

The Transformational Effects Of True Engagement

I recently read a piece in Forbes which highlighted the fact that Europe's employee engagement levels are the lowest in the world. It's not surprising then, that we are facing a productivity crisis and companies are scrambling to implement new benefits and engagement programmes. Businesses have obviously realised it is an important topic, but I wonder if as many organisations that have decided they need an employee engagement programme or initiative, have really thought about why they need one.

My definition of employee engagement is simple: it's the ability for employees to be present, focused, and energised while feeling connected to their organisation's purpose. Many organisations confuse employee engagement with the similar topic of employee well-being, which encompasses a range of traits from emotional and physical well-being, to community and social relationships, to financial stability.

Employee well-being asks the question "Do my employees have what they need to do their best work?" and while it is important for employers to address questions of employee well-being, it is my belief that true engagement embodies so much more and can be transformational for a business, in a way that simply addressing employee well-being in a transactional way, cannot.

As Simon Sinek says: "When people are financially invested, they want a return. When people are emotionally invested, they want to contribute." Don't we all want to foster true and meaningful contributions?

If you want to address some of the key issues that impact every business e.g. employee retention, and how to increase profits, then taking a transformational and measurable approach to engagement is the first and most vital step.

Here's three areas in which a focused approach to increasing employee engagement will help transform your business:

1) Productivity and Profitability

A recent study covered in The Guardian explored how seating arrangements impact productivity at work. The research found that people who sat nearest to the most productive staff members and workers who produced the

best quality work tended to improve their own work by a factor of about 10%.

This is the power of engagement. It is infectious, and as engagement levels increase so does productivity. People who are more engaged in their work give more of themselves to the task at hand and as a result, work is completed faster and with much more attention to detail. Essentially this means fewer errors, and higher quality output, which have a tangible effect on profits.

A study by Gallup showed that organisations with high levels of employee engagement report 22% higher profitability levels as well as 21% higher productivity levels.

2) Employee Retention

A recent Independent piece stated: "One of the UK's biggest challenges post-Brexit will be attracting and retaining talent" and engaging employees is a key competitive differentiator for businesses.

By connecting employees to an engaged purpose, the individuals on the front-line of your organisation have an understanding of why they are doing what they're doing, which makes them proud to come to work and provides context for their tasks.

Furthermore, by implementing an employee engagement programme that helps businesses establish a two way dialogue with employees about what they need in order to do their job more effectively, it allows employers to address concerns before they become issues. This helps increase employee satisfaction levels and demonstrates employers' long-term interest in their workforce.

One way to do this is by introducing an interactive platform which allows employees to give crucial and honest feedback anonymously. This provides every team member with a voice, helping them to feel connected and valued.

The data regarding how engagement improves employees' commitment to a business speaks for itself: according to this year's Gallup Workforce Study, only 37% of engaged employees are looking for new opportunities, compared to 73% of actively disengaged employees.

In other words, engaged employees are not looking to leave their current role.

3) Customer Engagement

I passionately believe that an organisation can't truly engage its customers until the organisation itself is engaged. If employees don't feel connected to their work or the individuals

around them, this can lead to feelings of frustration and disengagement. People love the idea of being part of a business family and getting to know one another outside of their everyday roles. By actively encouraging team get-togethers and social events, organisations can help to nurture a feeling of community as well as creating bonds between employees that extend beyond their professional lives.

A great example of how employee engagement helps is Zappos' brand philosophy: "Happy People Making People Happy." The company used "WOW"- inducing customer service to build its brand as well as growing sales from \$1M to \$1B in 10 years. One of the things that helped them reach this monumental sales achievement, was the introduction of an employee currency called "Zollars". Zollars were used as a way to recognise when a colleague had gone above and beyond. Employees could then choose to spend their Zollars on Zappos branded items such as clothing, in addition to purchasing movie tickets or donating them to a charity of their choice.

This initiative created positive emotional connections between employees, and that positivity was then passed onto customers because Zappos employees became engaged with the practise of going above and beyond. Research has also emphasised this point: the University of Bath's Engagement Report found that just 17% of non-engaged employees feel they have a good understanding of how to meet customer needs, but 70% of engaged employees feel that their understanding empowers them to do so.

Imagine what your company could do if 70% of your employees described themselves as 'empowered' to serve your customers well.

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