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## Seven Easy Wins to Enhance Your Employee Engagement

Over the past 12 months we have helped many organisations improve their level of employee engagement. What is clear to us is that organisations give great attention to collecting and collating engagement data - the front-end of the engagement life-cycle – but insufficient attention to the back-end, the building of an action plan that delivers greater engagement and effort.

Similarly, organisations tend to see employee engagement as a score or index that describes the mood of the organisation. People At Their Best believe that the **purpose of any engagement survey should be to improve organisational performance.**

More and more, the following seven initiatives have been implemented by organisations we work with because they are effective, cost very little and can be driven internally. Energy in these areas translates into enhanced engagement and greater workplace performance.

### 1. Implement an Internal Communications Action Plan

First and foremost, we recommend an Internal Communications Action Plan. The Communication Plan would proscribe that leaders increase the frequency of interactions with employees. There is no doubt organisations would engender greater engagement if they communicated with employees more frequently and in a more systemic way. Engagement will be further advanced if organisations communicate more proactively and also actively manage employee perceptions. (See below)

Where possible, organisations should introduce daily communication meetings. Such forums could utilise a simple and effective communication template such as H.E.L.P. Key points from each area's communication forum could be electronically shared and made available for those who may wish to better understand what is happening in other areas.

Senior leaders could also build a sense of momentum and alignment through monthly 'town hall' or 'state of the nation' meetings. Further, senior leaders could improve employee focus and awareness (of priorities) by holding weekly 'pre-start' or 'week in review' meetings.

We recommend that leaders increase their visibility across the organisation and spend greater time talking with employees; systematically spending time 'in the shoes' of employees. Few initiatives engender as much 'togetherness' or demonstrate greater empathy and support for employees. While this may appear to be a soft-edged strategy, it is one of the simplest and most effective ways to enhance engagement and notions of belonging. Creating a 'rolling interaction schedule' and adopting an 'enquiry script' will ensure that the interactions are meaningful and productive.



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## 2. Recalibrate employee narrative - communicate in a pre-emptive and proactive fashion

Organisations need to move swiftly to address any perceptions of unequal treatment, and be much more proactive and pre-emptive when communicating reasons for decisions. One way to do this is to ‘get out in front’ of staff dialogue by using daily communication forums (as recommended above) to explain the rationale for decisions. Leaders can also use these forums to recalibrate the narrative by overtly and publicly committing to a consistent application of rules and policies and discussing what fairness looks like.

We have found that organisations could leverage initiatives far more effectively by; discussing improvements, celebrating efforts and providing detail around timelines and milestones. While organisations may feel they have communicated the status of improvements, the reality is many employees are unaware of progress and this offers an easy wins and an opportunity to regulate perceptions.

## 3. Adopt the ‘5 Pillars of Great Engagement’

Research shows that effective leadership is the key driver determining engagement and that Australian workers are critical of the leadership of their bosses, with less than half regarding their leaders as effective. A lack of interest by leaders in their people is driving widespread dissatisfaction in the workforce, as is a failure to communicate organisational direction and vision. One of the most effective initiatives any organisation can pursue is to adopt the ‘5 Pillars of Great Engagement.’ We have written at length about these critical engagement levers. Here they are once more:

- i. Give staff the chance to share their views with you – ensure people know their opinions count
- ii. Communicate the future direction & goals of the organisation – ensure people know where the organisation is heading
- iii. Provide honest feedback on performance & set expectations for future work – ensure people know exactly what you want them to do and what is required of them
- iv. Explain the link between the work people do & the organisation’s success – ensure people know why their job matters. Make sure that every employee understands how his or her job affects the customer experience. This is particularly important for roles that are not customer facing
- v. Talk about your organisation’s value propositions and differentiators – ensure people know what you stand for and how this is different to competitors. If employees do not understand your value proposition, it is unlikely that potential customers will

Overlaid on these five pillars is the need for belonging - people need to feel that they belong to a common undertaking and are part of a shared effort and endeavour.

We also recommend that senior leaders talk about engagement every day. In talking about engagement, ensure that it is defined and that people know what it looks like - the desired performance required of employees. Translating these into tangible behaviours like faster response times, reduced absenteeism, higher sales, cost savings, better timekeeping, less errors and so on is critical.



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#### 4. Manage change more effectively

There is a perception, real or illusory, that leaders do not sufficiently articulate the aims, rationale and benefits of change. More importantly there is an opportunity for leaders to better link change initiatives to organisational goals and vision - any change being considered must be clearly mapped to the organisation's future direction. Without this, organisations will continue to experience degrees of resistance to change, from apathy to active sabotage.

We recommend that leaders better engage staff throughout the change life-cycle and systematically ask questions around their alignment to changes. Competence in this area would ensure that leaders leverage improvements more effectively. Such action would also identify change champions who could advocate for change with their peers.

To build trust in leaders, we recommend 'big-picture' communication briefings at the front-end of the change process. Integral would be to demonstrate awareness, empathy and recognition of impacts on employees. Using a proven change methodology, such as Kotter's 8 Steps Change Process, is critical.

#### 5. Hold events that demonstrate support for staff

Employees want to belong. While this may appear simplistic, it directly correlates to notions of 'togetherness' and 'equality' and, more importantly, generates trust in leaders and belief that they care about their people.

#### 6. Conduct more frequent performance discussions

We recommend more frequent 'accountability meetings' so as to review individual progress against KPIs. Organisations need to clearly describe how employees contribute to success. To this end, leaders could explicitly outline the behaviours required from staff and better use performance discussions to elaborate on ways that staff can more effectively use their talent, skills and energy to help deliver the organisation's value promise.

Discussions should also explore the way that workers can use their strengths daily. Those who do so are 6-times more likely to be engaged in their job compared to those who do not have the opportunity to utilise their strengths daily.

#### 7. Enhance employees' well-being

Investing in programs to boost employees' overall well-being can boost engagement levels and give companies a distinct competitive advantage. For this reason, it is vitally important that leaders find ways to improve their employees' lives. Leaders must monitor employees' psychological safety - depression alone costs the Australian economy \$8 billion a year. For this reason, we recommend that leaders demonstrate a commitment to the health and well-being of their people and embed well-being goals into employees' development plans. Further, we recommend that well-being becomes an organisational goal just like any other goal.



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