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A Clear Path to Success

A common hurdle to employee engagement is a lack of direction. Even a deep pool of talented people will go underutilized if they do not have a full picture of what is expected of them. Starting from the ground up, there are key strategies to prevent an engagement drain and promote driven employees dedicated to your organization's success.

- ✓ **Start Strong, Stay Strong** – Recruit, interview and hire the right people. Establish clear goals and organizational standards. Know what you are looking for and what qualities will exemplify those standards in a new employee. Once you have the right people, tailor your retention strategies to keep them. Having the right employee base is what makes good companies great.
- ✓ **Expectations** – Job descriptions are often vague. It is tempting to generalize and to leave gray areas to account for the unknown. But the fact is, the more ambiguous a job description, the less focused the employee will feel. Having a clear, defined list of responsibilities allows an employee to focus and develop specific skills needed to maximize his or her contributions to your organization. Have a living document that defines each person's role in the organization. Making this document public lets people know what is expected and who to turn to with challenges. When responsibilities are added or moved, announce and discuss them with the impacted employees.
- ✓ **Improvement Ladder** – Ideally you hired someone that is bringing skills into the organization, things that are going to improve your workplace. The next step is to get that person the right training. Create development goals and set aside time and effort to help each of your employees improve their skills. Having more talented employees will only lead to more productivity and more engaged staff.
- ✓ **Give Them a Mission** – Having a highly trained, motivated and engaged employee with a lack of meaningful work is a disaster. From the moment you hire someone you should have an objective in mind. These can be fluid and change regularly, but they need to be defined. People want to know the path ahead of them. There does not have to be a finish line, just a way forward. What are they working towards, what goals have you set for them, what can they set for themselves? A lack of meaningful work will often result in employee turnover as your high-performing staff member goes on to find an organization that will be challenging and clear about their work goals.



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- ✓ **Feedback** – A frequent mistake managers make is waiting for yearly reviews to offer feedback to an employee regarding their progress. Waiting to provide feedback on a work habit or performance metric is like waiting to correct steering when driving on an icy road: you invite disaster. Feedback does not have to be negative; in fact, today's workers appreciate positive reinforcement for jobs well done. Consider quarterly reviews rather than yearly. Course correction and validation should happen regularly. Use frequent, informal meetings and conversations to check in between quarterly reviews.

- ✓ **Be Realistic About their Career** – In the past, an organization would hire a new employee and expect them to stay for most of their career, if not all of it. Job scarcity and security were once much bigger factors for an employee considering a new career. Today the job market is full of both new employees and new opportunities. Understanding that a new employee may not want to work for you for the rest of their lives, accepting it, and embracing the idea goes a long way toward promoting employee engagement and the buy-in they need from the organization. The best retention strategy in the world will only keep so many high performers. Help your employees plan their careers. Develop skills and qualities to aid them and create a roadmap of advancement. You can only promote and grow so fast. Keeping your employees' best interests in mind allows you to promote internally and understand when someone needs to move on with their professional journey. It will also increase your odds of getting them back, should things change down the road.

- ✓ **Power Players** – Speaking of promoting and growing, you should be on the lookout for the people in your organization that are going above and beyond. The people chasing this path to success, climbing the development ladder and working to make your organization better are your power employees. Promote them, reward them and continue to challenge them as much as you can. Keeping a power employee in a stagnant position because they are too valuable to replace is a critical failure that will lead to dissatisfaction and a drop in productivity. Studies show that 1 In 10 employees are potential managers. Keep watch for these people and harness their ability to improve your organization and engage the other 90% of the staff. Power players are made every day. It is not an inherent talent or drive; it is a question of engaging them and allowing them to take control of their career.

Having a clear path to success will result in employees who are realizing their potential. It creates passion and encourages drive. Empowering your employees with the entire framework needed to be successful is a powerful method of improving engagement and strengthening the core of your organization. A solid, dependable and high-performing staff can only help you succeed.