No Surprise! Employee Engagement is a Two Way Proposition

Over the past 6 years report after report tells us that more employees are more disengaged than ever. Burnout, stress, de-motivation and more are increasingly seen every day. We frequently read surveys that great numbers of employees would like to quit their jobs and find a new one.

Research tells us that disengaged workers are more likely to make errors, call in sick, disenfranchise customers and their fellow employees, turnover and generally fail to contribute to the organization. Where as engaged employees tend to pay more attention to their work and their customers and contribute more effectively into the workplace.

The challenge today in involves understanding how to gain engagement with a diverse and constantly changing workforce.

Engagement Looks Different For Different People

Employee engagement is a term bandied about frequently and as a result the definition can be muddled. Generally employee engagement involves a personal/professional sense of ownership and the resulting contribution an individual delivers to their workplace. This is underscored by a sense of emotional and/or intellectual investment on behalf of the employee. This investment can involve an employee who is enthusiastic about the organization, the team, the customers and their own work and who seeks to make a contribution through positive actions. This does not mean the engaged employee is enthusiastic in a loud and outgoing way, but is enthusiastic about the opportunity to participate.

It is useful to keep in mind that employees have different personalities and preferences. An engaged employee does not need to be a vocal cheerleader, show up at every workplace social function or even be the most friendly or personable person. An engaged employee can be locked away in an office contributing highly important work or an engaged employee can be out front jumping in and motivating others, showing up early and staying late, organizing employee events and acknowledgements and more. The workplace is changing and the demographics and needs of employees are changing and as result what engagement looks like is changing. What engages a Baby Boomer will differ from what engages a Gen X or Millennial. Within an organization when it comes to spotting and creating engagement flexibility is important.

Two ways to Pump Up Employee Engagement

Research into engagement is ongoing and it is important to stay on top of what is being learned about what attracts, excites and retains employees. Most people want to make a contribution and be engaged in their jobs. The employee who works a custodial or as the Director of Operations would both prefer to feel engaged. It is generally people's nature who want to be involved, engaged and to make a contribution. It is just that sometimes organizations and people lose track of what matters.

Two things you can implement in your workplace to engage, if not all, then many of your employees are not really that difficult to identify or in many cases implement.

1) **Providing Autonomy and Flexibility**

Although the what, why and how differs between genders, generations and individuals, workplace flexibility has become an important tool of engagement for many employees. Workplace flexibility can enable employees to take ownership and feel rewarded which can in turn engage them further.

According to a recent report, titled Connecting Canadian Talent to the Workplace with Technology, reported in the Calgary Herald, there was an 89% in 'high engagement' when a workplace was flexible and 97% of workers who worked remotely said they would continue to do so if given the opportunity. Of those surveyed 53% of people were working flexible hours while 16 % with the option to choose not to and 31% did not have it as an option.

The option to work flexible hours or remotely may engage workers because they appreciate the opportunity and as a result feel more committed to their employer, either or both emotionally and intellectually. Employee engagement is not tied to being physically present in the workplace but it is tied to being connected to the workplace. You still have to work to help that remote or flex worker remain connected but if you can do it right you can succeed in gaining great engagement.

Openness, Transparency and Communication

Building trust and offering trust are classic ways to gain emotional and intellectual investment. Another way organizations are creating more engagement is by opening up the opportunity for two-way dialogue and opening up the lines of communication more directly between people, with management, senior leadership. A leadership presence, including in-person presentations, talks and 'walking the floor' can also build engagement with employees.

According to research executives with social CEOs say their CEOs' social media presence makes them feel inspired (52%), technologically advanced (46%), and proud (41%). In another survey 82% of employee respondents said they trusted a company more when top executives communicated via social media. And an employee who trusts a company is generally more likely to feel committed and want to take ownership and invest time and energy to make a contribution.

At the end of the day employees are people and when people feel trusted and as though they have options and when they trust and feel included they are more likely to invest their time, energy and ideas and contribute positively to their employer.

Sources:

[The findings of a national survey released Wednesday by Calgary-based WORKshift and Rogers Communications draw a clear link between flexible work options and employee engagement].

[The social CEO: Executives Tell All]

[The CEO Social Media Study]