no’ to the Chief with no reason, and even that the Chief will not fight for the employees.

3. Staffing- Employees are concerned for staffing levels of the police and fire department. Recent resignations were due to the other morale issues of pay and not feeling cared for, but some employees are still considering leaving. Also, multiple retirements are scheduled in the very near future and recent civil service exams have not attracted applicants. Inability to hire in safety services is not unique to Celina, however, coupled with retirements and some employees already leaving, some employees feel if the morale issues are not dramatically improved, more employees will leave.

Additionally, in the fire department, current staffing numbers create a large need for callbacks. While callbacks give employees large opportunities for overtime and additional income while maintaining services for the community, callbacks also appear to lead to burnout, less sleep and poor work/life balance. Many employees feel some sort of solution to staffing/callback would greatly increase morale.

4. Leadership – Many employees stated they do not see effective leadership in the Department Heads and Administration. Some of that is perceived (as stated earlier, perceptions have as much of an impact on morale as facts. Some of these comments/perceptions are just that, perceptions from certain actions/inactions or even rumors heard throughout the years. Some, though, were heard/seen firsthand from multiple individuals. Some were verified through conversations with Administration, other comments though remain unverified as actually having occurred, yet are included here as relevant to current state of atmosphere due to beliefs that they are true) from the lack of communication mentioned above, and other examples include the following comments or events:
 - a. Supervisors who consider themselves to be a ‘hands-off’ leader and therefore are rarely seen and refuse to make decisions, deferring all matters to Administration.
 - b. Appears that Supervisors are not working at least 40 hours per week
 - c. Indecisiveness
 - d. Waste time/resources
 - e. Supervisors/Administration don’t follow the leadership principles found in books assigned to employees to read for promotional civil service tests
 - f. No accountability
 - g. Fear retaliation
 - h. Unethical
 - i. Relays ‘private’ conversations with Administration to employees, which creates frustration/angst with Administration

- j. Safety Service Director – Most of the negative comments towards Administration leadership were concerning the Safety Service Director and his known or rumored comments and actions towards employees.
 - i. Comments: Regarding vests: “lucky city issues vests”; regarding the recruitment ad employees made: “how’d that work out for you?”; regarding retention issues: “police officers are replaceable”; regarding negotiations: “union rep sucks”, “union should have fought harder left stuff on the table”; regarding pay raises: “if [ones] wife keeps spending money then you wouldn’t need raises”; regarding employees who quit: heard bragging that he fired 3 people who actually quit; told supervisors not to ask for any changes in procedures; “anyone off the street could do your job”
 - ii. Military Surplus Gym Equipment was ordered then used to force the Union to alter contract and ultimately sold all equipment without being used.
 - iii. Perception is that he controls the chiefs – controls schedule (no sgts on day shift, sends AC to range, errands)
 - iv. Refused to answer union requests to MOU on pay/staffing
 - v. SSD takes pleasure in being the bad guy, pits people against each other
 - vi. Holds grudges
 - vii. Told employees not to address/speak with council
 - viii. Perceived as a bully
- k. Mayor - There were not many direct comments/complaints regarding the Mayor. Rather, the perception is that due to the Mayor’s position being responsible for the Safety Service Director, there is a sense of guilty by association, or that by seeing no rebuke of the Safety Service Director’s actions (mentioned above), then the Mayor must be okay with the actions or even authorizing them. (Mayor was unaware of most comments discussed above) Many of the employees believe the Mayor has not been accurate when addressing the public in regards to employees who recently left City employment. The Mayor stated that he relayed the information provided to him at the time.

When asked if the employee could be in charge, what would they change, the responses were almost unanimous. They almost all stated that communication needs to be improved from the top down, that leadership needs to be better displayed, starting with more meetings/positive reinforcement and empowering middle management/less micromanaging.

One recent event caused a rift between the police department and administration impacting morale and views on leadership which shows a good example of the impact rumors and perceptions can have on morale. After some employees left the City’s employment to work at Van Wert, rumors began to spread on the possible interference of the hiring of these employees. Multiple versions of who spoke with whom, and what was said were relayed to the consultants.

Speaking with several of the direct individuals involved, it was easy to see how as the story got farther from the sources, it changed considerably. Those on the tail end of the rumors strongly believed in the version they heard which was not the truth, yet the consultants found no attempt by any person to clear up the disinformation being spread.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The statements made by employees regarding the lack of effective leadership skills were consistent and perceived by employees as a severe issue amongst the departments. If not addressed, these concerns along with the lack of communication, have the ability to detrimentally impact morale in the Department and, ultimately, productivity and further retention issues. The Consultant recommends the City conduct further review into the above noted complaints, rumors and concerns regarding Supervisors and the Safety Service Director and take measures to coach and/or correct any poor behavior or job performance.
2. Supervisors and Administration, along with all employees, should pay attention to rumors and work to address disinformation being spread collaboratively.
3. Some complaints made reference to specific allegations of improper conduct. Administration has been advised to begin following policy into verifying those allegations immediately.

CONCLUSION

Leadership concerns have been around the longest for many of these employees, and the long term effect that has had on the workforce can equally have a long term impact on future staffing and the ability to provide excellent service to the community, as already felt by the exit of many employees recently. The City should focus on the short term solutions/training to leadership and communication issues while developing long term plans for retention and recruitment.

There were many examples cited of perceived retaliation for various actions going back several years as reference above. This is a component of the general 'mistrust' the employees state they have towards Administration. This feeling of potential retaliation for seemingly any action, led many employees to not speak with consultants at all, and left others to feel uncomfortable speaking with the consultants as they feared future retaliation. An employee audit of this nature is only possible on the ability of employees to freely speak openly about their working conditions. Supervisors and Administration should encourage this openness, and also be looking for ways to improve the work environment without criticizing or retaliating. Any retaliatory action by supervisors or Administration should be reported immediately.

Lastly, the employees' concerns listed in this report, whether real or perceived, are real to the employees, and these concerns need to be addressed in one form or another. It is recommended to review the employee recommendations and then meet to identify what changes can be effectuated immediately. Supervisors should also be made aware of the employees' concerns so as to be involved in problem solving and taking a teamwork approach to supervision with a goal of addressing and improving employee morale and department atmosphere as well as dispelling the nature of rumors, gossip, and disinformation that divides the City.
