



Get SMAART

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Nineteenth Judicial Circuit, Lake County, Illinois
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It's Time to be Heard

The major league baseball playoffs have started and everyone is weighing-in on their favorite team. The presidential election is also right around the corner and everyone is looking forward to the opportunity to get out and vote for the candidate of their choice. Likewise, our Third Annual *19th Judicial Circuit Court Employee Survey* is now underway and all employees are strongly encouraged to voice their opinion.

Court leadership remains keenly interested in and committed to the process of surveying staff on whether you feel that you have the tools, support, and direction so important to providing the highest quality of court services. Your opinions and insights will assist the court management team in determining those areas in need of corrective action and the improvement efforts to be taken to direct the court in the future. Therefore, all employees are strongly encouraged to participate.

Court leadership recognizes that the level of commitment and involvement of our court staff has a direct impact on the court system's overall level of performance, and is a fundamental component towards achieving the goals and objectives of the court. Knowing how court employees perceive their work environments is absolutely essential to facilitating organizational development, assessing teamwork and management styles, and enhancing job satisfaction, which ultimately impact improved service to the public. Court employee satisfaction is such a critical component of the health and performance of the entire court system, in fact, that it is one of the ten core measures contained in the National Center for State Courts (NCSC) Trial Court Performance Measures initiative, commonly referred to as *CourTools** (NCSC, 2005).

Based in the feedback and opinion that this survey has generated in the past, court leadership has been able to prioritize many of its projects and initiate new efforts designed to improve the work-life of employees. A number of important changes that have been recommended by employees do require greater resources in terms

"People often say that, in a democracy, decisions are made by a majority of the people. Of course, that is not true.

Decisions are made by a majority of those who make themselves heard and vote – a very different thing."

Walter H. Judd

“Employees will only complain or make suggestions three times on the average without a response. After that they conclude that if they don’t keep quiet they will be thought to be troublemakers or that management doesn’t care.”

Peter Drucker

of time and financial support to achieve, but court leaders are committed to the constant improvement and development of the entire court organization. Some of the more noteworthy examples of changes over the past year include:

- Increasing the number of fleet vehicles available to staff.
- Installing OnStar® on new fleet vehicles.
- Updating the staff safety manual in Adult Probation.
- Coordinating with the Administrative Office of the Illinois Courts (AOIC) to provide probation officer basic training in Lake County.
- Redistribution of workloads through the hiring of new staff, prioritizing cases according to risk and need, and internal restructuring of units.
- Increasing the number of internal staff trainers in areas such as Motivational Interviewing and the Level of service Inventory - Revised (LSI-R)

As many of you may already have noticed, we have changed the format in which the surveys are being distributed and submitted. After much debate, the Court Management Team together with the SMAART Program Committee opted to have unit supervisors distribute the surveys and collect them from employees. There are several reasons cited for this change:

- 1) Previous Court Employee surveys were included with employees’ payroll checks or direct deposit slips. In the past year, the county has replaced the direct deposit notices with information available through BOSS. Consequently, approximately 60% of Court Employees do not receive a hard copy notice as they did in the past.
- 2) Although the technology exists to publish the survey electronically, there was some concern about employees who do not regularly check their e-mail accounts as well as those who do not have internet access in order to take a web-based questionnaire. (There is an open-ended question on the new survey that allows employees to weigh-in on this issue.)
- 3) Our own participation rate decreased significantly from the first employee survey to the second, 75% of court employees completed the survey in 2006 compared to only 65% in 2007. Earlier this year, the NCSC solicited participation rate information from jurisdictions throughout the United State that utilize the Court Employee Survey. Those results (provided below) indicate that our most recent participation effort was below that of other comparably sized courts, and of those jurisdictions that had used the survey in the past ours was the only jurisdiction to experience a decrease in the rate of participation.

CourTools Measure 9 Participation Rate Update

National Center for State Courts, July 2008

Court Type	State	Number of Staff (approx.)	Participation Rate (most recent)	Number of Participants	Participation Rate (previous)
Local - GJ	AZ	3000	49%	1470	30%
Local - GJ	CA	1648	56%	923	
Statewide System	UT	1100	61%	671	42%
Local - GJ	DC	950	50%	476	
Local - GJ	MN	640	75%	480	
Local - GJ	AZ	340	79%	269	
Local - GJ	CA	320	61%	195	61%
Local - GJ	KS	300	78%	234	
Local - GJ	CA	256	69%	177	
Local - GJ	IL	252	65%	164	75%
Local - LJ	WA	245	71%	174	
Statewide System	ND	230	80%	184	
Local - LJ	AZ	53	58%	31	
Local - GJ	OH	26	98%	25	
Local - GJ	OH	24	92%	22	
Local - LJ	WA	23	100%	23	
Local - LJ	AR	14	100%	14	
Local - GJ	WA	9	90%	8	
Local - GJ	IN	4	100%	4	
TOTAL		9434	58.8%	5543	

GJ = General Jurisdiction Court
LJ = Limited Jurisdiction Court

"You've achieved success in your field when you don't know whether what you're doing is work or play."

Warren Beatty

It is our hope that as we embark on our improvement strategies for 2009, that we will do so with the confidence that we have heard from all employees throughout the organization. Change efforts based on little more than half-participation are likely to benefit only half of the organization. So as you cheer on your favorite team in the playoffs and get behind the candidate of choice in the upcoming election, please demonstrate your support for the court organization by taking a few minutes to complete the *Employee Survey*.

*Additional information on the CourTools initiative can be found on their website:

http://www.ncsconline.org/D_Research/CourTools/tcmp_courttools.htm

Reference:

National Center for State Courts (2005). *CourTools: Trial Court Performance Measures*. Williamsburg, VA: National Center for State Courts.

Thanks for your time.