



## FOCUSED FEATURES

### DRIVING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT THROUGH COMPANY CULTURE

Pick up any business newspaper, review business news online, read Gallup's 2012 *"State of the American Workplace: Employee Engagement Survey. . ."* or just talk to your peers, employee engagement seems to have reached an all-time low. If you are not finding this to be true in your company, consider yourself very fortunate.

When statistics from reliable sources like Gallup show a 70% rate of employee disengagement, we're faced with a realization of the financial, human risk, quality of life, and health and well-being impact on the longevity of our companies.

The good news is the *culture* in our companies can drive the kind of change needed to turn disengaged employees into engaged employees.

If you've created a culture where employees feel empowered and encouraged, and their contributions are valued, they are most likely engaged in the work they do. And, if that same culture attracts the best talent because they want to be part of the company's success, you're on the right road with the right team.

Conversely, if you don't have that kind of culture, make time to create the cultural platform that will encourage current employees to score high marks for engagement, and model the culture to new employees so they have a clear path to follow.

#### Understanding the basics

There is no mystery to creating a great company culture where every person in the company (top-to-bottom, side-to-side) is engaged, empowered and valued. But, it helps if you understand how culture evolves and why it is so important.

- Human beings have a basic need to feel valued. If that need is not supported, especially in the place where they spend the majority of their waking hours, they will typically disengage, perform at less than peak levels, and feel defeated.
- Culture is a system of learned behaviors that include values, norms, customs, beliefs, experience, education, and a working language. Just like a family, school, or sports club, every entity has its own culture. The same is true for a business.





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- When any employee joins an organization, they naturally bring *their* own cultural experience (family, geographic location, education, beliefs, language, etc.) to that company. If the company's culture is not strongly rooted, it may be challenged every time a new employee joins the company.

If your organization's culture is well planned, and visibly reflects the organization's success, it will make it easier for new and tenured employees to learn and model the behaviors needed to be valued members of the team. And, when employees are valued, they are engaged in their work, and feel encouraged to make contributions to the success of the organization.

But, when an organization's culture evolves by happenstance, most employees find it difficult to work in that kind of environment. If the culture has not been clearly defined, articulated or conveyed by the organization's leadership, employees can feel "caught in the middle." Many times employees will say things like:

- "I'm not sure what to tell a customer about why their order shipped late. If I tell them the whole story, they may never do business with us again, and I may lose my job."
- "When I get direction from my supervisor, it is usually contradicted by the department manager. I don't know whose direction to follow."
- "I usually just figure things out for myself, because no one seems to have time to answer my questions."
- "I could have solved "that" problem using the same process I used in my past job, but no one here was interested in trying something new."

The culture of a business is so important because it defines and affects the way employees work together with other employees, customers, vendors and anyone else who interacts with the organization. The culture of a company can make the experience of the interactions good or bad, and impact the future of the company's growth.

### **Looking into *your* company's mirror**

Strengthening an organization's culture starts with a common platform, structure, and language that make it easier for everyone to accept their responsibility in achieving personal and organization-wide behaviors and performance. Ask yourself these questions, and see if your company's culture is driving engagement or disengagement.



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1. What does *your* company culture look like today? What influenced the culture, and *how is it* driving employee behavior and performance?
2. Is your company's culture formal and structured, or informal and unstructured?
3. Is there one figure of authority, or is leadership developed at every level?
4. Does your company have an unshakable set of values that make employees feel confident adopting the values, regardless of their individual background / culture?
5. Do staff and leadership team members know what each other expects from the other?
6. Are employees encouraged to have meaningful communication with each other about the work they are doing?
7. Are employees recognized for the value they bring to the company?
8. Are employees mentored, especially during the early stages of their tenure?



Your company's culture can bring out the best behaviors and performance in every person on your company's payroll. Understand, plan, proceed and succeed!

### KEY NOTES:

- When employees are aligned with their employer's culture and feel they are valued members of the organization, they are more eager to contribute to the success of that organization.
- Your company's culture defines and affects the experience every person has when interacting with your company, on every level.