

26 Insider Tips to Dramatically Increase the Effectiveness of Your Survey

Does your organization spend time and money conducting surveys, only to find that the results are not actionable, or that the actions you do take do not resolve the issue or problem that caused you to carry out the survey in the first place? It doesn't have to be that way! Below are 26 "insider tips" that will help you dramatically boost the effectiveness of your surveys - no rocket science required.

1. The quality of preparation during the planning and design stages is key to a successful survey process.
2. Developing and administering surveys is a process, not an event.
3. In the absence of critical success factors, the survey process will fail.
4. Be very clear about the purpose of the survey; it drives the entire process.
5. Hire an expert; what you don't know about surveys can hurt your results.
6. Don't promise something you cannot deliver; confidentiality and anonymity are two different things.
7. The sample must be representative of the target population being surveyed.
8. Communication must be an integral part of the survey process.
9. Conducting a pilot survey is one of the best actions you can take to improve the effectiveness of your survey.
10. Survey items are critical; poorly written questions result in unusable data. Closed-ended questions limit the amount of useful information you can obtain.
11. Simple questions meant to address complex issues do not provide accurate, actionable information.
12. Confusing response options decrease the reliability of survey results.
13. Each question should relate directly to the purpose of the survey.
14. Survey items that are reliable produce consistent, dependable information.
15. Unless the use of your survey items has been validated, you can't be sure what you are measuring.
16. Non-exempt employees must be paid for the time spent completing a survey.
17. Distinguish clearly between "must have" features of an on-line survey system and "nice to have" features.
18. Significantly boosting your response rate requires advance planning.
19. When you conduct a study, you have a responsibility to protect participants' privacy.
20. Survey results are constrained by the accuracy of the data that produce them.
21. The type of data prescribes the rules for their analysis.
22. Simple types of data analysis are sufficient for most organizational surveys (e.g., customer satisfaction, employee engagement, stakeholder perspectives).
23. Tell audiences only what they need to know about the survey results, not everything you know.
24. You are better off NOT conducting a survey at all than doing it and failing to take action based on the results.
25. The survey process is not over until you have evaluated what changes were made and whether they addressed the initial purpose.

Source: *Survey Says...: The Professionals' Guide to Great Surveys* (2013) by Pat Lynch, Ph.D.

More about Dr. Pat Lynch

Pat Lynch, Ph.D. enables first responders to elevate the level of public safety in their communities and to keep their personnel safe. She is the primary author of *Every Fire-Rescue Professional is a Leader: A Practical Guide to Individual, Team, and Organization Development*.