

Good managers create environment for staff to be engaged

Just this week I spoke to a group of the top 100 supervisors, managers and executives of a manufacturing and distribution company. I asked, “How many of you are good at recognizing employees and showing genuine appreciation when they do a good job ... *and* you do it often enough?”

I scanned the audience. One hand went up—literally, only one of 100.

As human beings, we love recognition. Whether we want to admit it, recognition plays a huge role in our happiness and well-being, at work and in our personal relationships. Giving and receiving recognition encourages contentment and productivity. Yet as supervisors, managers and leaders, we are horrible at recognition at work, both giving it and receiving it.

It’s not like that with everything. Think about how natural it is to recognize achievements in your kids, grandkids, nieces and nephews, etc. For example, imagine the life of little Johnny.

When little Johnny is a year old and takes his first steps, what do you do? Praise him like crazy.

When little Johnny gets a bit older, gets on a bike and takes off on his own, what do you do? Praise him like crazy.

When Johnny brings home his first report card with good grades, what do you do?

Again, you praise him like crazy. Why? Because he was successful, and since you want to nurture that success and see more of it, you recognize it and show encouragement when Johnny does well.

Next, Johnny gets involved in extracurricular activities. Maybe he takes up an instrument, plays a sport or joins the theater group. He has more successes, and what do you do? Provide the recognition he craves and deserves. Even if he’s not very successful, you still find something to praise him about: “Johnny, so what if you struck out three times at the plate? Your bat speed was incredible.” This helps him grow and become a better human, a more productive member of society.

Johnny goes off to college, and the trend continues. He regularly receives recogni-



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tion for his efforts and results. After college, Johnny gets his first job. Wait: First he moves back into your house, and then he gets his first job. That’s when something strange starts to happen (as if moving back home isn’t strange enough).

Johnny enters the work world, where the words “good” and “job” are rarely used together and phrases such as “Way to go!” are few and far between. In fact, most supervisors, managers and executives ration praise as if there is a shortage of it.

Consider how demotivating it must be to generation after generation entering the workforce when expectations and an inherent need for praise and acknowledgment are consistently denied. Is it any surprise that we are suffering from an engagement crisis with two-thirds of the workforce not engaged or actively disengaged at work? Look that up with Google; it’s horrifyingly true!

So what does it mean to be engaged? It’s quite simple. If someone is engaged at work, that person is motivated and committed to act in the best interest of your company.

Here is the big fallacy: Sometimes managers and leaders believe it’s their responsibility to motivate others at work, but the reality is that as a manager or leader, you can’t motivate anyone at work in a sustainable way. Your job is to *create the environment* where employees can tap into their intrinsic motivation and become more committed.

Don’t think for a minute that money drives performance and motivation, because it doesn’t. Also, don’t get tricked by rewards-focused companies into believing that rewards drive performance or a more engaged workforce. This, too, is simply not true. Yet it is true that everyone wants

a more engaged workforce.

So what will help create an engaged workforce?

More than seven decades of research shows there are three main factors promoting motivation and commitment in the workforce:

- Feeling respected for doing a good job.

- Relationship with my boss.

- Understanding how I make a difference (having a purpose at work).

Even with voluminous research and proof, there is still a chasm between what has been proven decade after decade and what business leaders and managers actually do. I call this the strategic recognition chasm, and it should and can be closed. Too many managers have a rewards-based mentality and operate from assumptions about performance that are outdated, not challenged enough, even untrue.

The reality is that cash or reward incentives will not motivate people in sustainable ways. Motivation is intrinsic. As a leader, you cannot motivate people using bonuses, tchotchkes or other rewards. It doesn’t work—never has, never will.

We’re conditioned to think of rewards and recognition as a pair that must go together, but in fact quite often they don’t. I am not suggesting you should recognize people and forget about the reward. I am suggesting that your company will get much greater value out of the power of recognition and much less from the actual rewards and that the two don’t need to go together to be optimally effective.

The art and science of capturing and sharing successes in a strategic way is about tying recognition to specific actions and results. It’s not only about showing appreciation. It’s about capturing the specific behavior and the resulting business benefit and sharing it in a way that others in the company can learn from.

As a leader and manager, if you want a more engaged workforce, then take ownership of doing what you can to create an environment where employees can become more motivated and committed. Begin by taking five minutes a week to positively

recognize an employee for “living the brand,” demonstrating the values or delivering great service, and share it with others. Do it, get others around you to do it, watch the culture change over time and

enjoy a more engaged workforce.

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