

The Power of Employee Engagement

You have probably heard the joke where a manager is asked how many people work in his company and his reply is, "About half of them."

Very funny the first time you hear it but it tends to lose its appeal after about the tenth time. I think I now know why this is the case. The reality is that it is no laughing matter and when you look at the statistics below you will begin to understand just how much time, energy and resources are wasted in Australian organisations.

The Gallop Australian Employee Engagement Survey 2006 delivered the following results:

21% are Engaged Employees

Employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organisation forward.

61% are Not-Engaged Employees

Employees are essentially "checked-out". They're sleepwalking through their workday, putting time –but not energy or passion—into their work.

18% are Actively Disengaged Employees

Employees aren't just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish.

What is going on and what can be done about it?

For several years now, "employee engagement" has been a hot topic in corporate circles. It's a buzz phrase that has captured the attention of HR managers and executives, but very few can articulate what it actually means, let alone implementing solutions to address the issue.

No wonder. It turns out that all that employee engagement research undertaken over the past few years has defined the term differently and, as a result, they have reported different key drivers and implications.

In 2006, The Conference Board published "Employee Engagement, A Review of Current Research and Its Implications". According to this report, twelve major studies on employee engagement had been published over the prior four years by top research firms such as Gallup, Towers Perrin, Blessing White, the Corporate Leadership Council and others. Each of the studies used different definitions and, collectively, came up with 26 key drivers of engagement. For example, some studies emphasised the underlying cognitive issues, others on the underlying emotional issues.

The Conference Board looked across this mass of data and came up with a blended definition and key themes that crossed all of the studies. They define employee engagement as:

"a heightened emotional connection that an employee feels for his or her organisation, that influences him or her to exert greater discretionary effort to his or her work".

At least four of the studies agreed on these eight key drivers:

1. **Trust and integrity** – how well managers communicate and 'walk the talk'.
2. **Nature of the job** –Is it mentally stimulating day-to-day?
3. **Line of sight between employee performance and company performance** – Does the employee understand how their work contributes to the company's performance?
4. **Career Growth opportunities** –Are there future opportunities for growth?
5. **Pride about the company** – How much self-esteem does the employee feel by being associated with their company?
6. **Co-workers/team members** – significantly influence one's level of engagement
7. **Employee development** – Is the company making an effort to develop the employee's skills?
8. **Relationship with one's manager** – Does the employee value his or her relationship with his or her manager?

In all studies, in all locations and within all age groups, it was agreed that the strongest driver was “the direct relationship with one’s manager”.

The challenge for all organisations in Australia is what gets an employee to the stage where they actively become ambassadors for you? We know employee engagement is an issue central to the profitability of an organisation. But with a myriad of personalities, motivations and core values a one size fits all policy to employee engagement is not going to work.

If you would like to know more about employee occupational interests and using Management/Coaching reports to give managers the tools to better relate with their direct reports, please email Mark Purbrick (mark@profiles.net.au)

“...people leave managers.....they rarely leave companies...”