

ATLANTA BUSINESS CHRONICLE: CULTURE OF TRUST KEY TO KEEPING TOP TALENT

Article by Cindy Lubitz, inTalent Consulting Group

Open communication is the key to creating a sustainable workplace culture where trust grows. Transparency builds trust. Dialogue builds trust. Implement a communication plan that tells your team what you know and what they need to know to excel. The more trust you create with your employees, the more commitment you generate in your workplace.

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“Dunder Mifflin Scranton.” If you’re smiling, you recognize this fictional workplace from “The Office” television show where the hilarious characters and the bumbling boss, Michael Scott, make us laugh. We know his intentions are good, even if his actions are silly. We can relate — knowing what it’s like to belong to one team, while wishing we were on an entirely different team.

We’ve all experienced moments of deep commitment to our company, only to feel like quitting at other times. What changed?

Knowing what causes employees to disconnect and re-engage is one of the most important management challenges business owners face today. As a consultant who helps organizations transform the way they hire and manage talent, I often help leaders keep employees engaged to maximize productivity and retain top performers.

Whether you’re running a small company or leading a large department in a global enterprise, you face the same challenges and opportunities in maintaining a motivated workforce. How do you keep your employees connected and engaged during these uncertain times?

In today’s do-more-with-less workplace, this challenge provides a vital opportunity for leaders. Now is the perfect time to connect the head and the heart at work.

FUSING GENERATIONS

We have four generations working together for the first time in our history. This fusion of cultures means employees have different perspectives and motivations. While once it was fashionable to live for work, today’s workplace must balance work and life with a greater acceptance of individuals’ goals and preferences.

Employee engagement requires an individualized approach driven by line managers with less top-down communication from senior executives and headquarters. Employees of all life stages want more. While every generation is motivated by different values, here are proven ways to increase engagement among your employees:

- Creating a culture of trust. Open communication is the key to creating a sustainable workplace culture where trust grows. Transparency builds trust. Dialogue builds trust. Implement a communication plan that tells your team what you know and what they need to know to excel. The more trust you create with your employees, the more commitment you generate in your workplace.
- Communicating and collaborating. Employees feel most positive about their work when they are encouraged to share ideas, participate in project teams, attend team meetings and recognized publicly for their efforts.

Hold a daily huddle and speak to the day's priorities and yesterday's successes. Host a cross-functional forum to discuss ways to improve performance across departments. Employees want to hear news about the company and impending changes from their boss. Seek information from your manager about the company's strategic direction and share with your team. Communicate in a consistent, substantive and interactive way.

- Being a career coach. Employees are most engaged when their leaders provide clear guidelines for job performance. Position employees in roles that match their skills and provide the support they need to fulfill their responsibilities.

Promotions and raises are not the only ways to motivate employees. Lateral moves, special projects and career conversations all demonstrate managerial commitment to professional development. Regularly meet with employees to help make their goals real and actionable all year round – not just at review time. Ask how they are feeling about their own performance. Create a career path for every person and coach each employee as they move along their path.

- Knowing your audience. Does your communication style effectively engage your employee audiences?
- Are you using the optimum communication vehicle for each message?

Gen Y loves technology. Twitter, Facebook and Google are part of their DNA. Some companies block the use of technology in the workplace in an effort to control the environment and “force productivity.” This actually takes away one of the most compelling tools the younger generation uses to stay current, leverage information and gain knowledge.

Accept social networking and partner with IT or corporate communications to create guidelines. Embrace the change, but do so appropriately.

Avoid e-mail and text messaging when communicating important news or change. Speak openly and honestly when you can. Managers should share their own concerns, while exhibiting confidence in the company's direction. Put your ear to the ground and really listen. You may be surprised by what you learn.

CREATING WORK REWARDS

Look for low- and no-cost ways to create a culture where peers see individual contributions. Invite employees to special events hosted by senior leaders. Create stretch assignments for high-potential employees. Recognize exceptional performance with no-cost perks. Employee engagement doesn't have to be expensive or elaborate. Just implementing these simple solutions can have a major impact on your company culture.

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Article may be found at: <http://www.bizjournals.com/atlanta/stories/2009/09/14/smallb4.html?page=all>