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The Power of Engaged Managers

Employee engagement starts at the top. Executives define the culture of the organization and set the standard for all to follow. From the CEO, CFO, and COO to the directors and board members, the rest of the company looks to those in charge to lead by example. If senior management does not buy into the idea of employee engagement that attitude will permeate the organization's culture from top to bottom. Setting the tone for the organization through day-to-day behavior and routine interactions, clearly communicating new changes and initiatives as well as general demeanor all play a vital part in defining a culture of engagement. While senior management sets the vision for the organization's engagement culture, mid-level management has the largest impact in making it a reality.

The old adage "people don't quit jobs, they quit bosses" has never been more true. Most of the organization's employees will interact with their immediate supervisors and mid-level management far more than with their CEO. Engaged and driven managers are a key factor to successful and engaged staff. Studies by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) have found that "employees who trust their managers appear to have more pride in the organization and are more likely to feel they are applying their individual talents for their own success and that of the organization." An engaged management staff leads to a more engaged and long-lasting talent pool within your organization. Keeping the talent engaged and within your group will lead to increased productivity and higher gains. Mid-level management is the group that takes the vision of engagement defined by the executives and implements it. They are the champions of the cause who sell the principles of engagement to your employee base and, as such, they need to be 100% on board.

When implementing a new engagement initiative take a moment to evaluate your mid-level staff. Determine what factors and qualities they possess which would be a benefit in fostering a culture of engagement.

A great manager has the skills and values needed to become an ambassador of this new organizational culture:

- ✓ **Great Attitude** – This is the first step. The manager should have a great attitude towards change, towards engagement, and that attitude should be positive to the utmost degree. Your great manager will be part coach, part cheerleader, part emotional steward, and the kind of leader that makes people excited to be part of your organization.
- ✓ **Cultural Proponent** – Your organization's culture defines it. A great manager will understand this culture and promote it. Culture directs everything the organization does and differentiates it from others in the field. It is part of what makes your organization stand out. Your managers need to champion the cause.



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- ✓ **Communicator** – Employees value being in the loop. People want to know what is happening with the company and that when they talk they are heard. Great managers take the time to engage employees and to listen to their projects and ideas. Great managers gather feedback and inform their employees of the current state of the company.

- ✓ **Problem Solvers** – Lack of focus leads to lack of engagement. Employees who do not have a clear path in front of them or are unsure of their next step need a great manager to prioritize and direct their efforts. Managers must often make decisions on the spot to guide the day-to-day function of the organization. Being able to identify the problems, form a plan, and make decisions while directing their teams are the qualities of a great manager.

- ✓ **Accountability** – Every member of your organization has their own responsibilities. Goals are important and we all work towards them every day. That being said, it is the managers who hold the responsibility for achieving department goals. They are the ones truly accountable when things go right and when things go wrong. Employees need to know that they can trust their manager. Managers who understand how to own the process and exemplify the best in the organization's culture will earn the respect of their employees by keeping them engaged in the drive for results. Empathetic Motivator – This is one of the most challenging aspects of being a great manager. Engaged employees are motivated and inspired by their leadership; they strive to excel and to contribute to something larger than themselves. The challenge is each of us is as unique as we are similar. What motivates one of your employees may have no effect on another. Understanding how your employees feel and what drives each of them is a skill that takes practice and constant upkeep to maintain but the result is a more engaged staff with higher productivity.

- ✓ **Self-Aware** – Even the sharpest knife dulls with constant use. The best managers are aware of the passage of time and the complacency that comes with routine. They are able to reassess themselves to ensure they are staying sharp. It is far too easy to develop and implement a process. See that it works, and then never look back. What happens over time is that perhaps that process becomes outdated or a new idea comes along that would work even better. The saying “that’s how we have always done it” is an engagement killer. A self-aware manager will sharpen their skills, create and build new methods, and ensure that they are not doing the same thing over and over again.

None of these qualities are inherent, they require practice and motivation. Just as with any other skills, they can be learned over time. Identify the people in your organization that exemplify some or all of these qualities and help them hone their managerial skills to raise your employee engagement.