

# HOW TO ENGAGE YOUR EMPLOYEES

Employee engagement is one of the most fundamental precursors to achieving your business goals in terms of performance, productivity and profitability. Yet it can be highly elusive and difficult to nail down.

Employee engagement (or disengagement as the case may be) can sometimes seem like there is “something in the water” whereby the culture of the whole organisation can have a significant impact on the commitment of individuals who come into it—for good or ill.



Therefore having engaged employees is not as simple as just recruiting a new “engaged” staff member to replace a “disengaged” one who is leaving. The problem with this approach is that before you know it, the new employee will likely be exhibiting the same behaviours as the former one. Therefore employee engagement is often most successful when it is a whole business/team and holistic approach. However there are always instances when engagement is restricted to individuals within an organisation.

It is important to remember that employees are your key assets. Therefore it is important that you are getting the best out of your team and not putting disengaged employees into the “too hard” basket as this could have a significant detrimental effect to your bottom line.

## Company Z

Company Z makes an excellent case study of how disengagement can become endemic and impact on the performance of the business.

This company has been a major player in the manufacturing industry for the last 20 years. It lives by its core values: innovation, design and quality.

When we started working with Company Z, we unearthed various people issues and challenges that were clearly manifested in the way the employees behaved in the workplace. This was easily identified by a number of tell-tale symptoms like ‘clock watching’, a high level of gossip, strife between supervisors and subordinates, negativity, as well as incidences of bullying and harassment.

Clearly the level of disengagement within the team was extensive and resulted in not just a technically mediocre performance from a team that should have been humming, but it also appeared to have a magnified effect in regards to customer service which revealed itself through

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tangible errors made in very simple procedural tasks resulting in unwarranted customer complaints and unnecessary costs. Despite the re-training of the erring staff members there was no sincere effort by the manager to rectify the other issues being raised by the staff.

It was then observed that disengagement was not just a result of poor resourcing (which was the primary complaint of the staff) but fundamentally the result of poor leadership.

For several months, weekly full-day coaching sessions with the management team were conducted to enable them to effectively deal with the undercurrents between managers and staff. Work issues were resolved and on-going performance was effectively monitored and supported.

By installing HR systems and processes to support engagement initiatives, the staff members started to feel an appreciation of their work and their individual contribution to the company. They reached a level of comfort to freely make suggestions on how to improve the way their tasks are performed which greatly contributed to the reduction of technical errors.

The moral of this case study is that deeply entrenched issues within your team should be managed as soon as possible. The lack of a solid HR management plan for people challenges such as these will definitely impact the engagement and eventually performance, productivity and profitability.

At the end of the day you need to address the core issues. While in some instances this may be an issue with an individual, if it is endemic within a team and seems embedded within the culture, you will need to drill down to find the cause and then engage in perhaps significant relationship building strategies to pave the way for employee engagement.



## Company Y

Company Y was not affected by active disengagement in the way that Company Z was. On the contrary. Company Y proves that the engagement strategies implemented for this client in order to further enhance the level of employee engagement in the business really works.

Developing a strategy for improving employee engagement initially required an understanding what employee engagement looked like with Company Y. We have been working with this client

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for many years now and from the results of the first management survey, the figures showed that their engaged employees represented between one-quarter and one-third of the workforce and this was evidenced by their positive attitude about work.



Their disengaged employees, on the other hand, had a glass-half-empty attitude about the company and the type of work they performed. To develop a strategy that covers both sides of the engagement spectrum and which focuses on recognition, motivation and relationship building was a primary task for us.

In collaboration with the leadership team and with regular coaching. Company Y was able to develop and implement a recognition and reward scheme that recognised high performing staff. Employees who received recognition for their expertise were (and still are) motivated to perform at even higher levels.

The company also created opportunities for leadership roles for employees whose performance exceeded the company expectations.

It was a challenge for the client to create enthusiasm about work when routine job functions were anything but exciting. One strategy involved challenging employees to think of 'stretch' goals apart from the ones outlined in their job description. This included thinking of ideas aimed at improving processes for performing their job functions. Employees whose suggestions for improvement saved the company money and resources were subsequently rewarded.

A year on, when a second workplace survey was conducted, the results showed that 95% of the respondents agree that the company's business vision, values and goals are clear, communicated to all staff and evident in all that they do. This was further supported by Company Y's improvement of overall productivity and successful achievement of annual targets.

## Company X

Whilst working with the directors of Company X, it was established that one of their key priorities in the business was to know what their employees thought and to get a feel of the level of commitment their employees had to the business. Being aware that how people behave at work can make the crucial difference between business and operational success or failure, a workplace survey was then rolled out to the entire organisation.

Instead of the usual online questionnaire methodology used to obtain the responses, our HR Specialist asked each survey question in a one-on-one interview with each employee. This manner allowed us to elicit further feedback or comments by delving deeper on relevant questions.

Company X's staff were quite honest with their responses and whilst the workplace survey results showed some level of engagement and willingness to commit to the organisation and its goals, the problem was found to be a veritable lack of communication from top management down to the rank and file employees.

In general, the team members were not clear about the company's vision and values as well as the organisation's business goals. The leadership team were then provided with an action plan to eliminate the communication gap from conducting regular staff meeting and initiating the roll out of policies and were provided with a device for ongoing performance and career management. Involving employees in carrying out the action plan steps provided another outlet for employee engagement.



It is therefore vital that the 'big picture' is effectively communicated to all members. It should resonate with all members of your team; they should 'buy in' to the vision and feel compelled to be part of achieving that vision and eventually support a high performance culture.

Employee engagement and the development of employment strategies is directly tied to the employees' sense of value and the ability to give feedback about working conditions and their workplace relationships, particularly those involving manager—subordinate relationships.

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