

Employee Engagement, Energy and Advocacy

Employee engagement is a critical element to business success and has been a focus for organizations for many years, yet the journey to engage with employees is constantly under pressure.

The landscape for cultivating an engaged employee and organization is constantly changing as the needs and expectations of the workforce is evolving rapidly. That being said, there are three areas that will contribute to effectively creating an engaged organization: establish a plan, connecting with your people, and raising energy and advocacy. Based on input from a number of organizations as part of the CSPN Advisory Council, people need to feel cared for, listened to, and trust has to be established. Creating a culture takes time and everyone needs to be consistent through words, actions and policies. The leader has a significant responsibility in setting the expectation and demonstrating these traits. The leader displaying vulnerability, having open dialogue and having constancy of purpose are important elements. While some may view engagement as a responsibility of leaders, creating a culture of high engagement is everyone's responsibility.

Before diving into approaches and tactics, let's start with defining employee engagement. Forbes defines employee engagement as "the emotional commitment the employee has to the organization and it's goals". Another element has also been considered, which is increasing the amount of discretionary effort an employee puts into their work.

Establish a Plan

A key element to developing your plan is aligning it with the company's brand and vision, and translating that in a genuine manner to the priorities that are established within the function. The best plans clearly connect and communicate the vision in an effort to reinforce the value that every employee contributes. This element addresses the need for people to be part of something bigger than themselves and creates a collaborative community. Like any focused effort, it is important to have a plan that encompasses multiple elements to capture employee input, establishes a clear measurement process and utilizes a structured communication plan. An understanding of the systemic influences across the employee lifecycle and how your culture has evolved over time is also critical. For example, do your recruitment activities consider the behaviours you expect your employees to exhibit? Understanding the implications and applications throughout the employee lifecycle including the on-boarding, training, early tenure and tenured processes that apply to all employees across the organization.

Connecting with your People

There are a few levers that are commonly used to connect with employees, to establish an on-going dialogue and to understand sentiment. A primary foundational tool that is leveraged is conducting a regular employee survey process, often times aligned with the approach that the organization uses for surveying customers e.g. Net Promoter System. Conducting regular employee surveys is an effective method to set a baseline and measure progress and to compare your results with other organizations. The survey helps to gain an understanding of areas where engagement is nurtured and where it is eroded. It allows employees to provide candid and

anonymous input, which can then be raised in open forums to allow for building trust and allowing the leader to illustrate vulnerability. It's been well documented that there is a positive correlation between traditional business metrics and engagement survey scores. These measures and pulse points enable a deeper psychometric analysis to determine the key moments of truth for employees, what motivates them to strive and thrive in the environment. Some key questions to include on the employee survey, "I have the tools necessary to be successful in delivering on my responsibilities", and "my leader supports my development". Another way to connect with people is to have frequent and regular employee forums including town halls and focus groups with specific discussion topics, with an agreed upon list of actions and follow ups. Based on the amount and type of discussion within these forums, employee engagement can be determined. And lastly, "walking the floor" and other informal, ad hoc ways to connect, to create openness and to break down perceived barriers.

Raising Energy and Advocacy

The importance of creating energy in the environment is an important consideration. People get energy in various forms so ensure to create opportunities for different employee types. Whether that be employee events where people can interact, or onsite features such as yoga, exercise or meditation. Keep in mind that there are various peaks and lulls throughout the day and build a plan around both. Especially in customer-facing organizations, energy translates directly from your team to the customer. Positive and high energy contribute to an extraordinary customer experience. Integrating the employee recognition program into the overall engagement plan is critical. At a summary level, utilize formal and informal recognition elements. Ensure the recognition is delivered in a meaningful manner that is personalized to the employee.

Employees' understanding of the organization's priorities and results, and how their roles contribute to the higher purpose of the organization is foundational to creating advocacy. People want to feel that their contributions matter, and they do! These messages can be effectively communicated in quarterly employee town halls and reinforced through ad hoc focus sessions if there are specific elements where there are questions and interest.

As engagement peaks, the ultimate objective is to drive employee advocacy. Advocacy and heightened levels of employee responsibility go hand in hand. Establishing an employee innovation program for all employees to provide input on processes and policies and the influence on the customer experience help to reinforce the value of every employee. There are pitfalls associated with establishing an employee innovation program. The best practices that have been successfully leveraged include making the innovation tool available all the time (to allow for real-time input), to review the inputs in a defined and understood period of time, and to communicate the status of each of the ideas in a timely and thorough manner. Whether the idea is implemented or not, the biggest mistake often occurs by not responding quickly or not responding at all to the person that submitted the idea. There are various systems (e.g. Spigit) which allow for effective management and analysis, and enable the innovation effort to be easier to manage.

Advocacy can be further bolstered by making the company's products and services readily available for employees. Utilizing front line employees and having open dialog in product and

process design and innovation sessions is another approach that is leveraged that further elevates the product's effectiveness and drives employee advocacy.

The journey to create and cultivate an engaged employee environment and advocacy requires consistent focus and attention. The result is highly rewarding and energizing for everyone in the organization. And the correlation between creating a differentiated customer experience, delivering a differentiated employee experience and strong business results are evident.