

6 MYTHS OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

THROWING MORE MONEY AT IT DOESN'T BUY TRUE BUY-IN

With today's global ability to produce carbon-copy technology and business models, people truly are a company's only competitive advantage. Businesses that want to optimize their competitive talent advantage focus on employee engagement strategies that improve overall workforce productivity and return on staffing investments.

A major disruption to employee engagement is the adverse impact of the unhappiness epidemic across

many companies. When employees are disengaged or disenfranchised with their work situation, performance plateaus or greatly diminishes. When there is awareness about what causes unhappiness at work, a company can do something about it.

Studies have shown that the drivers of employee engagement have everything to do with how an employee feels about work and feels at work. It begins with the employee feeling connected and invested in the company's mission and direction, and continues

with the employee having trust in the company's leadership.

The first step in creating and inspiring engagement in the workforce is to debunk the pervasive and misleading myths about employee engagement. There are six myths disrupting companies' ability to keep people engaged.

1. A FLEXIBLE WORK ENVIRONMENT FOSTERS PRODUCTIVITY

While remote work opportunities reduce the carbon footprint and avert hours wasted in traffic, more often than not companies do a poor job of looping remote workers into the day-to-day activities of the business. A typical adverse impact of remote work for the employee is "out of sight, out of mind." Research shows that remote and flex time workers receive less coaching and mentoring and miss out on the institutional knowledge-sharing and socialization that happens in a shared workspace.

2. STRONG PAYCHECKS = STRONG LOYALTY

Not all people are primarily motivated by money, and more often than not, fair and sustainable pay is not a motivator — it is a table stake. For years, company leaders have approached solving the employee retention problem through monetary rewards and incentives. While this economic motivator works for 20 percent of the population, most organizations are finding that employee spiffs and salary increases alone aren't

enough to reverse the turnover trend.

For 80 percent of the working population, money is not a lever that leads to engagement and buy-in. Forty percent of people want workplace rewards in terms of more educational opportunities, rewarding and challenging projects and a sense that they can further their knowledge and career path as a result of working with a specific company or in a certain role.

The other 40 percent of workers want to feel emotionally connected to the mission and service of the organization and to the customers they serve. Increasing customer-facing opportunities is more rewarding than a few extra bucks in the paycheck or a gift card for coffee.

If money is the only mechanism to get people to stay, it leads to bidding wars between current and future employers.

3. EMPLOYEE INDEPENDENCE IS NECESSARY

One pervasive myth is that all employees need autonomy and independence, and the more hands-off that management is, the better the employee will perform.

The reality is that not everyone values autonomy and independence. To one employee, being left alone can be a true benefit and they may thrive when left up to their own devices. To others, it is a recipe for feeling disconnected, isolated and ignored.

4. A JOB IS JUST A JOB

Today's workers, and human beings in general, are much more evolved and present to work life fulfillment than ever before. Employees today fundamentally want and need much more than a job for a paycheck. A striking majority of workers have said they want pur-

pose and meaning in the work they do, and that they feel happier when they know that what they do matters to the success of the organization.

5. EMPLOYEES SHOULD BE SATISFIED WITH THEIR CURRENT POSITION

High-performing people need to see a pathway for themselves in their role and in their company. Research shows that when people see a pathway for their growth and development, they provide a higher level of consistent results for the team. When

CONTINUED ON PAGE 54



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CONTINUED ON PAGE 54



employees feel that a company is invested in their growth, they are more committed to their role and more connected to how they impact the success of the company.

6. YOUR COMPANY IS ENOUGH TO KEEP THEM

The sixth myth is that loyalty to the company and brand is enough to keep employees engaged and retained. It has become painfully apparent over the last decade that people don't leave companies — they leave managers. When a good employee does not have a strong relationship with their manager, no incentive or brand loyalty will keep the employee fully engaged.

People need to feel appreciated, respected, acknowledged and important. When their manager does

not provide meaningful assignments, regular feedback and mentoring, engagement is thwarted.

While all of these perceived solutions are good ideas as components of an effective employee engagement program, alone they are insufficient to drive employee connection and engagement. When carrots like money, time off, autonomy and career path are not coupled with alignment and good people management, those incentives wind up costing companies millions and derive little to no benefit in the long run.

A well thought out, conscious employee engagement program considers who people are as individuals, and allows for customization in the approach to assigning work and giving feedback. Individualization

is a 21st century shift from the one-size-fits-all management of the 80's. A main component of a well-built employee engagement program includes a highly competent management team who embraces coaching and mentoring their people.

When a manager takes the time to offer professional development opportunities, communicate how the employee's role contributes to the organization's success and provide rewards for great performance, employees feel valued and appreciated and engagement soars. 

Magi Graziano, CEO of Conscious Hiring and Development, has 20 years of experience helping firms create high-performance teams. Visit www.KeenAlignment.com.



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