How Employers and Employees Can Increase Employee Engagement — Business Analyst Training

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Employee engagement is a popular buzzword and lack of engagement is a significant issue across the economy. Countless studies show how disengaged employees are, and employers keep investing in tools and strategies to bring people back. Both sides seem to be at a standstill.

For successful employee engagement, managers and employees need to work together to come up with actionable solutions. Keep reading to better understand employee engagement from both perspectives: what a manager sees and how an employee perceives it.

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How Do Employers Approach Employee Engagement?

Employers often create and implement employee engagement plans. However, when both employers and employees have clear expectations of what engagement means and why the company is trying different tactics, then both parties can reach solutions for a better work environment.

What Do Managers Expect from Engaged Employees?

There are several tools, seminars, and workshops to increase employee engagement, but both sides need to understand why they should care about the concept in the first place. Who cares if employees are happy? How does that help the company's bottom line?

From an employer perspective, managers reap what they sow by engaging employees. Jacob Shriar at Officevibe sets out six results employers can expect from engaged employees:

- Higher employee satisfaction.

- Lower turnover rates.

- Reduced absenteeism.

- Increased productivity.

- Increased profitability.

- Increased company loyalty.

Another benefit of having employees who are truly engaged in the company are the intangible culture shifts they create. These employees live the brand and the organization's values. Brand leadership expert Denise Lee Yohn highlights three dimensions of actively engaged employees:

- Personal and emotional commitment. Employees act as brand ambassadors and the company is proud of what they have to say about the organization.

- Understand the brand strategy. Employees base their daily tasks and goals around the brand's vision and proactively take steps to execute it.

- Day-to-day involvement with the brand. All employees, regardless of whether they have customer contact, take steps daily to represent positively and take actions based on company goals.

These intangible effects of engaged employees have tangible results in the form of better recruiting, better project execution and better customer experience.

Both Parties Are Responsible for Employee Engagement

While employers certainly want engaged employees, some aren't sure how to keep their employees engaged or what they can do to track engagement.

Leadership coach Camille Preston, Ph.D., explains that engagement is often perceived as an employer problem. Managers want to reap the benefits, so they need to come up with solutions. However, she believes the burden to communicate also falls on the employee. Some managers or leaders might have blind spots to problems or not know if and when an employee is checking out.

Preston cites research showing that less than 20 percent of current managers have high levels of talent management. Most managers need help on how to provide motivation and will learn this along the way.

However, not everyone agrees that the burden falls on employees to make their workplace better. "To say that an employee is responsible for her own engagement is like arguing that a customer is responsible for their own satisfaction with your product," author and consultant Jason Lauritsen writes at SHRM.

Both Preston and Lauritsen make strong arguments. Employers need to be in tune with their employees, taking steps to track engagement and come up with solutions when problems arise. And employees can help by providing feedback and communicating their issues.

Let Your Employer Know That You're Not Engaged

One of the hardest things employees can do is talk to their employer about difficult issues, especially if it's something personal and reflects job satisfaction. Some employees might even fear for their jobs if their employers know that they're not engaged. However, employee engagement is an important conversation to have.

"When you speak up and say something about your lack of engagement, it can certainly lead to some awkward moments," executive coach Dr. Rick Goodman writes. "On the other hand, if you don't say anything, nothing will change—and that's probably even worse. It means you'll be unengaged; your boss' leadership style will continue to fall short; and the whole team might ultimately suffer."

There are a few approaches you can take to start the discussion professionally without stepping on too many toes. Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic, Ph.D., and Lewis Garrad at Harvard Business Review suggest three ways that employees can tell their managers they need to change their company experiences:

- I need help reaching my full potential. This tells employers that there are tools missing or barriers to your success.

- I need new challenges. This tells employers that you are burned out or bored with your work.

- This role may not be the right fit for me. This shows that you aren't satisfied with your current role and what you do on a day-to-day basis.

Instead of providing just statements of dissatisfaction, career consultant[Jennifer DeRome](#) encourages employees to pair their concerns with suggestions for improvement. Show how these steps are mutually beneficial to both you and the company, and estimate what the effort or cost would be to your manager. This way you don't come off as overly negative or place the burden of [problem-solving](#) entirely on your manager.

How Do Employees Perceive Engagement?

Employers who understand what engages employees and how they can connect with them will have greater employee job satisfaction, productivity and retention success.

While employees can provide feedback to their employers and help management with engagement initiatives, the majority of the engagement burden falls on managers. Employers who understand what engages employees and how they can connect with them will have greater employee job satisfaction, productivity and retention success.

There's a Difference Between Engagement and Perks

Unfortunately, employers often try to put a band-aid on the problem. They invest in easy

solutions that they see companies like Google or YouTube employ, rather than focusing on intangible issues within the organization.

"Engagement is forged with different tools — trust, loyalty, open communication, clearly-articulated goals and expectations, shared values and well-understood reward systems," Talent Culture founder and CEO Meghan Biro writes. "It's about treating employees as humans who are worthy of respect."

Too often, Biro sees companies focus on perks, like breakroom snacks or gaming areas, rather than true employee engagement. Your team members can be just as toxic and miserable in a bean bag chair as a traditional office space.

SnackNation should know. The company delivers healthy snacks to organizations. But eating healthy snacks doesn't mean the mental health of the employees is healthy as well. So they wrote the book on employee engagement and created a guide for their clients to follow.

One of the main points SnackNation highlights is the importance of supporting middle management. While the CEO and senior managers are important, employees have significantly more contact with the people they directly report to each day.

"In most companies middle managers have an even bigger influence on engagement than even senior executives," they write. "They're the ones in the trenches, making daily contact with your employees...and therefore are a critical factor in the effectiveness of your engagement strategy."

What Actually Engages Employees?

If you want to create an employee engagement strategy, then it helps to know what motivates employees and gives them pride in the work that they do.

In an article for Nutcache, Sébastien Boyer, PSPO, describes exactly what keeps your team members happy, regardless of their position within the company:

- The company has a clear vision and concise goals for success.

- Employees and employers both understand these goals.

- There is a clear link between the employee's work and the goals, and they can see how their effort correlates to the success of the business.

- Leadership is present and able to motivate the workforce.

- Managers have the right skills they need to succeed.

While employees appreciate recognition by management for their work, they stay engaged because the recognition shows how they helped the company and made an impact toward the organization's goals. And it's important to note that these goals will change by company, department and team.

Another crucial factor is that even highly engaged departments can have disengaged employees, which makes it necessary to focus on engagement at all levels of the organization.

How Can You Engage Your Employees?

Once you decide to increase employee job satisfaction and engagement, you can start testing different tactics.

Once you decide to increase employee job satisfaction and engagement, you can start testing different tactics. While there are a few steps any company can take to create engagement strategies that appeal to their employees, a punitive approach or one that does not solve an underlying issue is not usually successful.

Too often, employers try to attack the symptoms rather than the problem. For example, they might crack down on employee absenteeism or introduce productivity boosting initiatives. However, if employees aren't engaged, they are likely to ignore these efforts or create other problems for the organization.

Peter Economy, The Leadership Guy at Inc. Magazine, encourages employers to set time aside to solicit employee feedback. Employers need to learn what they are doing wrong (or right) from a management standpoint, and from an operations one.

Remember, this is only valuable if you take steps based on this feedback. Your employees will feel motivated when they know they can be honest with their suggestions and see their ideas put into action.

For example, learning technology provider Valamis gives employees options when it comes to onboarding, company president Mika Kuikka tells ProHabits founder and CEO Adam Fridman. Materials are presented in either a video, written or social format, so new team members can learn in whatever method works from them. The company understands that there are different learning styles and accommodates them. This means that — from the outset — new team members are engaged because they see how the company cares about giving them the right tools to succeed so they can give back to the brand.

Along with different learning styles, employers can learn from the generational differences in their employees. Rob Seay, director of employee experience at Bonfyre, a workplace culture platform, says the modern workplace has as many as five generations of Americans working there. Each has different backgrounds, cultural values and work beliefs: What works for Gen Z might not work for Gen X. Understanding where employees come from and what they value can help brands tailor their engagement strategies.

Tim Eisenhauer, cofounder of Axero Solutions, produced an extensive guide with employee engagement tips. There are 49 ways you can increase employee engagement, or 49 opportunities to test what works for your company and find out what your employees respond to.

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