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## Going green boosts employee morale

An Illinois payroll firm formed an employee advisory board to cut its impact on the environment—and boosted morale in the process. Sometimes, employees get sick of being communicated at.

After all, they often are more in touch with the day-to-day goings-on at a company than executives at the highest levels—and usually have a lot to say about it.

That's why Steve Sarowitz, CEO of Paylocity—a fast-growing provider of payroll and HR

solutions in Arlington Heights, Ill.—recently established an employee advisory board to help him in his mission to “go green.”

“As we grow, I want to make sure we're positioned to do so in an environmentally friendly way—sure, we recycle paper and ink cartridges, but it's time to take things to the next level,” says Sarowitz, who in less than a decade helped his company grow from a tiny, three-person start-up to a \$17.5 million corporation with 180 employees. “At the same time, our first responsibility is profitability. So our mission is to find out all the ways we can be green without making a big investment. It's a learning process.”

Dubbed the “Green Team,” the employee advisors' charge is to learn how the company can minimize its impact on the environment in cost-effective ways.

Setting up vehicles for two-way communication with employees has been vital as Paylocity has grown, the CEO says.

“Employees will always be happier in an environment where they feel that they are being listened to and that their opinions count,” he says. “The Green Team filled up in just a few minutes after just a single e-mail.”

In fact, he says, the fastest route to ensuring success of such a board is to choose an area employees are passionate about. “It empowers employees to make a real difference in that area,” he says.

And they do indeed often make a real difference, Sarowitz says, explaining employees often share really good suggestions.

“It's always good to get ideas from employees,” he says. “Although we are still a relatively small company, we are big enough now that our management team needs that feedback to continually improve our work environment.”

The Green Team, which meets monthly, has come up with ideas for everything from more environmentally friendly office space (the company moved to a larger space recently) to biodegradable kitchenware to sponsoring events like Rolling on the River, a bike ride that raises money for environmental causes.

To make an advisory board effective, make its goals clear

It's important, Sarowitz says, to set expectations and hopes for an employee advisory board, which is why the Green Team created a mission statement and a list of what it wants to accomplish.

The team is also sending out an e-mail survey to the entire staff to see what projects they would like accomplished.

To ensure the company actually did something useful with the ideas, Sarowitz recently

appointed a corporate communicator to facilitate the process.

“Although I originally felt that this wasn't necessary at a company of our size, the captain of our Green Team has requested this,” he says. “He feels we need the approval and guidance of executive staff to implement changes and to motivate the staff. He also feels the executive staff needs to be aware of our mission and goals to help us become more effective.”

Addressing the suggestions and concerns of the employee advisors—and whether or not the company is going to act on

them—is vital, the CEO says.

“It’s very important to give them prompt feedback on their ideas in order to maintain their commitment to the cause,” he explains.

Their commitment to the company also will be a benefit. Paylocity has been named one of Chicago’s “101 Best and Brightest Companies to Work For” twice by the National Association for Business Resources and has twice been named “One of the Best Places to Work” in Illinois.

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“Employees who get a reasonable forum at work to achieve personal goals are more

productive,” he says. “All parties benefit from our efforts, including the causes we support, the employees who get satisfaction from supporting them and our company, which gets the benefit of having happier employees.”