

How can you effectively engage your employees?



By [Lia Marus](#)

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I've said it before and I'll say it again: technology has turned the world we live in upside down. Our communication methods have done a total 180 degree turn thanks to the likes of Facebook and Twitter. In six months, a motor vehicle company can imitate, produce and bring to market a vehicle that another company has only just launched - the turnaround time was once something like six or seven years...

Businesses have found it increasingly difficult to differentiate themselves because technology has made it easier for people to imitate others' products. So when you try to engage your employees, or even attract new employees, you must focus far less on differentiating what you do and more on how you do it because they are focused on differentiated services on a minute-by-minute basis.

What are the nuts and bolts of employee engagement?

People are the DNA of your organisation and in this knowledge economy, says chairman and founder of the virtual works Jonathan Hall, you need to concentrate on retaining your people if you want your business to survive.

According to Gallup's latest report, engaged organisations have:

- A 10% better customer retention rate than other organisations which are not engaged,
- A 21% better productivity level than their rivals,
- 147% better earnings-per-share than their competitors, and
- 90% better growth trends than their competitors.

So there is ample benefit for your bottom line to institute an employee engagement plan!

Why do engaged staff outperform their disengaged counterparts?

At a presentation entitled Aligning and engaging employees for future advantage, Hall offered a very interesting explanation about why engaged employees perform better than their non-engaged counterparts.

He said that when people are excited, happy and feel that they belong in a company, they release a number of chemicals in their brains which make them feel inspired, creative and ready to work. When people feel demotivated and have other negative feelings, they release another set of chemicals in their brains which prompts them to do less work and generally behave like "bad employees".

Over 70% of your staff are not aligned with your company's overall purpose

In addition, says Hall, they do not know what the brand stands for nor do they believe that they have any impact on the company's success or failure.

"It's a bit like telling a soccer team to take the field but only 2.7% of the team are told how the game is played. The rest of the team must run around and sweat like crazy but don't have to get onto the field if they don't want to. But the kicker is that you expect them to go out and win tournaments," says Hall.

Engage employees by tapping into what motivates them

If you base your employee engagement strategy on what motivates them then they will be more inclined to listen and engage with you.

According to the 2010 Gallup study, employees are motivated by the following:

1. At the top of the list, employees want to be connected to what is really going on in the organisation. A company's awards programme means nothing to an employee if it is not connected to what the organisation is trying to achieve.
2. Employees rank having materials and equipment to do the job as number two on the list of motivators. They want to know that their employers value the work they do and the contribution that they can make to the company so much that they will be given every tool possible to make that happen.
3. The opportunities to do what the employees do best,
4. Recognition and praise,
5. Employees want to know that the company cares for them as a person.
6. They want to feel that the company encourages their development and takes their opinions into consideration.
7. Employees want to feel that they are personally connected to the company's goals.
8. Everyone on the team must pull their weight - it can't be one person doing all the work, and
9. Finally, there must be opportunities for growth.

Money doesn't feature anywhere near the top-10 items of what employees are motivated by. In fact it is actually a demotivator as the lack of this commodity actually demoralises people.

An engaged workforce makes teamwork into a smooth operation. Hall puts it best here: "Every single member of a team has got to see that they are important and relevant."

ABOUT LIA MARUS

Lia Marus is the editor of HR Pulse, which is an online HR publication published by ITWeb. She has a BA in French, Italian and Linguistics from UCT, an MA in translation from Wits and a Postgraduate Diploma in Management from the Wits Business School. She is currently studying towards her LLB through Unisa.

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