

Mutiny or Movement – It's Your Choice

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Business leaders have a choice to make. They can foster an employee movement that fuels the companies to greatness – or they can allow ignore, or stifle, the potential of their employee community.

The choice is important now more than ever before. The U.S. Department of Labor recently reported that the “quits rate” (the number of people voluntarily leaving their jobs) is on the rise. And, labor costs are skyrocketing as healthcare costs and regulation increase. Add these trends to the well-established high cost of employee turnover (estimated at \$7,000 per employee in the restaurant industry, for example), and it becomes clear, business leaders need to make a serious commitment to engaging their employees -- or suffer the consequences.

But traditional employee engagement efforts aren't the answer. Today's workforce feels over-worked and underappreciated. Thanks to layoffs and delayed expenditures, people are stretched thin and constantly being asked to do more with less – and they're not being rewarded with more than the fact they have a job. It's a wonder there aren't more stories of insubordination – or insurrections – in the news. A company picnic, CEO blog, and casual Fridays aren't going to quell the rising tide of frustration.

Employees need motivation to go the extra mile even when they're burnt-out – to work for more than a paycheck -- to put the companies' interests ahead of their own. This kind of motivation isn't produced by a top-down, feel-good, flavor-of-the-month program. Instead motivation comes when employees are inspired by a common cause and can participate in efforts to advance the cause through their work. In a word, it comes from a movement.

Movements are powerful ways in which people interact with other people, with culture, and with organizations. Think Lance Armstrong's livestrong. Or the slow food movement.

Movements are also powerful ways people interact with the companies they work for and the jobs they do. Lululemon employees are part of the movement that's making yoga more than just an exercise routine. Zappos employees are on a mission to “Wow” customers. There's a “make flying fun” movement going on among Southwest Airlines employees. Movements are what enable companies like these to thrive and grow.

When it comes to employee movements, the role of a business leader is to inspire, align, and focus their people – and then get out of the way. Leaders who have done this successfully use their brands. They understand their brand explains why they do what they do in a way that gives more meaning to their relationships with customers and employees alike.

They make sure what their brand stands for is crystal clear, they help employees understand why it's important, they give them the information and tools to interpret and reinforce it appropriately, and then they let the movement take off.

When employees see themselves as contributing to a brand purpose that has more substantive and lasting impact, their work is transformed. They see themselves as more than functional cogs in the company wheel and they act accordingly.

They go the extra step for customers and for fellow employees. They do more than their job description requires. They work hard even when no one is watching. They make decisions with the bigger picture in mind.

Employees in a movement collaborate with each other because they enjoy working with people who share the same mission and values. They coordinate their efforts with others because they understand everyone needs to support the movement. They embrace and execute change more effectively because they're invested in the long-term success of the business and they understand the need to evolve. They contribute creative ideas for making the company better so the movement can be advanced.

And they stay. They aren't as easily lured away to other companies by better packages or fancier titles. The movement is what they're working for – and what they're committed to.

There's great power in an employee movement. And now is the time for business leaders to understand and unleash it.