

January 2, 2008

Hello NAAFA,

I am a 22+ year agent with AmFam. When I received the Compass Today, December 12, 2007, article entitled "Valuable Results from the Agent Preference Survey," I felt it really didn't make sense to me, so I forwarded it to a client of mine who is a social scientist (with a PhD) with expertise in research methods and applied measurement. I asked him if he would review the stats included in the article. Because I consider his response to be quite credible, to say the least, I wanted to forward it to you as I believe you will find it quite interesting.

Thank you,

Signed by Agent (name withheld)

My friend's reply to the Compass Today article:

_____ gave me the printout you sent. It is an interesting (and perhaps creative) use of data. What I mean is that there are some other statistics that are necessary to ascertain whether there really are some significant and substantial differences between American Family agents and agents from benchmark companies. In its current form, the printout appears to show that AMFAM agents are less likely to leave the company, are more highly engaged, perceive a higher number of job opportunities, and are more committed than agents in other companies.

However:

1. Without the total sample size from each group of agents that completed the survey (i.e., AMFAM and benchmark companies) and the standard deviation of scores (e.g., the commitment index scores) – which describe the spread (or distribution) of scores around the mean, it is impossible to determine whether the observed difference between AMFAM commitment (overall mean = .42) and benchmark commitment (mean = .26) is significantly different. Based on the spread of scores, these two means might not actually be statistically different when tested – however, without sample size and standard deviation information, we cannot test this. If this were a manuscript I were reviewing, this would be considered a fatal flaw and would result in a rejection.
2. In addition to statistical significance – the issue of practical significance seems important here. In other words, even if the difference in scores (e.g., commitment) were statistically significant, the next (and perhaps more important) question is whether there is a practical, meaningful, or robust difference between groups. Often times, when given a large enough sample size, statistically significant differences emerge that are, in practical terms, meaningless. In other words, the difference is so small that there is little practical utility in such differences. Often times people confuse statistical significance with practical significance – I see this a lot in the manuscripts that I review.
3. Is there information on whether the survey completed by AMFAM agents was the same, similar, or different from the survey completed by benchmark companies? The degree to which the surveys were not similar would substantially reduce the quality and confidence of comparisons across groups.

These are just a few concerns that I have regarding the data that you were sent. Without more information, I am far from confident in the findings and how they are described.

(NAME WITHHELD)