

CORPORATED MANAGEMENT / HUMAN RESOURCES

PAPER: THE STAR (CLASSIFIEDS)

DATE: 28 AUGUST 2012

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IT USED to be that the biggest staffing issue managers had to deal with was turnover. As long as people stayed with the organisation, most managers felt they were doing their job effectively.

At the same time, senior management was satisfied if turnover was kept to an acceptable standard, preferably just below industry average.

Today, the real issue is engagement — finding a way to get staff to do more than just turn up to work physically and do the bare minimum.

It's about finding ways to engage them mentally and emotionally so that they put in that something extra which will lead to extra productivity and extra profits.

There has been a lot of research done on defining what it means to be engaged but not much work has been done on identifying the personal qualities that impact on whether corporate engagement initiatives will be successful.

Can everyone be engaged? Is it just a matter of putting in place the right culture and letting it happen?

I believe that a person's level of "engageability" is one of the most important factors in creating an engaged workforce but it is generally overlooked by researchers.

All the emphasis seems to be on how managers can extract the discretionary effort that is hiding inside each person — but what if there is nothing to work with? What if the person is not engageable to begin with?

Look for a sign

No matter how effective you are as a manager, I don't believe that you can get an employee to be engaged at work if he isn't engaged anywhere else in his life.

I believe there is a direct link between one's personal and professional life when it comes to engagement.

If you have on your team someone who goes through the motions of life, someone who is always watching from the sidelines rather than getting involved, someone who lacks motivation for anything, how can this person suddenly become engaged at work?

At the heart of engagement is passion, which can be defined simply as "an intense interest in something".

It's about being attracted to, involved in and engrossed by something that interests you. It can start in any aspect of your life and then be transmitted elsewhere.

However, this can also be true of a lack of engagement. Dissatisfaction in one part of your life can affect your attitude towards

Can you be engaged?

Having other interests outside work is a sign that the person can be motivated to do better.

everything else.

You need to find ways to look for signs of engageability when you hire people. Here is a checklist of questions to consider asking next time you are recruiting:

- Do the candidates have hobbies and interests they are actively involved in?
- How do they describe their previous achievements?
- Do they seem to get involved in pursuits like sport or community service?
- What personal goals are they working towards?
- When was the last time they got really excited about something?

If the candidate seems to be giving "standard" answers to these questions, delve further.

What you want to see is whether they get genuinely excited and passionate about something because that passion can be transferred to their work situation given the right conditions.

With existing employees, you need to be able to tell if someone is just disengaged because of his current circumstances or whether he has never been engaged in the first place, at work or anywhere else.

Why not add some extra questions to your regular performance review discussions to see if you can uncover their passions?

Perhaps you also need to encourage some people to work fewer hours and use the time to rediscover their passion for life.

In the short term, it may seem unproductive, but in the long term, assisting an employee to reignite his passion for life will bring its rewards.

How about yourself?

Finally, to address what I think is the most important aspect of engageability, you need to ask yourself: Are you, their manager, engaged in your own life?

Disengagement among managers often begins with the way people are traditionally chosen for a management role: taking the most technically competent ones and turning them into managers, whether they



Encourage people to work fewer hours and use the time to rediscover their passion for life. - AP

like it or not.

The truth is, they don't always have the right skill set or the desire to be a manager.

At the same time, there could be technically less brilliant people who would actually make great managers but they aren't considered because senior management are working from the wrong mindset.

Part of the problem is the company needs ways to motivate and reward its best technical performers who have reached the top of the ladder, and moving into management has traditionally been seen as the next step.

You can't give to others what you haven't got yourself, so if you are wondering why your people aren't engaged despite your best attempts, it might be time to take a

look in the mirror.

If you re-engage yourself, then you may well find that engaging your staff becomes a whole lot easier.

So instead of investing time, money and energy into more and more engagement initiatives that may have questionable outcomes, I suggest you go back to basics and determine if the people on your team have the basic DNA of engagement: engageability.

It could well unlock the secret to releasing discretionary effort at work. - Singapore Straits Times/Asia News Network

● ARTICLE by Karen Schmidt, an award-winning speaker, workshop leader and facilitator with Training Edge International.