Fostering employee Engagement

What is Engagement?

How often have we heard the adage, “people are the greatest asset” to an organization. Well, they can be if they are engaged employees. Conversely, disengaged employees can cost a lot of time and money, and negatively impact the entire department and organization. Some studies indicate as many as 50% of all employees are disengaged. Disengagement can result from many factors of the job, the organization and personal life.

There are four basic levels of employee engagement:

- Actively Engaged
  - Take pride in their job, satisfied, proud of organization, clear sense of ownership and purpose

- Engaged
  - Committed to the company, satisfied with their job, proud and feels a sense of purpose in their work

- Not Engaged
  - It’s “just a job”, indifferent to work issues, meet minimum requirements, not proud of organization

- Actively Disengaged
  - Negative attitude, dissatisfied, not interested in company goals, focused only on personal gain

Who is Responsible for Engagement?

Ideally in an organization, instead of relying on Human Resources, there is shared ownership of fostering engagement. Employees control their own engagement, but direct managers, Human Resources and Executive Management all play a vital role in understanding the factors that affect engagement, and ways to keep employees engaged.

The Manager’s Role

As a manager, employee engagement is implicit in your job description, and you play the leading role. You manage the relationships with your individual employees.

There are many activities involved in engagement, and while they are not all encompassing, below are 5 activities to get you started:

- Ask employees, “How satisfied are you with your job?” and “What are your career goals?” Then coach and assist them to develop skills and experience to meet their goals.
- Get to know your employees; pay attention to your direct reports and be proactive if you see signs of disengagement.
- Ask employees, “What do you need from me?”
- Watch for and identify signs of disengagement such as reduced productivity, missed deadlines, change in attitude, lateness or absenteeism.
- Be sure you are engaged; if not, employees will notice and may follow suit.

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The Employee’s Role

As employees you need to choose to be in charge of your own engagement:

› Communicate your skills, interests, goals and values to your managers.
› Ask your manager, “What do you see as my greatest strengths?” and “How can I utilize them in the best interest of the company?”
› Periodically ask yourself, “What are my expectations?” and “How am I meeting those expectations?” Initiate discussions with your managers and welcome coaching.
› Reflect on your expectations – are they realistic?
› Try to recognize if you are becoming disengaged, and if you are get assistance.

Executive Management’s Role

Engagement starts at the top. Thus, executive management has the responsibility to create a culture of employee engagement.

› Set an example -- make engagement a priority and practice it with your direct reports.
› Coach managers on how to maintain engagement and identify disengagement; work to reengage your disengaged managers.
› As executives, continually monitor employee engagement across the organization.
› Be a sponsor and champion of the employee engagement process.
› Consider an employee engagement survey program either in-house or through an outside firm. Expect the results of the survey to be followed by suggestions for specific improvement activities.

Human Resource Department’s Role

The role of Human Resources (HR) is to facilitate the employee engagement process.

› Clarify with managers that employee engagement is an implicit part of their jobs.
› Ask managers which of their employees are engaged and which aren’t. Then assist in resolving employee engagement problems. Always be objective; don’t take sides.
› Coach managers on how to foster employee engagement and suggest methods for improvement.
› Proactively share with executive management which managers are not engaged, and suggest ways to get them reengaged.
› Monitor the employee engagement across the organization and suggest actions the organization can take to make improvements and resolve employee disengagement.

As Jack Zenger says in his book The Extraordinary Leader, “we’ve done several studies on this topic and always find that when you improve employee engagement, you improve customer satisfactions — which then turns into increased revenue.”