

**A CEO was asked how many people work in his company: "About half of them," he responded. We can laugh at his joke, but it is true that in some organization, a significant number of people had mentally "checked out."**

## WHY STAFF ENGAGEMENT MATTERS



- Paul T. McCoy

A workforce consisting of largely engaged individuals will no doubt be able to drive the performance of the organization to an optimal level.

There have been enough studies to confirm that the level of staff engagement in a workplace has a direct impact on the performance of the organization. Many companies measure their staff engagement score. Some organizations even make this a key performance measure of their senior leaders.

How do we ensure that our workforce has a high level of engagement? In order to raise the staff engagement score, some corporate leaders introduce team bonding activities, regular town hall sessions to communicate the company's direction or regular skip level sessions for the leader to get feedback from employees. All these are good efforts. However, to establish efforts that are sustainable and effective, we have to understand the drivers of staff engagement.

When we talk about staff engagement, we are not talking about happiness. An engaged staff is one who is willing to invest in discretionary effort to ensure that the organization succeeds. In his book, *Getting Engaged: The New Workplace Loyalty*, author Tim Rutledge explains that truly engaged employees are attracted to, and inspired by, their work ("I want to do this"), committed ("I am dedicated to the success of what I am doing"), and fascinated ("I love what I am doing").

### **I want to do this**

What does the employee want to achieve in his or her role? If the only reason is the pay, how engaged can we expect the employee to be? This is where the managers have to be genuinely interested in the individual team member's career

goals and aspirations. Helping team members map out what he or she wants to achieve in the career and enabling the right match of the job role to individual aspiration is the first step of engagement.

### **I am dedicated to the success of what I am doing**

Just wanting to do the job is like saying I am interested but not committed. There must be alignment between the organization's mission and vision to the individual's value. Why would the employee be going extra miles beyond normal call of duty to ensure the success of the organization? The individual must have a belief in what he or she is doing; the impact of her work and the value that the organization is delivering.

We have seen leaders who work hard at driving all kinds of activities that are said to enhance staff engagement: team bonding, quarterly communication sessions, career development plans. You named it. The most effective way, that I had seen, is not what the leader is doing. It is "How" the leader is doing it.

Authentic leaders, who truly believe in the mission that the organization is driving, has contagious influencing power that attracts team members who will go all out to make things happen. Leaders, who truly care about his or her team members, will be able to create an engaged team that drives transformation.

### **I love what I am doing**

If you think about moments when you feel the passion in what you are doing, you will notice that those are moments when you are "in the flow". This is very often when you feel competent in

delivering what the task demands of you. You cannot be in love with what you are doing if you are incompetent in the function. You can see the value that you are adding and very often, recognition from bosses or peers come naturally. You see why your work matters and that motivates you to want to do more. The leaders need to give acknowledgment and affirmation to keep the fire burning.

In Chip Conley's TED talk, *Measuring what makes life worthwhile*, he shared what he had learned from Bhutan's measurement of Gross National Happiness (GNH). Over a dinner, Chip asked the Prime Minister of Bhutan, "How can you create and measure something which evaporates -- in other words, happiness?" The wise man answered, "Bhutan's goal is not to create happiness. We create the conditions for happiness to occur. In other words, we create a habitat of happiness."

That inspired Chip in the way he manages his organization. The aim of creating an engaged workforce is to create a habitat with the right conditions for engagement to flourish. His organization's employee turnover dropped to one-third of the industry average, and during that five-year dot-com bust, they tripled in size.

As corporate leaders face the immense pressure of growth expectation from the shareholders, we may be missing the point when looking at staff engagement survey results. As Einstein said: Not everything that can be counted counts and not everything that counts can be counted."

Creating a habitat to enable staff to be truly engaged in their work is one of the most important tasks of a leader. Do a review of what your organization is doing in creating this habitat of engagement and start measuring the right metric that matters.