

Sheetz employees 'connect' with execs at 'town halls'

It was news to the top brass: The hats that cashiers and deli staff at convenience store chain Sheetz wear as part of their uniforms were rubbing the hair off their heads. Execs at the Pennsylvania headquarters didn't know about it until they decided to hold an employee "town hall" meeting to ask workers what was on their minds.

Now employees may choose a more comfortable uniform cap among three designs.

Since the 350-store chain started its "connect sessions" last year, 1,000 of its 13,000 employees in six states have met with store executives to ask questions, make suggestions and complain.

The 57-year-old, family-owned organization has made changes as a result. *Among them:*

- Part-time employees, who were formerly eligible for tuition assistance if they worked an average of 20 hours a week, can now tap the benefit after 16 hours. The chain employs lots of college students. The town halls revealed that 20 hours is too many for a full-time student to work.
- HR is preparing an employee recognition "toolkit" for managers in response to worker complaints that they don't get enough pats on the back for their daily contributions.

"You shouldn't ask employees what needs to be improved if you're not willing to improve it," says Stephanie Doliveira, VP of HR, who has attended 35 sessions in a year and has put her staff to work to resolve employee issues.

Contact: Stephanie Doliveira at sdolivei@sheetz.com.