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How to increase employee engagement

It's easy to see how a happy and motivated workforce can help businesses achieve higher levels of performance. But how do you create a highly engaged organisation in the first place?

The good news is that, although the route may be challenging at times, creating a culture that in creases employee engagement can be done simply and at minimal cost. Engagement is largely related to how individuals feel within their roles. The easiest and most direct way to increase engagement is to modify the way individual jobs and teams are organised.

Essentially, there are three drivers of engagement at an individual job level:
- Job autonomy – the amount of independence and trust staff have at work
- Task variety – the complexity and variety within the tasks and sequences of tasks staff complete in their roles
- Job significance – the value staff perceive they have to the organisation and to others

From the above, it can be seen that increasing engagement at an individual level doesn't mean increased financial investment. Any business can review and change the way jobs are done without incurring extra cost. What is required – and this costs nothing – is a genuine desire to involve staff and a willingness to place trust in employees. Sadly, this last point is where many well-meaning organisations fall short.

However trust and engagement can be developed with a few simple steps.

1. Ask employees for their input and then act on it.

The first two areas, *autonomy* and *variety*, can be improved by asking staff for help. This tells them you care and encourages them to become masters of their own destiny. Asking employees to evaluate their jobs and think of ways to improve productivity, performance or job satisfaction will immediately get them thinking proactively.

Implementing their suggestions is personally rewarding process for employees, and incremental improvements in the way jobs are done will translate into significant benefits.

2. Give detailed feedback on performance at all levels

Job significance is determined by an employee's perception of their role and its impact. Too often, employees turn up for work but have no idea how their role fits into the overall picture. Simply explaining this link will help them understand – and value – their contribution more clearly.

For example, helping a customer services team member understand how complaints become lost customers, and explaining the value of each retained customer, creates a direct correlation between their job and the performance of the business.

If the team's year-end bonus is then linked to prompt resolution of complaints, customer services staff will soon appreciate their potential to impact the business. The goal should be for all employees to understand how their actions affect your business and its customers.

3. Get the basics right

There are a number of areas you can easily address to encourage greater engagement. These are:

- Have a clear organisational structure and reporting lines
- Be clear about the responsibilities and impact of each job within your business
- Let staff provide input and control over their working environment and how their job is done
- Reward staff equitably, in line with the market rate
- Recruit the right people with the right attitude into the right roles
- Manage performance fairly and appropriately
- Give staff good feedback on their performance and recognise those who put in extra effort
- Offer good training that is relevant to jobs and provides real development opportunities

Setting up a business is one thing, but becoming expert in employee engagement is a whole different ballgame. Any business will have owners or managers who are expected to multi-task, and essentially, handle areas that they are not especially experienced in. This is one where there are cost effective gains to be made.