The Concise Guide to Engaging and Retaining Employees

A publication by **Work In Confidence**

The problem

You probably know that engagement is important. Recruitment is expensive and time-consuming, and keeping your best people takes more than a pay rise these days. So, engagement seems like the obvious solution. The problem is that it can be hard to gauge return on investment.

The engagement techniques and systems you might have heard about tend to be pretty pricey, and it's hard to tell how much money you're saving when you don't know how many people would have left if you hadn't started engaging them in the first place.

It can all feel like a lot of expense for very little return! Luckily, it doesn't have to be that way. At WorkInConfidence, we believe some businesses misunderstand engagement by either spending money on a one size fits all solution, or feeling like they're losing the retention battle because they don't have the money to compete.

These days it takes more than a pay rise to keep your best employees

But here's the secret. It's not about money, and there is no one size fits all solution. It's about recognising that your workforce is made up of a body of individuals and trying to understand and serve the needs of each and every one of these employees – separately.

A simple three-step process

The three step process any company can use to start engaging and retaining their employees today. The best news is, it doesn't cost a bomb, and, once you're up and going it will become second nature, rather than hard work. It really is that simple.

1. Communicate frequently

2. Reward inexpensively

3. Build continuously

Step 1: Communicate Frequently

Rather than spending all that money on understanding trends and numbers, how about trying to understand the people that make your business with one key, simple, (and free), trick...

Talking!

Communication is the key to engagement, but communicate how? Well there are many ways, most of which fall into two categories. The traditional, and the personal.

The traditional

Traditional means – such as email, meetings, and forums – are great ways to start collecting valuable feedback from your employees, and it is always worth using them for a more general picture of how your workforce are feeling.

Of course, the inherent problems with the traditional methods are that it's easy to ignore an email, and hard to gauge tone from a reply. Meetings and forums are more personal, but in groups you tend to hear the same voices all of the time, while introverts are crowded out. That's why we believe that, while traditional communication is still important, for engagement you should be focussing on...

The personal

The best way to get a true picture of your employees engagement level is to talk to them one to one. Do you have an open door policy? Great, walk through it and start talking to people. You'll get a lot more out of your staff when you go to them, rather than waiting for them to make that intimidating journey through your door!

Office too big to see everyone? That's fine. Start showing you want to listen to your employees and they'll start seeking you out too, just make sure that when they do, you don't use this as an excuse to stop going to them.

Remember, it's easy to treat your employees as a single body, but show them they are valued as individuals and they will start valuing the company. Show them you're available and they will get involved. Talk to them and they will talk back. You may even find they have some great ideas you hadn't thought of... an added bonus! Soon enough you'll all look like the people below.

Great, but don't let the picture fool you. There's still work to be done. Time to move on to step two...

Step 2: Reward (Inexepensively)

So, you've started communicating with your employees, you're learning about them as individuals. Now show them you truly value their contribution by rewarding them.

"*Okay, great," I hear you say, "but that's got to be expensive, right?"*

Wrong - In fact the best way to start rewarding your employees is completely free, and pretty easy too. All it takes is two little words...

"Thank you"

So simple that many companies gloss over it completely, but most employees are used to getting little praise. Start thanking staff for their efforts and you can guarantee it will brighten up their day, and get them working even harder in future!

This act needn't be – and perhaps shouldn't be – a public event. Just drop by their desk, thank them for their hard work, and leave it at that. It's more personal that way, and they'll know the organisation values their input.

Get into the habit of saying thank you in the first instance, then try these other cost-effective rewards too.

Time off

Start talking about paid time off to an employer, and they'll generally start counting lost money. But think about it this way: If you give one hard worker a week a half day on Friday, how hard will the whole office work to get that reward? You might find you make your lost time back in gained productivity by Tuesday!
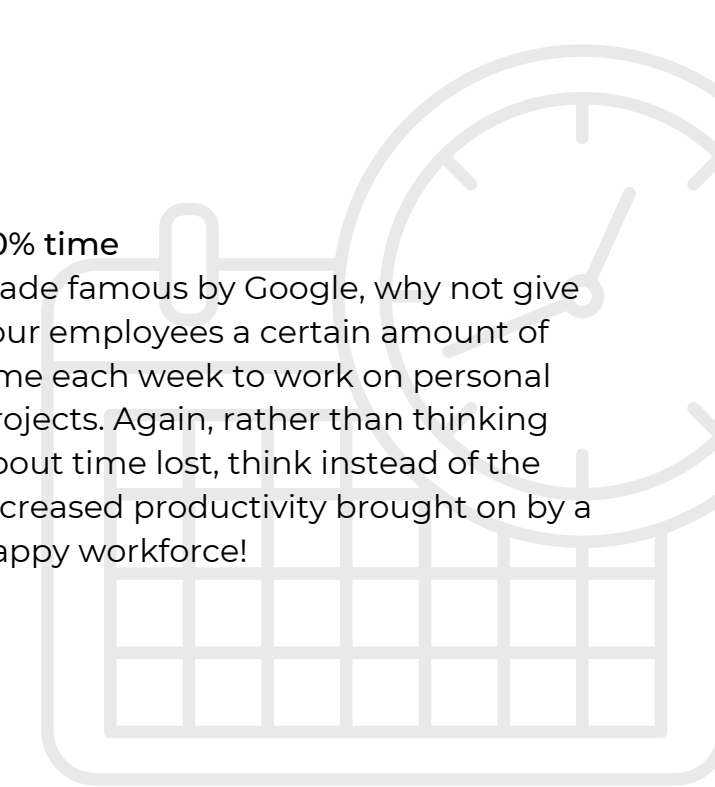
Buy coffee

Points for buying the office drinks. Minus points if you send someone else to get it!! Bonus points if you use it as a catalyst for communication.

A trip out

Another one with bonus points for communication. Why not take the office out for lunch, dinner, or even to a theme park? Let off some steam and do some bonding. Just remember, no rushing people back to the office after!

20% time

Made famous by Google, why not give your employees a certain amount of time each week to work on personal projects. Again, rather than thinking about time lost, think instead of the increased productivity brought on by a happy workforce!

So, you're communicating with and rewarding your staff... just one step left to go.

Remember, rewarding your employees is important, but it needn't cost the Earth. Again, this comes down to seeing your staff as individuals, rather than a collective. Sometimes throwing around cash can do more harm than good, as it can seem like you don't care. If you can use your rewards to genuinely thank staff and start a meaningful dialogue with them, you're winning, like the ladies & gentlemen below.

Step Three: Build Continuously

The great thing about step three is that it's a natural progression of steps one and two, and, like these steps, it also doesn't take much financial investment to get it right.

By building a company culture we mean employing a workforce that aligns with the values and personality of your brand, to an extent that is obvious to your customers at every interaction point.

Build this culture correctly and you have a workforce that enjoys working together and loves working for you, meaning lowered costs due to retention and higher revenue due to increased productivity. There's almost no reason not to…

But…

The problem with culture is it's a bit of an all or nothing deal. Many companies have a fantastic culture – in theory. In practice, however, they're just not getting it right. They're put off because it can be tough to implement, but by putting it off you're losing out.

The thing is, once you get going, and have staff start engaging with your culture, they'll start passing it on, and it will all knit together. Once it becomes a process, it becomes second nature, and suddenly it stops being a chore. You just have to persevere to get there.

Getting started is the hard bit. Luckily, we're here to help you out with three top tips.

1

Educate

Want your workforce to share your culture? Tell them about it! Make sure each and every employee knows what you're about and why they should share your ideals.

If you've recruited the right candidate, this shouldn't be too hard!

2

Recruit right

Many organisations fall down right away when it comes to building a community – how? By recruiting in error, hiring for experience alone.

Trouble is, if someone doesn't fit into your culture, it's not going to work out, no matter how experienced they are. Instead, design a personality document of the perfect employee and hire the person that fits it. Do this every time and you have no excuses for not having a great company culture.

3

Engage

Back to steps one and two... reward and communicate, regularly and fairly, and your workforce will want to align with your values, putting you on track to a strong company culture.

Simple as that.

Remember: You can train for experience, but not personality

Remember, the key to building an effective organisational culture is the key to engaging and retaining your workforce. In fact, it really all boils down to one simple concept: Treating your employees as individuals, rather than a collective. Demonstrating your strong company culture, knitted together by great recruitment and education, genuine rewards and open communication, creates a community of people all pulling in the same direction – your direction, and ensuring your business is the place to be for everyone you're trying to sell to.

Don't get caught out by common engagement misconceptions. Get it right and the productivity boost will far outweigh any money you spend on it.

Start engaging today...
Put everything you've learned here into practice and you'll be well on your way to a company culture, envied by all, and all the productivity gains and organisational health that come with it...
Get engaging... good luck!

Further resources
Looking for more tips and resources on engagement? Why not check out our Employee Engagement Tools Hub, we have lots of tools and resources from eBooks, Infographics and free sample surveys as well as problem-solving and top tips blogs to digest.

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