

HOW TO IGNITE EMPLOYEE POTENTIAL

Engagement doesn't happen by accident—learn how to create a work culture that welcomes and rewards loyal high-performers.

BY ROXANA HEWERTSON



When do you feel truly engaged at work? Chances are it's when you believe in what you are doing, you are actively involved and you enjoy the people you work with. You are truly engaged when you are fully present, committed to the task at hand and enjoying what you are doing.

Research has long proven that engaged employees lead to more successful and profitable businesses. In 2012, a Dale Carnegie study found that of the 1,500 employees studied, only 29 percent were fully engaged, 25 percent were disengaged and 45 percent were only partially engaged. These results reflect many other credible studies conducted during the last ten years that show that, time after time, 50 percent or more of employees in all industries are dissatisfied at work and less than fully engaged.

Employee engagement is often lumped into the bucket of “soft, touchy-feely” human resource topics, but the “hard reality” is that flawed management practices and failed leadership contribute significantly to employee disengagement—and disengaged employees are unproductive and unprofitable employees, resulting in a negative financial impact. Engaged employees are more productive and deliver better customer service and higher quality work, all of which result in better branding, reputation and financial success for their employers. Every drop of discretionary effort impacts your bottom line. Whenever an employee contributes beyond what he or she must do to keep the job, you get more time and productivity than you are paying for.

Engagement doesn't happen by accident. You have to

create a work culture that rewards engagement. That can happen on any work site with any employees.

Did you know that creativity, questioning and laughter decline rapidly after the age of 5? In 1968, George Land gave 1,600 5-year-olds a creativity test used by NASA to select innovative engineers and scientists. He then retested the same children at ages 10 and 15. The results were staggering: 98 percent at age 5 registered genius-level creativity, 30 percent at 10 years old and 12 percent at 15 years of age. The same test given to 280,000 adults placed their genius-level creativity at only 2 percent. In his book *Breakpoint and Beyond*, co-authored by Beth Jarman, Land concluded that non-creative behavior is learned.

That's right—we pound creativity out of people starting as young as 6 years old. And it doesn't stop in school. Many workplaces discourage engagement and commitment. Plenty of supervisors still tell people, “I don't pay you to think—I pay you to get the job done!” or “We've always done it this way and it's just fine, so we're not interested in changing anything.” Those jobsites probably don't see much laughter, questioning, creativity or engagement.

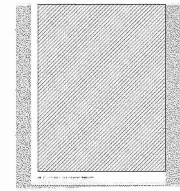
The good news is that we can consciously create healthy work cultures that reignite creativity, encourage innovation and reward engagement in our employees. As construction industry leaders, you must be as strategic about human resources as you are about your financial and equipment resources. They go hand in hand. Get the human resource expertise you need so you and the supervisors within your company can build a work culture that encourages and rewards employee engagement.

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT DOES NOT MEAN:

- Employee satisfaction
- Everybody is happy-go-lucky
- No one is accountable
- Work is all we do
- Talk is all we do
- Play is all we do
- Having a clique or favorites culture

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT DOES MEAN:

- Employees can see how they fit into the overall business
- Employees believe what they do has meaning
- Employees believe their efforts have value
- Everyone is accountable, including the boss
- Everyone wants everyone to win—the contract, the deadlines, the quality, the budget
- People enjoy coming to work
- People consciously choose to produce their best



FOUR KEYS TO EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

1. Credible Leaders

- You demonstrate honesty, trustworthiness and reliability.
- You show you are capable of understanding and/or doing the work you delegate.
- You foster a culture of trust and open communication (not fear).

2. High-Performing Organization

- Your company demonstrates commitment to employee engagement and retention.
- You have a respected reputation.
- Your brand, quality and product/service are outstanding.
- Your workplace is productive, fair and rewarding.
- You all take pride in maintaining a productive workforce.

3. Job and Career Satisfaction

- Your employees truly understand their role and responsibilities.
- Your employees believe that they have internal opportunities for growth and advancement.
- Your employees believe their immediate supervisors will support earned and fair advancement.

4. Supportive Co-Workers

- Your company environment values mutual support for a win/win result (team).
- Your company values solid peer groups that are developed and supported.
- You create multiple opportunities for collaboration and peer learning.
- You demonstrate that team accountability matters as much as the individual and that it is rewarded.

OUTCOMES OF AN ENGAGED WORKFORCE

When your employees are engaged in their work and your company, you will have a more productive organization that will be a place where people want and hope to work. You will have a high-performing workforce and culture where innovation, creativity, appropriate risk-taking and synergy happen in positive ways for the employees and the organization. You will see higher productivity levels and more profitable results. Your employees will be committed and will choose to contribute discretionary time to you and your business—time you would have lost otherwise. Finally, you will have satisfied and loyal customers, employees and vendors who will champion your brand and your services; high retention rates of outstanding performers; and the ability to attract the best of the best.

CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE LEADERS

- Create clear accountabilities that can be trusted.
- Develop others constantly and continuously.
- Run effective meetings versus meetings that are a waste of time.
- Deal with and resolve conflicts well.
- Build effective teams.
- Involve the right people in the right decisions the right way.
- Become more other-centric than egocentric.
- Lead more than manage.
- Lead change successfully.
- Invest in staff development to get high-quality results.
- Equip staff with necessary resources, knowledge and skills.
- Delegate decision making to employees closest to the work whenever possible.
- Lead by example, authentically and respectfully.

Creating this kind of outcome takes a lot of commitment and hard work. To do it well and consistently, you will need to approach your culture the same as any other project: with a plan and a change process that takes into account the who, what, when, where and why of the change. Start at the top, and roll this culture change all the way through the company. As long as the “top” of even one department or division is committed, you have a golden opportunity. If need be, start small and grow a culture of engagement with leaders and supervisors who can and will make it happen in their areas of influence and responsibility. The first task in this project of high employee engagement is to empower interested leaders with the skills they need.

When leaders are engaged first and then become truly committed to leading their people well, the people will follow. While this step is not enough to create a highly engaged workforce, you must start at the beginning—by creating or enhancing credible leadership. **CBO**

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