

Great institutions value the people who make them great

I truly believe that our success is driven by a focus on people, programs and place. At the heart of every community, organization and venture are people, and the people of this university, this community and this great state are among the friendliest, most caring people in the world.

Last Friday this came across my email: “There are men and women who make the world better just by being the kind of people they are. It really matters very little whether they are behind the wheel of a truck or running a business or bringing up a family. They teach the truth by living it.” The quote, often attributed to former U.S. President James A. Garfield, caused me to pause, reflect and smile.

The email also challenged the reader to identify a positive role model in your life and learn from their strengths and weaknesses. I thought immediately of my pastor, and I also thought about the university as a whole. How are we making the world better just by being the kind of university we are – nimble, innovative, caring, and resilient?

While I can easily create a very long list of how we are making our communities, the state, and even the world better – the quotation in my email also made me think a little closer to home. How are we making Fort State University a great college to work for? Do our values, policies and practices create an environment that enables our employees to thrive?

Since at least 2008, Fort Hays State University has participated in the Great Colleges to Work For survey. Although, to my knowledge, we have never made the honor roll (top 10 in the nation), our 2019 results were worth celebrating. They provide insight into how we can become even better. The survey has two components: a questionnaire about institutional characteristics and an employee questionnaire about individuals’ evaluations of the institution. The assessment also includes an analysis of demographic data as well as workplace policies, including benefits.

Then there are 15 items that our faculty and staff rate: job satisfaction and support; teaching environment; professional development; compensation, benefits, and the work-life balance; facilities; policies, resources and efficiency; shared governance; pride; supervisors; senior leadership; faculty, staff, and administrative relations; communication; collaboration; fairness; respect and appreciation; and salary average. The data summary classifies each of these areas as one of the following: excellent, good, fair to mediocre, warrants attention, and poor.

The good news: out of 15 items, 14 items scored the highest satisfaction percentages since 2008. The most improved item is shared governance – which to me means engaging our employees throughout the university in important conversations and then listening and learning from their thoughts and experiences. Shared governance dramatically improved from 48 percent in 2015 to 72 percent in 2019. Additionally, for the first time, the overall survey average is 67 percent, which means we are finally on par with our peers.

On all 15 categories, Fort Hays State was rated either excellent, good, or fair to mediocre. Two thirds of the categories were rated as excellent or good – with five areas rating in the fair category. This survey is such a great opportunity for us to, as the challenge stated, learn from our strengths and weaknesses.

One of my favorite writers, Mort Crim, once wrote that the biggest room in the house is the room for improvement. I am excited by our strong results and progress and energized by our efforts to focus on “rooms for improvement,” because that is how we make Fort Hays State the absolutely greatest place for our people to work, live and thrive.