

Coaching for Engagement

Tap into your employees' discretionary energy and efforts.



by Beverly Kaye and Beverly Crowell

COMPANIES SPEND MILLIONS ASKING employees how they feel about work. *Are you satisfied? Does your boss communicate with you daily? Do you support the company mission and values?*

Sadly, many companies compile the data, report back, and check engagement off the *to do list* without changing how employee's feel about their work, their boss, or the company. Engagement and retention require a sustained one-on-one effort by everyone who manages people to get at the heart of what really matters to employees.

Organizations spend big money on surveys, and then build processes and procedures to sustain employee engagement. These plans create new programs, policies and some short-term victories, but rarely *change leader's behaviors*.

For example, one company heard from employees that *lack of career development opportunities* is a key dissatisfier. A team was assembled to address the problem, and an *employee career resource center* was created. Great news, except for the employee who asked his boss if he could go to the center and heard, "You don't have time for that. You need to get the work done at your desk."

For such leaders, *engagement and retention* are defined as the annual satisfaction survey and the *tedious action plan* that has to be created as a result. All the best plans will fall short if they aren't supported. That's where *coaching for engagement and retention* can create a sustained and measurable difference.

Disengaged workers, those who *quit but stay*, cost organizations *billions of dollars annually* in lost productivity, turnover, and reduced quality and safety. The task of re-engaging them falls on the leadership team. While many leaders know the importance of engaging their talent, the "how" and "all that soft, fuzzy stuff" are often left up to the HR team. After all, isn't that their job?

Coaching *leaders* on engagement and retention reduces the risk and empow-

ers leaders to tap into their employee's discretionary effort and bring that energy to work. When coaching is directed at these issues, it helps leaders find meaningful ways to engage their talent beyond the everyday distractions.

Skilled engagement coaches understand the *unique employee engagement and retention challenges* of each leader. Surveys provide a great place to begin analysis since leaders can learn about the engagement needs of their team; however, true value comes from frequent conversations. *Surveys set the tone, but conversations set the direction.*

Leaders have a big impact in retaining and engaging people. Employees want this relationship. They feel *engaged* by their work and *cared for* by their leaders when they have open, honest, two-way conversations about their ideas, careers, motivations, and challenges.

They need leaders who listen (more than once a year) to their perspectives, offer their own points of view, and provide encouragement, guidance and opportunities. When individuals *feel understood and valued* by their leader, they commit more of their energy and enthusiasm.

Engagement builds or diminishes in every interaction between leaders and employees. *Purposeful engagement is the ability to focus on employee talent in every interaction with employees.* You don't necessarily have to *do more* to engage your employees, but you need to *commit to specific actions that meet the engagement needs of each employee.*

Once a leader accepts this responsibility, the engagement coach can serve as a resource to generate ideas and provide questions that can be asked so that leaders learn more about what matters to their employees. The coach also works with the leader to explore the difference between *engagement and performance*. Leaders and employees tend to talk about *performance*—but what *engages* us is different and personal. Engagement conversations get to the true motivations of each employee.

If an employee wants more options to learn and grow, try this:

- *Conduct a career conversation* to learn more about their unique skills, inter-

ests, and values. Offer your perspective, discuss trends and options, and co-design a career action plan.

- *Link people to others* who can help them achieve their professional goals.

- *Take time to mentor your employees.*

Share your success stories and failures.

Teach organizational realities and let employees mentor you too.

If an employee doesn't feel valued, build loyalty by trying the following:

- *Recognize employees* for a job well done. Offer praise that is specific, purposeful, and tailored to each person.

- *Notice your employees.* As you walk the halls, say hello to them by name.

- *Get honest feedback.* Get a clear picture of how you look to others. Do you have any high-risk behaviors that may be getting in the way of your efforts?

If your employees want to work in a place they love, try these ideas:

- *Have fun at work.* Do something new or different, or create a culture where it's okay to laugh and smile.

- *Show enthusiasm for what you do* (it will enthruse others). Disengaged leaders won't engage their people.

- *Align your values with your work.* You will then find it meaningful, pur-

poseful and important.

Much of *coaching for engagement* revolves around *common sense approaches* to good leadership. One approach, the *stay interview* (before the dreaded *exit interview*), asks "what can I do to keep you?" providing data managers need.

Beyond providing insight to leaders, the coaching partnership can motivate leaders need to do what they know should be done. Leaders with engagement coaches often remark that the coaching reminds them to put these common-sense strategies into practice.

Success happens when leaders assume the role of *engagement coaches*. While leaders can be *catalysts* for engagement and retention, employees must step up to identify what actions they can take to find more satisfaction at work.

The *coaching relationship* goes beyond what a coach can do to grow the leader to what the coach can do to grow the organization. Done well, coaching for engagement and retention creates leaders who think of their talent first and employees who commit to bringing the best of their capabilities to work. LE

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ACTION: Start coaching for engagement.