



From the Backroom to the Boardroom: The Impact of Leadership on Employee Engagement

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People with passion can change the world for the better – *Steve Jobs*

Employee engagement is the commitment to connect employees towards an organisation. It is believed that higher engagement from employees will lead to higher levels of productivity. This definition of “Employee Engagement” by Kevin Cruse, a NY Times best-selling author, highlights the importance and impact of engaging our employees in an inclusive manner.

“This emotional commitment means engaged employees actually care about their work and their company. They don’t work just for a paycheck, or just for the next promotion, but work on behalf of the organisation’s goals.

When employees care—when they are engaged, they use discretionary effort.”
– *Kevin Cruse*

“A great place to work is one where you trust the people you work for (Management), have pride in what you do (Job) and enjoy the process with those you work with (Team/Colleagues).”

Top decision makers already understand that employee engagement directly affects the health and profitability of an organisation. However, employees' expectations at the workplace are shifting, from taking a “paycheck” to having a “purpose”, from just having work “satisfaction” to personal and organisational “development”, from reporting to a “boss” to being mentored by a “coach”, and doing the mundane “annual review” to having “ongoing conversations”, according to a study by Gallup^[1]. Younger workers are inspired by business leaders who are proactive in making a positive impact on society, and be responsive to employees' needs^[2]. How to create a great workplace culture?

While good relationships are the key to a great workplace, TRUST is the driver of that process. A great place to work is one where you trust the people you work for (Management), have pride in what you do (Job) and enjoy the process with those you work with (Team/Colleagues). Apart from excellent product lines and top customer services, this culture of trust is the only sustainable competitive advantage an organisation should possess.

Employee engagement is not the sole responsibility of HR or senior management. Middle managers also play an important role in engaging their team members. However, not all managers are good people managers: most are tactical and competent, but not exactly good with people. This gap may result in high employee turnover because of a lack of communications; hence, creating an inaccurate perceptions of information.

Here are 12 leadership lessons you can take on board and positively impact your organisation's employee engagement.

Lesson #1 FOCUS ON HUMAN CAPITAL

Human capital is an important part in building a successful business. But it is often minimised or taken for granted. Make your employees happy and you will have happy customers. This can be done through relevant ways like offering meaningful employee development, making training an ongoing company's culture and showing employees that they are supported.



Lesson #2 CULTIVATE A HEALTHY FEEDBACK CULTURE

A healthy feedback culture is critical especially for organisations who have suffered from negative employee feedback. If established successfully, this feedback culture could help cultivate a culture of trust between both employers and employees, leading to a more engaged organisation.

Lesson #3 CONNECTING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT WITH PROFITABILITY

Some leaders do not have values that naturally guide them to focus on the softer side of human capital. But they can learn to do so once they learn to connect with employees and how this can co-relate to the company's profitability.

Lesson #4 LEAD WITH “HEAD + HEART”

The most effective leaders use not just their heads, but also their hearts to guide the business. A tip from Alibaba founder Jack Ma: Hire the right people, not necessarily the smart people.

Lesson #5 WALK THE TALK

Practice what you preach. As noted by George Bradt, nothing kills credibility faster than not practicing what you preached. He added, credibility can only be built when what you believe, what you do and what you say align, also known as the “Be Do Say” leadership.

Lesson #6 HIRING AND FIRING AT APPROPRIATE SPEED

Hire slow; but not too slow. Fire fast; but not too fast. According to SHRM India, a hiring mistake can cost a company five times the bad hire's annual salary. However, an empty seat requires other team members to overwork and in turn, may accelerate employee disengagement. Firing fast is not advisable especially when companies want to attract younger blood into their organisation. Especially for Millennials and Generation Z, where they value working for an organisation that puts their employees first. Companies who fire fast portray an image of a ruthless employer.

Lesson #7 DISCOVER UNLIMITED POTENTIAL

It is important to believe in and cultivate the unseen potential in yourself and others. An employee's success and the decisions they make are all influenced by the types of leaders they can observe and learn from.

Lesson #8 CULTURE OF TRUST

The only sustainable competitive advantage a company can have is a culture of trust. Anyone can replicate products, services, and processes. A trust culture is the hardest to build and to replicate. A value-based culture will be created eventually as a result.

Lesson #9 RECOGNISE AND DEVELOP POTENTIAL TALENT

Most leaders have this issue of “Be Like Me”. A great leader develops people to realise their full potential, while a boss only uses people for the company's benefit.

Lesson #10 DEVELOP EMPHATIC LISTENING SKILLS

We often listen with the intent to reply, not with the intent to understand. Emphatic listening skill is a differentiator that reflects Emotional Intelligence. Communications experts estimate that only 10% of our communication is represented by the words we say. Another 30% is represented by our sounds, and 60% by our body language.

[1] Gallup (2017), State of the American Workplace. Source: <https://www.gallup.com/workplace/238085/state-american-workplace-report-2017.aspx>

[2] Deloitte (2018), 2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey: Millennials disappointed in business, unprepared for Industry 4.0. Source: <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/gx-2018-millennial-survey-report.pdf>

Lesson #11

“MOMENTS OF TRUTH”

There are 5 “Moments of Truth” that a real leader should reflect:

- Decide one’s core principles and values
- Make a deep commitment to them
- Align behaviours and actions to them
- Self-correct when out of alignment
- Allow & help others to self-correct

Lesson #12

LEADING WITH EFFECTIVENESS

We can only lead others at the same level of effectiveness we are leading ourselves. A quote from Dee Hock summarises that, “control is not leadership; management is not leadership; leadership is leadership. If you seek to lead, invest at least 50 percent of your time in leading yourself – your own purpose, ethics, principles, motivation, conduct. Invest at least 20 percent leading those with authority over you and 15 percent leading your peers”.



A healthy workplace culture with engaged employees are the base of any successful organisation. Employers should equip even the least experienced manager with tools that will enhance their ability to engage and connect with employees. With the rise in technology adoption rate, leaders should consider take the following features when choosing the ideal technology: contemporary, intuitive, simple, engaging and impactful. An ideal well-thought-out strategy will reduce the occurrence of undesirable employee disengagement, ultimately improving employee retention rates and productivity.