

Boosting employee engagement is often at the forefront of HR and management initiatives, which can lead to countless surveys, meetings, reward schemes and other new programmes. But the simplest way to increase engagement is sometimes overlooked – it starts with the day-to-day communication.

One of the most difficult challenges for any organisation today is to find ways to effectively speak to its employees. Communicating with your employees regularly helps ensure everyone understands the business objectives and goals, as well as their place in achieving it. But with ever-changing technology and new ways to communicate being developed every day, businesses must ensure that they're reaching their people in a way that suits them. While a printed memo might have done the trick a few decades ago, those days are long gone and organisations must now tackle the challenges of communicating to many generations of employees at once – many of which expect the instant, fun and globally-accessible aspects of social media in their personal life to carry over to their professional life.



It's hard to find arguments against getting your staff engaged. That's because engaged employees are more loyal, productive and committed to the organisation they work for. They tend to go above and beyond the call of duty, and have proven to provide more innovative ideas because they truly want the business to succeed so they look for opportunities for improvement. In this article, we explore the role of communication in creating an engaged workforce.

The recipe for success

Effective communication is like a recipe, and just like recipes, each one requires a different mix of ingredients. That's because every organisation's culture is different and it will set the tone and the way in which the messages are delivered. It will grow and develop as the people grow and become increasingly engaged, but the ingredients below are necessities that will need to be in the mix every time.

Communicating for engagement requires the following ingredients:

- A clear, consistent message with the appropriate level of information
- Openness and honesty with an authentic tone
- Passion and connection
- Goals, purpose and direction
- Clarity, transparency, measurement and accountability

These ingredients may seem straightforward and obvious, but far too often organisations get so focused on the business side of things that they forget the human connection that needs to happen regularly for employees to truly get engaged. Review your recent communications and see if they include all of the ingredients – it's a hard recipe to create sometimes, but gets easier once everyone is in the habit of creating an open and authentic way of communicating.

Communicating to a collective of unique individuals

Every person will have their own way of communicating, and each person will have an individual way in which they want to be communicated to. We are unique, so what we need to 'engage' us can sometimes be hard to find, let alone get it right when trying to communicate to your staff as a collective group.



So how does an organisation ensure that the messages they want to get across are communicated effectively and that the overall message helps improve engagement? Line managers can be significant contributors to improving employee engagement. Coaching and training to increase levels of self-awareness are vital ingredients of their personal development journey. Once each line manager in your organisation fully understands themselves, they are better able to identify the similarities and differences with others which helps them connect with those people on an individual basis. Since these are the managers that have the most day-to-day interaction with your people, they should be the focus of your leadership development in the area of communicating to increase engagement.

Line managers should also be a part of the engagement conversation with HR and senior management because they need to fully understand the goals and objectives of increasing engagement if they are going to play a big part in achieving it. For some managers, this will be a shift in their personal style, but fostering a culture that is open and honest amongst all team members has a tremendous impact on engagement and business outcomes. So, it's critical that your line managers are all on board with this approach.

When line managers and employees communicate effectively, it provides clarity around what is being asked of them. It also allows for greater understanding of the role they play and can aid personal development as employees may be encouraged to take part in new initiatives. Help managers by suggesting various ways to connect, especially if they have more than a handful of reports and communication isn't happening every day.

Keep in mind that the most effective communication will be that one-to-one time where discussions are open. This means sometimes getting off track and talking about non-critical business issues – and that's ok. It's during those moments that relationships are built and strengthened, where some of the most creative ideas can be sparked and where the strongest connections are made.



These discussions are made more difficult when people are working remotely or when everyone just seems 'too busy' to have a chat. So use technology to your advantage. Ask managers to IM their reports just to ask how their day is going. Consider an intranet site where people can post pictures, status updates and comment on each other's posts. Creating an intranet that mirrors social media sites like Facebook opens the floodgates of communication in a way that people are used to using on a daily basis in their personal lives.

Keep employees in the loop on the big stuff

Great employees want to know where the organisation is going and how their contribution plays a role. One of the best ways to keep the organisation headed towards the same goals is to increase the level of communication between senior leaders and your people. While line managers are responsible for the day-to-day engagement, senior leaders can help reinforce open and authentic communication from the top down. Most often this is done by the CEO giving a speech at a staff meeting about the strategy and direction of the business. But simple activities like leaders simply leaving their offices and walking around the business, taking time to stop and authentically say hello,

or creating a monthly opportunity where 3-4 employees are randomly selected to have a 'Kit-Kat' break with a senior leader where they can ask any question on their mind can go a long way in enhancing engagement.



Conclusion

Everyone wants to feel that they matter, so when employees recognise that their opinions make a difference, they are more likely to actively engage in the culture. Encourage employees to be vocal. Give them lots of different routes to make their voices heard so that they can find a communication option that works best for them.

Communication is the cornerstone of an engaged workforce. Implementing some of these best practices will help to connect with employees and move towards an engaged workforce, contributing to the most successful business outcomes.

About the authors

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Teresa is founder of National Awarding Winning Jungle HR. She has 20 years Strategic HR experience within a variety of industries and sectors including FTSE 250, Financial Services, Travel Industry, Private and

Public Sectors, Charitable Organisations and a Sunday Times Top 100 Company that grew 30% year on year. Teresa holds a Master's Degree in Human Resource Management (specialising in Change Management), is a member of the British Psychological Society, and is accredited in psychometric administration and feedback Level A and Level B, a qualified MBTI Practitioner (Step I & II), an Accredited Legal Mediator with Regents College, a Licensed Practitioner of Insights Discovery, as well as being a Chartered Member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).

Described by her peers as personable, innovative and high energy. Teresa has an extensive proven track record of facilitating and coaching individual executives as well as leadership teams to achieve high-level performance improvement.

Lindsay Munro, Client Relationship Manager at Insights



Lindsay joined Insights in 2003 following the completion of a Business Economics and Marketing degree at Dundee University. At University, Lindsay enjoyed both the academic and sporting challenges and was a member of

the senior rugby team with the highlight playing at Trinity College, Dublin during a European University Rugby Competition.

Since then Lindsay has enjoyed almost ten years meeting many exciting challenges, from developing his people management skills as Team Leader to growing and nurturing new business. His current role as Client Relationship Manager is the culmination of this wealth of experience.

Lindsay is passionate about making a difference to the people he works with. He has a strong working knowledge of all Insights solutions and supports his clients with their real business issues, ensuring the value of his involvement is central to his work. Lindsay is also a skilled facilitator who brings positive energy to all the clients that he works with. Lindsay's approach has been described as insightful, encouraging and valuing with a keen eye on the end result.