

## Emotional commitment – success through your people

How often have we heard the phrase "People are our greatest asset" only to be met with staff who are emotionally detached from the organisation – and in some cases, even unpleasant about the company they work for?

All too often we hear statistics that link employee engagement with impact on the bottom line. Take for instance the Corporate Leadership survey in 2004, where 50,000 staff were surveyed to learn how employee engagement affected their performance and retention. The survey found that:

Those employees who were the most committed, performed 20% better than the norm and were 87% less likely to leave the organisation within the next 12 months.

So what does emotional commitment really mean? Staff cannot simply be told to be emotionally committed, and neither does it happen by sidling up to each and every one of them, asking about their life story in an attempt to show we really care.

It really doesn't have to be that arduous. Emotional engagement is much easier to obtain and can be achieved through a variety of means. But here's the rub; nearly all emotional attachment to an organisation stems from the relationship that a member of staff has with their manager.

An employee's manager is the leading driver of an employee's commitment to the company. No wonder managers are under constant pressure to keep everyone happy and to ensure that they retain their staff at whatever cost.

So how can the manager create those emotional bonds that have staff wanting to work hard, work smart, achieve results and talk happily about the company they are working for over a drink in the pub?

Here are some top tips for managers – the more they can implement, the better the commitment, drive and enthusiasm they will get from their staff, and the better the results from their work.

- **Translate** mission, values, strategy and other corporate terms into jargon free statements that staff really understand. For example, if your company is "re-engineering internal processes so that they are streamlined, cost efficient and can respond to customer requirements more quickly", sit down with staff and explain exactly what this statement means. People are far more likely to respond to the explanation that "we are wasting a lot of money on getting things out of the door on time, and our competitors are managing to get out customer orders in 48 hours".
- **Involve** staff in everything, so that they have a chance to express their views and feel like they are part of something. "What would you do in this situation" or "Can you help us to come up with a solution" are such empowering comments that are so rarely used by the manager when the company is struggling.

Let's face it – our staff are closer to the real issues, so making it a habit that we turn to them for solutions and ideas makes perfect sense. Asking for help shows vulnerability that staff value. It isn't about having to appear to know it all, just because you are the manager. People respond far more readily if they feel needed.

- **Inform** staff of successes and failures. Any internal communications manager would say "but we do that anyway!" But do we really keep our staff updated on how well the company is doing? Do we give them edited highlights of sales and costs?

How empowering to tell staff that "sales are up this month and we have achieved £65,000 turnover and we only needed to achieve £62,500 to stay on track. Our electricity bill however, went from £800 a month to £1500 a month due to the cold snap, so it is not all good news!"

Far too many companies shield staff from bad news or even worse forget to tell them when something goes well. It can only result in alienation or that familiar cry of "they never tell us anything round here".

- **Make time** for staff to discuss something pertinent to them as individuals. Knowing that one person supports a particular team and that they are doing well in the league, makes for a good talking point at the coffee machine. Remembering birthdays or asking after someone's sick relatives is not something that you "just don't have time for". It is a valid part of being a manager and it makes people feel that they are valued and important to you and the company.

As HR professionals we need to be getting these messages out to our people managers as proactively as possible. Whether through individual coaching, management forums or just by adding a few lines onto our organisational competency frameworks, we have to drive the importance of emotional commitment and the link it has to the bottom line.

Finally, here are the findings of another survey conducted by Watson Wyatt in 2002 with over 12,000 employees in the US:

Companies with highly committed workforces achieved a total shareholder return that was 2-3 times that of companies with low level commitment workforces.

So you see people really are our greatest asset.

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