

The Times, They Are a Changing



The legendary Bob Dylan recently headlined the Austin City Limits Festival here in Austin, and it had me thinking that while many of us children of the 60's who grew up on Dylan and the other great music of the era enjoyed the prospect of seeing him in concert, there had to be a great number of young music fans that consider Dylan just a part of history. They were there to see the artists that are relevant to them...today.

Such is the case with the state workforce, including our TPEA members. There is a changing demographic of not only state employees, but also of the state's population. These changes present both great challenges and great opportunities. Turnover in the state workplace is still a challenge. There are great demands on the state's workforce to recruit and keep new, young talent with an every competitive private sector nipping at our heels.

TPEA has been the leading voice for state employees through advocacy since its founding back in the late 1940s. Many of the benefits that state employees currently enjoy were legislative initiatives of this organization. But times change and to maintain our leadership role we have to be reflective of the members that we represent and their needs.

We recognize for the workforce to remain an important part of public service to the electorate or people of the state, it has to be well trained. We have to really understand the demographics. We have to have a much more comprehensive approach in dealing with what newer and younger workers need.

The demographics of the state workforce are significantly different from the demographics of the general population. State workers, on average, are older than most Texans. There is a disparity not only in the gender makeup of the state workforce, but also in the ethnic makeup relative to the state population. As an organization, we need to understand that.

We need to recognize that while overall turnover in the state workforce has declined, turnover among new and younger state employees is still twice that of the state's average. This does not bode well for the future. We need to understand what it is that workers expect because they

obviously have many more options today than they had in the past.

We need to determine how to best communicate with them effectively.

How do we build a sense of loyalty, a sense of purpose in the jobs that they do. We need to preserve what the essence of public service is all about.

So what are we doing to meet these challenges? Our first step is to conduct a statewide survey of all state employees that will provide vital information on the ways our organization interacts not only with members, but also with the legislature. This survey will be sent to 90,000 state employees to get our finger on the pulse of our state workforce.

There are no right or wrong answers to the questions we will be asking. Our objective is to really learn from state employees, especially young employees, about what they expect from their careers. What is the most effective way to communicate with them? What is the relevance of an advocacy organization or the state legislature to their careers? Do they even know? Do they care?

It is our purpose to build and preserve excellence in the state's workforce. It is important for the taxpayers to understand the importance of quality public service, but to also support it. This is the fundamental mission of this organization and that has not changed in the past 60 years. We need to recognize our strengths but also be aware that the demographics have changed. We must become a part of that change so we can continue to be an effective advocate for state employees. This is just the first in a series of communications we will send to the state workforce to help us better address their needs.

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