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If Widely Adopted, Workplace Bill of Rights Would Dramatically Improve Our Economy

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The U.S. has survived and, most often during its 234-year history, thrived under a forward-thinking Bill of Rights. Much more recently, innovative airline JetBlue has turned its industry on its ear and even inspired action by the White House through its Customer Bill of Rights – which, from a consumer's point of view, is one of the few bright spots amidst a slew of disappointing developments like this one.

If the Bill of Rights concept works, why not apply it to the workplace culture? After all, research shows that more highly engaged employees result in stronger company earnings, and lead those firms to more resiliency in down economies like the one we're in now.

That – along fair treatment of, and an adequate living wage for, employees – is the idea behind Workplace Fairness' proposed Workplace Bill of Rights. The 9 "basic rights [they] believe every worker should be entitled to" that they spell out here are the basis of a petition in partnership with Change.org. The signatures gathered will be presented to the Obama Administration, through which a best-case scenario would produce widespread adoption of the bill by employers.

The largest hurdle before this initiative is, of course, business owners' uncertainty of the payoff of employee engagement, or of anything beyond what they're already doing in a tough economy. This is especially true of small businesses, which comprise the vast majority of employers and tend to be under-resourced versus their larger peers.

To help prove the point of my title for this post, and hopefully help overcome this hurdle, **I've linked some of the 9 basic employee rights*** Workplace Fairness is advocating to bottom line business results that Winning Workplaces has seen in our small business award honorees, and confirmed in workplace research by others – both of which I've blogged about previously:

- Employees should be treated with honesty and respect – Among our 2010 small business award applicants, employee activities designed to foster greater respect helped them grow 2009 revenues 12% over 2008, on average.
- Working full-time should guarantee a basic standard of living – Paying only 5% over the minimum wage saves a business almost \$2,200 per employee in turnover costs.
- No working person should be without health insurance – An average increase in employer-paid employee medical premiums of 6.8% of our 2009 small business award finalists, over their 2008 counterparts, led to increases in employee tenure and year-over-year revenue growth, and a decrease in turnover.
- Employees should be able to leave a job with dignity – Our 2008 award winners' universal adoption of retirement plans that match employee contributions at an average rate of 2.8% is linked to double-digit, year-over-year revenue growth and average per-employee revenue of over \$200,000.
- There is more to life than work – We pointed to Talent Management's citation of a Corporate Executive Board analysis which shows that strategies to promote work/life balance can raise workplace productivity by 21% and employee tenure by 33%.

The net impact of these business outcomes is stronger sales from a larger, more satisfied customer base, which adds up to job growth and ultimately a more robust economy over time.

If you see benefits for both employees and companies in WF's Workplace Bill of Rights, you can help to advance it by signing their petition here.

**Update: Workplace Fairness Executive Director Paula Brantner informed me that even though their list was promoted as having 9 employee rights, there are actually 10. See toward the bottom of their petition, as well as the voting/comments page over at Change.org.*

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