Best Practices for Fostering Employee Engagement

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Executive Summary
A truly engaged employee is not only an enthusiastic and productive worker, but also a valuable contributor to a company's long-term success. However, as Focus Expert Mark Herbert cautions, “Don't mistake tenure with engagement and contribution. In a down economy people stay because their options are limited.” So how do you keep employees engaged, involved and enthusiastic? In this guide, Mark and his fellow Focus Experts John Anderson, Jim Rembach and Barry Zweibel share their top 5 best practices for fostering employee engagement.

After reading this guide, be sure to check out the entire discussion and join the conversation:

Best Practices Checklist
1. Align your hiring and selection process with company culture to ensure a good ‘fit’
2. Have tactics and tools to help everyone build stronger work relationships
3. Promote an open atmosphere that encourages honest input from employees
4. Align your talent management systems with company practices
5. Build the core leadership at all levels of the organization
Best Practices for Fostering Employee Engagement

Best Practices

1. **Align your hiring and selection process with company culture to ensure a good ‘fit’**
   
   “On a macro basis my response is, ‘Build it in, don't bolt it on.’ To expand on that, my approach is to really understand the ‘value proposition’ and values of the organization. Once you have done that, then you build your HR systems with that in mind. By that I mean that you integrate your values and align them into your hiring and selection processes. You don't just hire people based on their technical skills, you hire the whole person and you assess and validate ‘fit’ as well as skills.” (Herbert)

2. **Have tactics and tools to help everyone build stronger work relationships**
   
   “You need tools and tactics to create healthy relationships. Research shows employees don’t leave jobs or companies, they leave people. Poor relationships at work is what causes people to leave. When you consider the high rates of divorce and people choosing not to marry is it any surprise that our work relationships are poor too. So enhancing employees abilities to grow healthy relationships is key.” (Rembach)

3. **Promote an open atmosphere that encourages honest input from employees**
   
   “Research shows, and our experience validates, that building trust in organizations is the number one way to increase employee engagement. Providing people with challenging work to do and appropriate rewards and recognition go a long way toward the same end. The net of it is that if you treat people with dignity and respect, listen to them and incorporate some of their ideas into the plans and tell the truth about your business, people will outperform others in organizations that ignore these critical things.” (Anderson)

   “Ask employees for their recommendations, and then authorize several of them — not because you think they’re good ideas, but because they think they’re good ideas (and you don't think they’re ‘dangerous’ ideas). If you've already made up your mind as to the course of action you're going to take, don't ask for their recommendations only to ignore them or just pay lip service to them. When staff pushes back on a decision you made (or are considering making) because it is, in truth, a suboptimal decision, modify your decision based on their suggestions and/or chief concerns. Recognize (and reward) people who challenge your decisions in constructive, respectful, well-thought-out ways so that others see you’re impressed with their courageousness, thought leadership and willingness to stand up and be heard, and that you do not ‘shoot the messenger.’ ” (Zweibel)

4. **Align your talent management systems with company practices**
   
   “Ensure that your performance management, reward, training and development and other talent management and deployment systems reinforce your values. Make sure there are no obvious incongruities like ‘What we say is x, what we actually do is y.’ ” (Herbert)
5. Build the core leadership at all levels of the organization

“It's important to note that leadership and employee engagement are directly correlated. It is not possible to have weak leadership in an organization and experience high levels of employee engagement. So building an organization with core leadership strength is important. Realize that either by designation or default, everyone is a leader in an organization. Peers look to peers for examples on how to act and behave as well as looking to the management team. So everybody is a role model and there are no exceptions. Once it's understood that everyone is a leader, then we can come to realize that leadership is not a skill or attribute of the role of leader, but resides in the relationship between the leader and the led. Leadership is a shared responsibility because to have strong relationships everyone must share in the effort.” (Rembach)

“Frontline and middle management are absolutely critical. Mission statements and executive retreats are interesting, but my ‘boss’ controls my worldview. There is an old saying that people join companies, but leave managers. In many cases, a single or limited group of bad managers create 80-plus percent of the turnover and poor morale. We tend to promote people based on technical skills, but engagement is largely about relationships — an inherent skills mismatch. In a very large organization, few interact with the CEO, but they interact with their boss daily. A good boss absent poor base structures (competitive pay, decent working conditions) usually gives you a shot at engagement. A lousy supervisor will rarely overcome the others and will cause turnover even with competitive wages.” (Herbert)

Read the entire discussion, and join the conversation:
http://www.focus.com/questions/human-resources/what-are-your-3-best-practices-fostering-employee-engagement/
Contributing Experts

**John Anderson**
Principal, The Glowan Consulting Group

**Mark Herbert**
Principal, New Paradigms LLC

**Jim Rembach**
Chief Spokesman, Beyond Morale Leadership & Employee Engagement System
http://www.focus.com/profiles/jim-rembach/public/

**Barry Zweibel**
Master Certified Coach, GottaGettaCoach!, Inc.

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Focus Best Practices Reports are designed to help professionals understand business and technology Best Practices for particular topic areas. The Best Practices included in each report are sourced from Focus Experts who have exhibited expertise in the particular topic. Best Practices Reports are designed to be practical, easy to consume and actionable.

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