

Five Tips for Remaining Union-Free

History is an amazing thing. In particular, the history of labor and employee relations in the United States has an interesting evolution with some impactful lessons. In the early days of the industrial revolution, several prominent entrepreneurs rose to become known as “The Men Who Built America.” Several names resonate, such as the Vanderbilt tie to railroads; the Rockefeller connection to the oil industry; the Carnegie link to the steel industry; the Morgan bond to banking; and the Ford name to the automobile industry. Behind their great success is a dark history of poor and unsafe working conditions, low pay, long hours, abusive management, and armed rebellions where many lost their lives.

One standout among this crowd was George Westinghouse—a pioneer of the railway air brake and electrical industry. American Federation of Labor founder Samuel Gompers once said, “If all business leaders and moguls treated their employees as well as George Westinghouse, there’d be no need for any labor unions.” The practices of Westinghouse are just as applicable today, nearly 150 years later, to creating successful, engaged places of work as well to remaining union-free.

To help achieve successful, union-free work environments, the following five principles can be applied.

1. **Train Your Leaders**

Above all, organizations need great leaders. You can implement the best HR systems and practices on the planet, only to have them undermined by an ineffective leader. Statistics show that many employees have left a job because of a poor boss. Leaders not only need to be focused on running efficient, profitable, and financially prudent departments, but they also must foster an environment of success for employees. Great leaders inspire others and create trusting, open and engaged work atmospheres.

2. **Communicate Effectively**

Open, authentic communication at all levels of the organization creates an environment of openness. A key motivator of employees in the workforce is to have a feeling of being in on things. Promote an open-door policy where employees are encouraged to ask questions and discuss concerns without fear of retribution.

3. **Avoid Burnout**

Many organizations are having trouble finding and retaining employees. Avoid scheduling fewer workers longer hours and avoid putting too much on the shoulders of your good workers. Fairness and consistency in the assignment and distribution of work creates a motivated workforce that will go above and beyond when needed. Recognize and award employee performance.

4. **Provide Competitive Pay and Benefits**

Along with great management practices, organizations that strive to provide competitive pay and benefits also attract and retain employees.

5. **Resolve Issues Promptly**

When employee concerns are aired, make every effort to resolve them as quickly as possible. Be honest. If it is something that will take a while to resolve, let employees know. If it is something you will not be able to do, tell them. If employees are surveyed for their opinions, they will be expecting a summary and action plan. Be prepared to provide that.

Creating a great work environment for your employees lends itself hand-in-hand to organizational success by attracting and retaining employees, as well as remaining union-free. For more information on how to implement successful programs, contact any member of MRA’s [Learning and Development Team](#).