



EMPLOYEES SWAMPED WITH EMAILS, TEXTING and checking social media platforms on their phones 24 hours a day. Workers completing repetitive tasks hour in, hour out with little enthusiasm. The line between work and personal time blurring ever more. None of that would matter if employees weren't absolutely vital to a company's success.

Little wonder that CEOs today are embracing the term Employee Engagement as if it were new. It isn't, of course. What's new is the recognition that no relationship matters more in business than that between top executives and their employees. Gone are the days of Chainsaw Al, the days when ax-wielding executives boasted about the number of jobs they'd cut. Now top leaders understand that harmonious relations with investors and the media begin at home, with their own employees.

We believe it misses the point to think of employee engagement as a process, tool or methodology. The engaged employee is actually an outcome. Engaged employees are ones who conscientiously behave in ways that deliver extraordinary value to businesses and their customers.

Engagement is a behavior. This is good, because you can measure behavior. It can be defined, observed and its resulting outcomes tracked. Given that the required outcomes in every business are different, so too are the behaviors needed to achieve them. We're not proposing any investigation into employee thoughts and feelings (although it can be

Brunswick's CHRISTOPHER HANNEGAN, NICK HOWARD, and GIOVANNA FALBO say that employee engagement done right can unlock commercial value

useful to understand those as well). We're looking at what employees actually do.

The best news about behavior is that it can be influenced. This fact is obvious to parents, teachers and coaches. It's also obvious to casual observers of popular culture. We know that celebrities are role models for multitudes of fans. Are the leaders in your business role models for employees? Do they display the behaviors you want employees to copy?

This throws up some important questions for CEOs and other leaders.

1 IS INTERNAL COMMUNICATION THE SECRET BEHIND EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT?

No. When a CEO asks, "How can we better communicate our strategy?" what she actually means is, "How can we better inspire employees to do the things that will execute our strategy?"

Achieving that goal requires more than effective internal communications. Efforts to engage employees should include models of leadership not only at the top but throughout the organization, supported by a culture that appreciates individuals, recognizes and takes full advantage of their talents and shows concern about their overall experience. There should also be a strong link to what management says internally and what it is saying to the media and investors. Now more than ever, employees see and read external communications with a skeptical eye, searching for inconsistencies. While good internal communication is always a

ILLUSTRATIONS: MIGUEL PORLAN

feature of employee engagement, the two are not synonymous.

2 SHOULD WE START WITH THE MESSAGE?

That's the standard approach for most internal comms-focused employee-engagement campaigns. But we believe you should start with your desired outcomes and work back from there. What is it you need to achieve? What do employees need to do to deliver that? And what will influence them to behave in that way? Then build your engagement programs around those drivers.

Maybe you need to think about reward and recognition differently. Maybe you need to look at the systems and tools employees use to do their jobs. Maybe you need to improve management or leader capability. Or maybe it's something else entirely.

3 IS AN ENGAGEMENT SCORE OF 73 (OR SOME OTHER NUMBER) GOOD?

Who knows? Many employee-engagement practitioners swear by surveys. But the truth is, most off-the-shelf employee engagement surveys are pretty useless. They give business leaders reams of descriptive data with very little insight. They're based around question sets developed years, sometimes decades, ago. Sometimes these sets are designed to tell executives what they want to hear to increase the chances of a lucrative multi-year contract with the research company being signed. Almost invariably, these surveys result in a

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score that will be benchmarked against so-called "high performing companies." Let's say you're a manufacturer of automotive components. Why would you want to be benchmarked against a bundle of companies that includes financial services, retailers, cement manufacturers and software developers? It's fine, of course, to be inspired by the success of utterly different companies in utterly different industries. But what you want to benchmark is the behavior of your employees against your very particular needs.

4 SO IS ALL EMPLOYEE RESEARCH A WASTE OF TIME?

No, particularly if you identify areas of high performance and productivity in your business and then use research to understand what's happening there. In other words, what are employees actually doing to deliver those results and how could you replicate it?

Understand what's influencing high-performing employees, then persuade the CEO and leadership team to reinforce and replicate those drivers. That will get you observable results that will render obsolete those arbitrary engagement scores.

Where do we go from here?

New skills and models for working together are needed to carry out effective employee engagement programs. Silos need to be jumped, budgets and legacy programs reconsidered. And increased acumen in social, digital, behavioral psychology, measurement and creativity may need to be added. The world has changed; companies must change their view of employee engagement accordingly.

We need to put ourselves in employees' shoes, acknowledging that they're bombarded with information, experiences and direction that may seem confusing and contradictory. It's not reasonable for any one department – whether that's Communications or Human Resources – to own employee engagement. It must be a shared responsibility championed from the very top. By someone who understands the importance of modelling winning behaviors. Someone who gets that it's not about communicating more stuff through more channels, but identifying what employees actually need to deliver better outcomes and a more-satisfying customer experience.

Maybe it's time to stop thinking about the person atop your company as merely the Chief Executive Officer. How about Chief Employee Officer?