



How To Improve Your Business Results - Through Your People!

Research consistently shows that higher engagement in the workplace is predictive of improved business performance. So, how do CEOs lift the engagement of their staff to a higher level - throughout the whole of their organisation?

Organisation-wide employee engagement means that **a critical mass** of your people are positive, committed, "in-tune", and likely to act in a way that advances the organisation in the desired direction.

This is a view that strips away the infrastructure of the business, places the focus on the people and aims to capture their hearts and minds to create a high performance culture. This creates the potential for the kind of business results being described in the research¹.

This article explains three areas that will make the difference:

1. **Opportunity - Create the right opportunities for people to engage in the strategic picture**

Often in the discussion of employee engagement, we hear about performance planning, reward systems, training and development, and role and career management, amongst other areas. These are critical, but generally operational and targeted to the individual. This is not enough for higher levels of organisation-wide engagement.

It is important to consider the opportunities for your employees to collectively engage in the bigger strategic picture, i.e. for them to see, explore, interpret and influence what that picture is and why it is.

To create these opportunities is to create a greater sense of purpose and greater shared understanding of what we do and why we do it day-to-day. This is more likely to lead to shared decision-making and activity in line with the intended business strategy, with the benefits flowing into performance levels.

What are the right opportunities to do this?

By being on the path of developing the next chapter in the story of the business. Good examples include:

- A new business strategy, plan or market positioning;
- A brand refresh;
- New corporate values;
- An acquisition/integration situation.

These are the critical decisions that affect everyone's future, and provide exactly the right opportunity to bring your people together to engage in what is happening. They need to feel that they can contribute and with that, validate themselves as part of the picture.



2. **Approach - *Take an approach that challenges your people, and builds-in momentum and innovation***

When taking the opportunity to engage your people in the strategic picture, adopt a team/group-based approach that challenges their creative thinking and logic, and which will create meaningful discussions and memorable experiences. Your people must actively use their own reasoning to draw conclusions about the strategic picture they face and develop their shared understanding of what it means for them individually and as a collective.

The "challenge" approach above demands that your people invest and share more - intellectually and emotionally. The outcome is that your people improve their shared sense of clarity, connection, commitment and ultimately trust. By definition, an improved level of organisation-wide employee engagement has been created. It is this which then underpins a lift in business performance.

Greater benefits again come with an approach that builds-in momentum. This is one that rolls-out to the whole organisation on an accelerated basis, creating a critical mass of people, thinking about the same strategic picture, in a consistent way, at the same time.

The business results can be driven higher still through an approach that builds-in innovation. Tap into your people's creative thinking and interpretation of what needs to happen, and through that, discover hidden areas of potential in the business. It creates the potential for gains in performance unanticipated in the original thinking.

What are the right approaches to be using?

The most effective approaches are those that are based on experiential design, learning by doing, and action learning. They meet the requirements for momentum and innovation, but in particular, dramatically affect what people, one year on, can recall and retain of the experience. This is fundamental to them taking the right kinds of action.

Using the right approaches generates percentage-levels of recall that generally head into the mid-seventies and above (compared to traditional "roadshow" style information slide shows and other normal approaches, that have far lower results).

This describes a critical mass of people, moving in the same direction - vital to sustained organisation-wide engagement.

3. **Leadership - *Lead from the top, for today and tomorrow***

Higher and sustained organisation-wide employee engagement will not occur without leadership happening at the right time and place. There are three key stages: Before, During and After:

Before: Organisation-wide employee engagement truly belongs on the CEO's agenda, not with any particular function or department. It is the CEO's responsibility to lead the organisation through the kind of decision-making necessary to create the opportunities to engage the people in the strategic picture and to adopt a "challenge" approach.

During: The opportunity and approach taken for driving organisation-wide employee engagement won't have total credibility, meaning and impact without the right leadership. It is critical that the



leadership team is seen to be participating. This visibility signals the right level of commitment and importance, and truly demonstrates that what is being predicated as a shared process, actually is, across the whole organisation.

After: Leadership is fundamentally critical for "what happens next". Once the engagement has been lifted, the challenge is to keep the momentum going. The leadership role is to trigger the memories and stories, and provide the reinforcement and belief in the experience and the conclusions.

What is the right kind of leadership?

It is the kind of leadership that is comfortable in creating the time and space for people to go through *their* process of discovery, without the leader's feeling the need to tell the people what to do, or what their conclusions should be.

This draws on particular aspects of leadership:

- Being able to provide inspiration;
- Being passionate about the business;
- Being a catalyst, a guide and a guardian.

There is nothing better than exuding energy and enthusiasm for what the business is and where it is heading, yet allowing others their space to also do the same.

Conclusion

Strip away the buildings, furniture and equipment, and what else is your "organisation" but your people? They have the knowledge, ideas, personalities, values, attitudes and behaviours that make your organisation tick.

Creating organisation-wide engagement is about tapping into and influencing this, getting to the core of the organisation, and capturing the hearts and minds of your people. It is no surprise that it can drive the kinds of results described in the research mentioned at the beginning of this article.

Are you taking organisation-wide employee engagement as far as you can? Take a look at the Opportunity, Approach and Leadership and see what you find to engage *your* heart and mind.

1. GALLUP Management Journal, <http://gmj.gallup.com>, "Investors, Take Note: Engagement Boosts Earnings", release date 14 June 2007, and "Return on Investment in Engaging Employees", release date 1 November 2007

Richard Jones, Director of Design at Manage By Design. At Manage by Design we develop innovative engagement tools that get people together to actively explore what your initiative is all about, what it means to them, and what they can do to support it. In the end, you will find that your people will be engaged in your business in a way you didn't think possible. For further information - Phone: +61 3 9629 6680; Email: richard.jones@managebydesign.com.au or visit the Web site: www.managebydesign.com.au First published: 28 March 2008. Last updated: 28 March 2008.