

Engagement all about leadership, culture and fit

Despite the plethora of speakers who gave us their take on employee engagement, there was remarkable consistency when it came to how to address this ever-present problem.

To reap the rewards, three key elements must be effectively integrated — leadership, culture and fit.

Leadership: Engagement levels directly tie to leadership and, in turn, culture and fit both emanate from the C-suite. But, often, there is limited understanding here as to how employee engagement affects the bottom line. The difference committed leadership makes was best illustrated by the WestJet story, whose founders purposefully and successfully set out to steward culture in the direction they wanted.

For leaders who doubt the value of employee engagement, the business case is compelling. According to Dwight Lacey, 25 per cent of productivity capacity is wasted due to failure to address engagement issues. In highlighting some of the findings from Aon Hewitt's survey, Neil Crawford revealed low-engagement employers have twice as much absenteeism as high-engagement employers that also benefit from, among other things, less turnover and higher revenues.

Culture: Creating an engagement strategy that works for an organization does not mean copying what organizations with high engagement scores do to build and sustain their cultures. Instead, start by figuring out what is important and



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unique about your organization — your compelling employee brand. Then develop engagement strategies to energize the employee population and facilitate any needed culture shift.

Fit: Identify the key components of employee fit through all stages of the employment cycle. This advice brings to mind the old management adage “hire for fit and train for skill.” This helps explain why hiring “stars” away from competitors is not always successful. It's crucial to take the time needed to hire properly and not be swayed by pressure to get a body in a seat — and then to continue to support employees throughout their careers.

To inculcate culture and the ensuing fit:

- identify selection criteria firmly rooted in organizational culture

- incorporate peer recruiting into the hiring process, as at WestJet where pilots help to hire pilots

- take as long as necessary to recruit the right fit (HOOPP has taken 18 to 24 months to fill openings)

- design a comprehensive onboarding program for new hires that strategically initiates them into the organization's business and culture

- manage performance effectively and institute proper rewards and recognition

- institute career management in alignment with bona fide career opportunities

- reintroduce development programs for all leaders.

Building a culture of engagement requires sponsorship at the top, a clear vision and strategy, ongoing communication, involvement at all levels and the patience, tenacity and “stick-to-it-ness” to see it through.

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