What is Employee Engagement?

A lot has been said about the importance of Employee Engagement, and it's a term that's bandied about quite a bit. There are many different definitions but essentially it's the degree to which all employees feel valued, and involved and directly connected to the business aims and values.

Why is this Important and does it _Really_ Matter?

Employee engagement is seen as one of the key drivers to business success. A Hay Group study in 2001 concluded that engaged employees generate over 40% more revenue. Another study showed that engaged employees are 87% less likely to leave the organisation.

Engaged employees take pride in their performance and offer higher levels of productivity and customer service. Sometimes, individuals might be highly committed and motivated but working detrimentally to the business objectives e.g. hitting target regardless of anyone else – customers included! Having one engaged and motivated team in isolation is not going to deliver the overall success you strive for. Employee Engagement is about _collective_ engagement with the key business aims and values.

Does it Guarantee Success?

In short "No". Engagement must go hand in hand with Empowerment – that is individuals have to be given opportunities to make a difference or they will become frustrated and disengaged. There has to be satisfaction with pay and benefits and commitment to the right objectives before the business can be rewarded with high performance from true employee engagement. Employee engagement is also more likely where the right resources, systems and processes are in place to launch employee contribution to its fullest extent.

Where to Start?

"Employee Engagement" will fail if it doesn't have the full and sincere backing of top managers. So, to begin with there has to be a sound business case to show the business benefits. Begin by identifying the key people challenges facing the business and how these are holding back success. These might be things like: staff retention; customer experience, quality and waste or insufficient innovation. Identify current performance and how great the gap is to the high performance you desire. If these gaps aren't sufficient to engage and energise the top team then perhaps it's the wrong top team! What you then need is focus.......

How do we Focus?

Firstly, establish current levels of engagement - a survey can be a great way of cost-effectively getting a benchmark. By repeating this at regular intervals you'll measure your progress over time. For an "honest" survey it's best to engage a third party to conduct and analyse, and feedback the results.   A good questionnaire will start to pin point what's encouraging or dampening employee motivation and enthusiasm. Key issues might fall under areas such as: leadership and management; job frustrations; working environment; learning and development opportunities; reward and recognition. The results enable you to determine what's necessary to raise the scores and to set targets for improvement towards building a highly successful team.

You might decide to create Employee Engagement champions so that you can drill down into the organisation and it's critical to let staff feel intrinsically involved in key initiatives – it shouldn't be the preserve of senior management. What's important is that employees feel able to contribute to the solutions – positive change will help embed engagement and increase motivation. It's an idea to develop an action plan to set out the changes and timeframes, and to regularly update all staff on what's being done.

So, it's a case of:

Benchmark

Identify Issues

Prepare Action Plan (clear actions, responsibilities and timeframes)

Involve Staff

Update everyone regularly (celebrate successes and enthuse)

Re-measure and Refine