

### The 3 R's of Engaging Employees© 2008

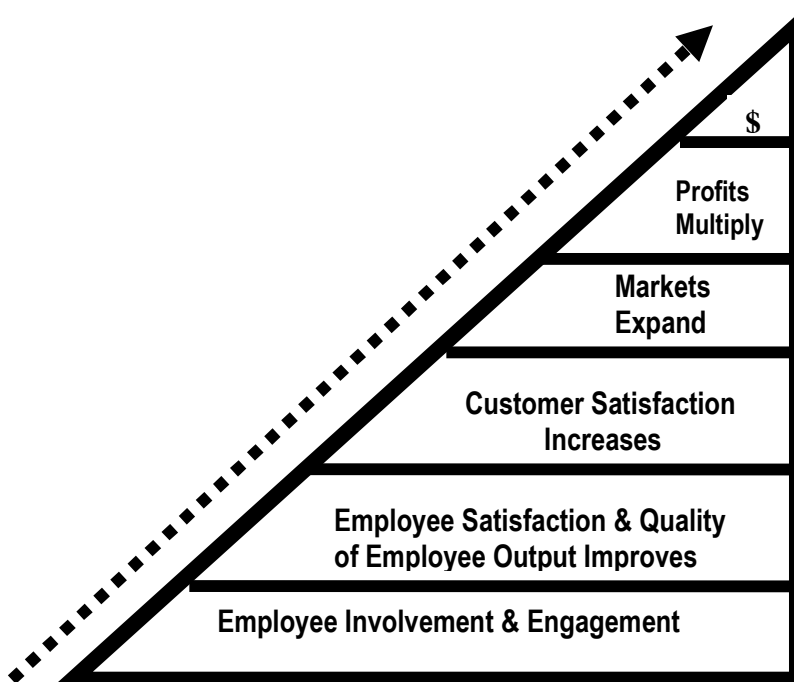
One of the most significant issues that companies must understand and address is employee *engagement*. To begin discussing this topic some critical questions need be asked and *answered*.

First, what is engagement? Each organization needs to ask “how do we define engagement as it relates to the corporate culture”? Second, “what is our corporate culture”? And based on an honest answer to this second question, “how successful is our culture in today’s market”? (Perhaps these last two questions should be asked first!)

In the May issue of T&D, Salvatore V. Falletta writes that engagement is a multidimensional concept that is measured on three levels – cognitive (what employees think – rational commitment to and beliefs about the organization), affective (how employees feel about the organization – their emotional attachment and connection to job, managers, coworkers) and behavioral (how employees act – the discretionary energy and effort exerted).

Based on Falletta’s definition and other research, **LOS** believes engagement is a foundational piece of the Effective Business Pyramid. Employee engagement leads to improved employee satisfaction and quality output. This in turn increases positive productivity which directly contributes to customer satisfaction growing. When customer satisfaction grows, markets expand and profits multiply.

### Effective Business Pyramid



Understanding the significance of employee engagement lends itself to this hypothesis: the inherent problem with any employee survey is that it occurs *after* the employee has been hired. So a different fundamental yet systemic approach (the 3 R's if you will) needs to be taken. Engagement must start at **recruitment**, continue as the employer is working to assure **retention** of satisfied and productive employees, and be a primary consideration when designing and developing **recognition/reward** systems.

**Recruitment** – You have an opening and need to fill it. During the initial contact and all consequent conversations, recruiters and interviewers must be honest with the prospective employee. The exact job requirements and responsibilities must be clearly communicated. These should include working hours, as well as overtime requirements, and flexible work arrangements. This is a great time to communicate your company's culture. (*“Our expectation is that people will work overtime when required. We are deadline driven and expect people to keep pace. We pay for performance. We're all team players here! And we don't promote anyone the first year.”*)

Your company may need to reevaluate the interview questions that are asked. Design the questions so that you will be able to get answers that will assist you in truly matching a candidate with the job? Effective interviews help the candidate decide if this is the right job for him/her too. (*Why hire an aeronautical engineer to supervise in a manufacturing environment? The education and skill set do not match the responsibilities of the job.*)

You may also need to reevaluate the team members who are conducting the interview. Will they be directly working with the candidate? Can they answer questions about the day-to-day requirements? Allow the candidate to speak with current employees.

The bottom-line, if you want to engage people, do it from the very start. Recruitment is a large expense to a company. Why not minimize this expense by maximizing the effectiveness of this process. Start hiring employees who have realistic expectations and will want to remain with the company.

Tips:

1. Be honest about the job requirements and your culture. Don't promise things you can't deliver.
2. Allow the candidate to speak with current employees.
3. Use interview questions that will help you better understand and evaluate the candidate's ability to do the job as well as the cultural fit.
4. Be careful about hiring people who are overqualified for the position.
5. Have the proper people conduct the interview.

**Retention** – Okay, you've hired the person. Your company expects the employee to assume the responsibilities of the job. **However, it** is imperative that the company lives up to the agreement with the employee. In other words, is the job actually the one that was promised to the employee? If the employee becomes disenchanted immediately, he/she becomes disengaged quickly. Remember the three levels of engagement: cognitive (*what are these new employees thinking about the company?*); affective (*how do they feel about the integrity and fairness of the manager? What do they feel about their co-workers?*), and behavioral (*what energy is being*

*expended?)* Conduct a conversation with the new employee in the first few weeks. Don't wait until the employee becomes disengaged.

As important as engaging and retaining new employees is, retention of current quality employees should also be a significant focus for any organization. Coach and develop your people. Learn about their skills and talents. Ask questions and listen. *“What do you like best about your current position or assignment? What do you like the least? What talents do you have that aren't being used? What development opportunities would you like to take advantage of?”*

Intelligent and self-motivated employees who become disengaged will begin spending their time either complaining about the company or looking for another position which would better match their expectations. This position may be external. The constant movement of people can be very devastating to the morale of other employees. Therefore, one employee's disengagement can spiral into many people becoming disengaged.

Ironically, when there is a widespread level of discontent/disengagement, employers will say that morale is low. Morale is usually correlated to productivity. Quite simply if my attitude is positive, I am more likely to extend productive effort. Companies try to measure morale by traditional employee surveys. When the results come back with low scores *effective and wise leaders generally ask questions to fix the problem while ineffective leaders place blame to supposedly stop the problem.* Therefore in low-trust cultures fear of recrimination prevents people from answering honestly and invalidates many of the survey results. The root cause is never discovered or discussed. The negative cycle is perpetuated.

Turnover is expensive. Losing people has many indirect and direct costs. Retaining engaged employees increases the company's profits. This is validated in studies by companies who are now using Evidence-Based Human Resources (linking human capital to business performance).

Tips:

1. Be true to your word – give the candidate the job that he/she interviewed for! If you promised a promotion within a certain amount of time, keep your word or explain the reason for not giving the promotion.
2. Coach and develop people. Learn about their skills and talents and utilize appropriately.
3. Ask employees what they want and listen. You do not have to give people everything they desire, but be ready to justify your decisions.
4. If you use a climate survey to get input, understand that a low-trust culture will not always yield truthful answers.
5. Empower people to do their jobs and make decisions. Make changes to create a climate that motivates people to exert more energy and effort.

**Recognition/reward** – *“Define recognition. Now define reward. What makes you want to stay with a company?”* Asking these three simple questions at the interview may give insight concerning the prospective employee.

The flip side is explaining how your company defines and demonstrates recognition and reward. What programs are in place? What type of informal recognition is used on a regular basis? Be as specific as you can. This helps either engage people from the initial contact, or it may be the end of the interview because the candidate sees no future in the relationship.

Asking your current employees the same three questions is critical too. Different generations (matures, boomers, X's, and millennials) have different motivators. For some people job security is fundamental. Others may be motivated by power and promotion. Some employees are motivated by the satisfaction of personal achievement while other employees seek a rich work/life balance. Get to know your employees and personalize their recognition and rewards as much as possible.

Take time to evaluate your current reward system. Use a three step approach: collect data through valid/reliable surveys, focus groups, and conversations with employees. Next analyze the information. Don't criticize or ignore the answers. Then ask for suggestions from your employees to develop recognition and reward processes that are meaningful.

Tips:

1. Understand that one size doesn't fit all. Ask your employees to define recognition and reward. Find out what makes that person want to stay at a company.
2. Listen to the answers without judgment. Personalize the recognition.
3. Ask for employees' input in designing and implementing reward systems

The 3 R's of Engagement is a systemic approach to success. It starts with **Recruitment**, is maintained through **Retention** and is a primary consideration when designing and developing **Recognition/reward** systems.