

Employee Engagement: More Than A Buzz Word



In today's hectic work environment, quick fixes are often favored over long-term solutions. Immediate improvements can be had when “band-aid” solutions are used to put out the fires, but these fixes rarely last. Short-term gain very often results in long-term pain. Management can no longer rely on old solutions because the problems we are facing in this fast-paced, competitive business environment are new.

The focus of my work is employee engagement and motivation, and I share Peter Drucker’s philosophy that “culture eats strategy for breakfast.”

Two months ago, I started to work with a company whose main focus is to have a committed workforce that is willing to go the extra mile. Many people in this organization have high seniority and have over the years become very complacent because they either haven’t worked anywhere else, or they have forgotten what it was like to work for another employer. The level of negativity is unbearable. There is a huge lack of initiative and employee engagement is pretty much non-existent.

Management knows that changes need to be made but they are struggling to put the recommended changes into action. It reminds me of what Ken Blanchard said: “While executives and managers say that they want new ideas and new thinking from their employees, their actions indicate otherwise. New ideas are disruptive, they’re messy, they challenge the status quo, they require taking chances and increased risk, and they push everyone out of their comfort zones.” And yet, that is exactly what we need — to get of our comfort zones.

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- In your mind, what does an engaged workforce look like?
- What percentage of your workforce do you think needs to be engaged?
- Why is an engaged workforce a competitive advantage?

Research continues to show that a well-substantiated relationship exists between **employee engagement** — the extent to which employees are committed, believe in the values of the company, feel pride in working for their employer, and are motivated to go the extra mile — and **business results**.

The goal of every progressive leader should be to **fully engage the entire workforce** in creating and delivering the highest possible customer value through relentless innovation. How are you doing in this regard? Do you view it as “mission impossible” or are you determined to lead by example and make it happen?

In his research on motivation, William James of Harvard found that hourly employees could maintain their jobs (that is, not be fired), by working at approximately 20 to 30 percent of their ability. His study also showed that “highly motivated employees work at close to 80 to 90 percent of their abilities.” At what level are your employees working?

According to a recent study, engaged employees have productivity rates that are 70 percent higher than those who are not. They also enjoy a 78 percent higher safety record, 70 percent lower turnover, an 86 percent customer satisfaction, and their companies are 44 percent more profitable. Can you just imagine the competitive advantage that an engaged workforce can have on your own organization?

Now, more than ever, employees feel less connected to their workplace and have little motivation to suggest improvements out of fear that they may replace themselves if they do more within a shorter time period, with fewer resources and less manpower.

Everyone listens to the same radio channel "WIIFM" (what's in it for me?). You may know the saying — there is no "I" in “team.” In my opinion, this statement is wrong. Personal interest, fulfillment, and desire are critical factors that motivate us from within to be engaged in whatever we do.

One of the most important things any leader can do to improve their organization is to first improve who they are. For things to change, you must change, and for things to get better, you must get better.

Always remember, excellence is not a skill. It’s an attitude.

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