

Employee engagement creates mutual bond

By LEIGH BRANHAM
Guest Columnist

Many companies still conduct employee "satisfaction" surveys in spite of research that for years has demonstrated that some of the most satisfied employees are the least productive.

Other organizations administer "commitment" surveys that ask whether the employee intends to stay in the organization. The problem with intent to stay, of course, is that many employees who plan to stay do not necessarily plan to perform at their best. As the saying goes, "some quit and leave — others quit and stay."

In other words, many stay and don't commit. Polls of the American work force consistently show that only about one-quarter to one-third describe themselves as: a. happy in the job/environment; b. planning to stay; and c. giving their best.

When the recession of 2001 set



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in, more businesses shifted their concern to getting the most out of every remaining employee. As a result, we have a new term in the management lexicon — "employee engagement" — that combines and connotes the concepts of satisfaction, commitment to excellent performance and intent to stay.

To engage is "to attract and hold," so it is a fitting word to describe attempts by many employers to create a voluntary mutual bond. To engage is also to "engross and occupy," implying a worker who is interested in the work and in creating positive outcomes. In other words, an engaged worker is "in gear," bringing body, mind and heart to the work.

Workers become more engaged when certain working conditions are present in the environment:

- Demonstrated business success, with a clear, compelling and credible plan for sustaining success.
- Growth and development opportunities.
- Opportunities for teamwork and friendship.

- Managers who coach, care and give feedback.

- Senior leaders worthy of trust and confidence.

- A culture of open communication, caring and respect.

- A job that fits.

Our firm recently developed a new work force engagement survey for use with client organizations. This survey measures employees' perceptions of the degree these seven factors exist in the organization. Employees lucky enough to receive these all too rare working conditions from their employers are simply going to be more engaged and productive than their less fortunate friends and relatives who work for less-committed employers.

Conversely, employees begin to disengage and withhold effort when they find their employers lacking in these seven areas. Managerial mindsets such as "if you don't like it here, don't let the door hit you in the backside on your way out" or "turnover is just the cost of doing business" don't help the situation.

Many company leaders believe that workers will soon hold the cards once again as the economy continues to improve. So, they are

trying to eradicate these outdated mindsets among the management ranks. They treat every avoidable and regrettable turnover as a loss to be analyzed. And they are willing to make the first move by creating conditions that maximize engagement.

Engaged employees are by definition more productive, thereby raising the productivity level of the organization. Imagine if your business could increase its percentage of engaged employees from 30 percent to 50 percent? What impact would that have on your bottom line?

An employee engagement survey gives a company the opportunity to set a baseline measure of employee engagement, then work to increase engagement scores in various units by whatever percentage it cares to set as a goal. With so many companies intent on becoming "employers of choice," the employee engagement survey is a tool whose time has come.

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