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Human Resources

Employee Engagement Depends On Senior Management

The key to employee engagement lies in the C-Suite, consultants say.

Senior leaders have been “outsourcing engagement to HR,” according to Jill Christensen, a consultant on employee engagement. While that’s not “a dig at HR,” she said, “if your senior leaders are unwilling to engage in your employee engagement strategy, then it is unlikely to succeed.”

But how do you get and keep the leaders themselves engaged? A handful of characteristics can make the difference, Evan Sinar, chief scientist of Development Dimensions International and vice president of its Center for Analytics and Behavioral Research, told Bloomberg BNA in a Dec. 21 e-mail.

Sinar said his organization’s research has pinpointed several main factors that keep executives on board:

- “Clarity of one’s career path within the organization”;
- “Having an up-to-date personal development plan in place,” something just over one in three leaders (36 percent) say they have;
- “Opportunities to provide feedback to senior leaders about the company’s strategy and culture”;
- “Upward advancement”;
- Whether leaders get information they must have “about what they need to do to excel.” Those who had access to such information “were 2.8 times more likely to be highly engaged, compared to those lacking this level and specificity of information from their companies,” Sinar said.

Trickle-Down Engagement. Engagement spreads down the ladder, Sinar said. “In our research, we’ve found that highly engaged leaders are 70 percent more likely than poorly engaged leaders to also have highly engaged employees, and 95 percent more likely to have employees unlikely to quit the company.”

Since “HR is increasingly becoming democratized,” managers must step up to make sure their subordinates are engaged, Rusty Lindquist, vice president of human capital management and thought leadership at software company BambooHR in Lindon, Utah, said Dec. 20.

Part of a strategy Christensen said she has developed based on benchmarking 15 companies worldwide from

10 years ago is “goal alignment—every person in your company must have goals that align with the CEO’s goals. Then they will feel an emotional connection to your company.”

“As a manager it is so important for you to have an open-door policy, and let them know you are there for them,” she said, adding that managers need “high emotional IQ” because that “forms bonds of trust.”

“The HR team can work with the leadership team to explain to employees their role,” Carmel Galvin, Glassdoor’s chief human resources officer, said Dec. 20. Together, HR and leadership can “establish the values of the company, what behaviors are expected of employees.” Glassdoor, based in Mill Valley, Calif., posts employee reviews of employers online.

There’s a very simple place to start, Erika Trautman, founder and CEO of Rapt Media, told Bloomberg BNA in a Dec. 21 e-mail. “One of the easiest solutions is simply taking the time to listen to your employees.”

“By doing this, you’ll find they want something new—and have ideas about what that looks like: 73 percent of the employees who responded to Rapt Media’s survey said they have suggestions for their internal communicators,” Trautman said. Rapt Media is an interactive video company based in Boulder, Colo.

Accountability and the Bottom Line. Christensen said another key piece of the manager and employee engagement puzzle is accountability. Employers, she suggested, should “declare a shared manager objective” and tie that to managers’ bonuses.

“There’s a real business case” for the leaders to focus on engagement, she said. “It isn’t just something fluffy.”

HR can get senior leaders on board the engagement train with data, Christensen said. “CEOs, CFOs and COOs love data, they are driven by numbers, especially with public companies. There is a direct link between engagement and revenue growth.”

Galvin said HR can build that business case to demonstrate how employee engagement can contribute to the bottom line.

If senior leadership won’t buy into the engagement strategy, Christensen warned, “you are pushing a boulder up a hill.” Whenever an HR person reaches out “I always ask if senior leadership is willing to work with me, and if not, we’re probably not a good match.”

Galvin, Christensen and Lindquist were speaking Dec. 20 during a roundtable broadcast over the Internet by BambooHR.

By MARTIN BERMAN-GORVINE

To contact the reporter on this story: Martin Berman-Gorvine in Washington at mbermangorvine@bna.com

To contact the editor responsible for this story: Tony Harris at tharris@bna.com

*DDI research on the drivers of leader engagement is available at [*crucial-leader-outcomes and <http://www.ddiworld.com/glf/engaging-leaders-in-the-information-age>.*](http://www.ddiworld.com/glf/drivers-of-</i></p></div><div data-bbox=)*

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