

Practical Mustard Seeds for Employee Engagement

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Do you ultimately want a legally sound, customer and employee-friendly, safe operation, an environment that brings you success no matter what's in your economic reality? Read on if your answer is YES! We will dig right into the critical process of building Employee Engagement that will reap you what you want. To plant the "MUSTARD SEED" for Employee Engagement (EE), you must do more than hire and assume that the new-hire will be engaged in the job. Putting an ad in the paper or online is a start but you must know some basics to recruit for each position first. Employee Engagement doesn't grow overnight; it doesn't grow without constant effort "rain or shine" on your part; thinking that you possess all the answers will definitely not make it grow!



If you want a different result, stop doing things the way you always have. Don't plant the seeds of engaging your employees on rocks (what you used to do), rather on the preparation of fertile ground, as we will discuss here. It's time to rethink your processes. Under the new economic conditions, there are many employers seeking better, more productive ways to make the best of a downturn. So change your behavior if you want to harvest the best "crop" of new-hires you have ever had who will develop into the best engaged employees they could ever be!

Engagement is not Retention, although the two are related. Retention measures are related to staff spirit and keeping newly

hired employees who need more of a boost at the new-hire stage. Communication and follow up are very important retention measures for new employees (and all of your team). Meeting with a new hire early on where both manager and new hire evaluate their experience opens up communication. The manager will not accept "I am doing fine" as an answer and will dig. On-boarding your new hire as a quality member of your staff is enhanced when you use a performance appraisal theme as early as 15 days into their employment to help them become an engaged employee. This practice can prevent early, undefined turnover. *

We all know some great ideas for retention to build morale and team spirit. Retention efforts of giving employee discounts, acknowledging birthdays and giving recognition for exceptional service are all important parts of the

road to success! Pizza parties during staff meetings is a retention measure, but not Employee Engagement although we all love pizza and pizza cannot hurt! Rewards Programs are part of the process for sure but Accountability is Key in presenting awards for performance (so that awards for years of service will also be awarded!)

Although a relationship exists between turnover, retention and keeping engaged employees, Employee Engagement (EE) is not the opposite of turnover. Calculate turnover measurements as part of Employee Engagement. The difference is this: you can retain all levels of performers, good and bad, through retention measures, but only by experiencing the performance you should

expect and need from employees can you have employee engagement! We will later take a look at nine simple steps to accomplish this bountiful harvest!

By only viewing from the end result of your desire for your staff to be engaged in their work and workplace, you are moving backwards. You will learn that it must start before the beginning of hiring, before pre-hire screening (before you plant the seeds in the ground of your business). The end result requires YOUR accountability before you can expect theirs. Unlike what is lacking in our economy these days, you must be responsible for your own accountability from the beginning instead of requiring it first from your employees. You will then reap what you sow: engaged employees and bottom line success!

Although there may be terminations, freezes and job cuts at the present time, we see some companies doing well. They continue to hire and/or are doing workforce studies to prepare for the future and are now having an easier time finding applicants with experience and references. Still, within each position, there are A performers and C performers. The A and C candidates will most likely be equally skilled in interviewing. In fact, C candidates often have great interviewing skills. It is times like these that pre-employment testing is an increasingly valuable tool. The cost of turnover is approximately 150% of the employee's salary. Compare that to the price of testing, and just one saved hire can pay for your entire year's testing budget and have a considerable impact on your bottom line. *

As part of our services as a pre-employment testing and technology company we get an interesting view of the employment

landscape. If you have already made the investment in your employees before they were hired by knowing what an engaged employee should look like, what their jobs look like, utilized the right prescreening tools, types of assessments and interviews to hire them, then that investment can be further utilized in a hiring freeze. Don't let a freeze ruin all of your planting efforts! It's an excellent time to reach into your employees' files to utilize the assessment taken when first hired. In the wealth of information used to make the hiring decision, the best assessments also include training and development suggestions. When the test is combined with performance appraisals, you can maximize your original investment.

Not unlike a garden that needs to be prepared before it reaps a healthy crop, so also you must be prepared to hire the best through preparation to expect engaged employees.

The opportunity to look at assessment results and performance appraisals for succession planning may reveal that a current employee would be quite trainable for a position that has

become vacant in another department. When one job is vacant a plan has already been in place to fill it from within. This will add rather than subtract from employees becoming more engaged in their work. An example is an employee whose test states that he or she is overly organized and structured, and the performance appraisals support this resistance to change. Like it or not, that employee will have to take on more responsibility and tasks. Training in Change Management can go a long way to relieve the anxiety of this employee. The goal is not to change this person's core behavior – the test and the performance appraisal would show this to be too strong of a trait. However, improvement can be made to help your valuable employee adjust to the changes. By tailoring the training to his/her greatest need, you would foster increased

productivity and employee loyalty.

Kevin Costner, in the movie A Field of Dreams, heard “If you build it, they will come.” In planting your Engaged Employee Team: “If you PREPARE to plant it, the EE Team will grow.” Not unlike a garden that needs to be prepared before it reaps a healthy crop, so also you must be prepared to hire the best through preparation to expect engaged employees. That preparation can start with knowing where and when to recruit beforehand, performing a job analysis for each position, followed by writing a job description for each so you know what to seek in your recruiting efforts.

This is when an Applicant Management System (AMS) could be of interest. AMSs have become affordable for small businesses. They help you recruit. The newest AMSs developed by Candidate Resources have several levels from small business systems, franchisee group systems to more detailed systems including OFCC and EEOC reports.

Web Resource:

www.zaboo.biz and
www.persprofiles.com/employment_center.asp

The following is an overview list of nine tasks will lead you to a harvest of engaged employees:

First, perform a detailed job analysis: walk through the job, engage the employee fulfilling that position well. Do not just think through the process. Document the days, weeks, months it is performed.

Second, write a job description for every position in your organization and link it to your analysis, assessments and performance appraisals. Ask yourself what skills and personality a qualified applicant must first and foremost possess for a particular job. Determine if you will train for hard skill or require experience and to what degree.

Then, third, update your application,

adding Pre-hire screening questions to the front of your application to help a job seeker determine if they should even fill out the application. Prepare 10 to 15 prescreening questions for phone or for an online Applicant Management System or answered with your paper application. Make sure you know what the acceptable answers are and if the job seeker needs to answer all of the questions correctly to be considered for a position with your organization. The Candidate Resources system is different from others in that it has weighted prescreen questions where the total adds up to 100% and you can actually opt to only view the applicants with a certain percentage of your lowest acceptable score. For Pre-hire Questions, view the site:

<http://www.criw.biz/admin/whichadmin.asp?ClientID=PPDEMO&ClientPassword=PPPASS> which will help you decide on the appropriate questions for your jobs. To view prescreen questions, go to the site then clicking on the icon “Headquarters Functions.” Then choose “Generic Prescreens.”

4th: Determine the appropriate pre-hire assessments for the job, using Reasoning (Mental Acuity), Personality and Hard Skills (Mechanical, computer, technical, etc.) as advised. Some assessments * can be administered early in the process, but viewed and charged when needed in your process. When used properly, some pre-hire tests are tools for employee engagement linked to the Performance Appraisal. The Achiever Assessment is also a development tool for existing employees, which can determine what the individual is able to do and/or be trained to do in addition to their current abilities and duties. Hard Skills can be required or trained, but be consistent in your requirements. Note that a person can work outside of their core behavior for a certain amount of time, but eventually revert back or often become ill or their performance fails. An example is to place a new-hire with high Mental Acuity in a low MA position. The performance is high initially and fades when there is no chance of advancement. Another turnover statistic in the making!

5th: Next, Face-to-Face Interview:
Confirm some key answers in your prescreen questionnaire. Review their application. Use behavioral interviewing. If you have used a prescreen assessment such as The Achiever, you can use the provided behavioral interview probing questions when the applicant falls short of the desired scores. It also provides examples of the behavior you are seeking to confirm. This is very helpful if otherwise non-interview-trained supervisors interview candidates.

6th: Decide if Background Checks are important for your organization. (Remember drug screens only after job offer.) Make the services you request from the background checking company relevant to the job position and base your choices on those that have the best fit for your company's culture including your particular business necessity, the nature of the job description, your industry-specific requirement, time sensitive hiring needs and costs involved.*

7th: New-Hire Training/On-boarding:
So what do you do when applicants become new-hires? There is now significant pressure to reduce the costs of companies' budgets as it pertains to education of employees. Bad move. Managing and growing your core business and gaining clients' confidence in your operation, requires consistently providing the best for all your services. Since you cannot do it all, the first line of communication between you and your clients is your employee team. So it makes sense that you should not only hire the Best but also make training them a major priority.

8th: Create an early on-boarding evaluation, as was mentioned earlier (we have a template available with examples of the attributes desired and the performance levels listed to assist in evaluating your employee. The supervisor and new employee complete the form separately and HR or a third party meets with the new employee. Use this especially if you discover high turnover in new hires. Short evaluations performed by both managers and employees at 30-60-90 days obtain a likelihood that the individuals will stay and

continue to be productive in their positions, especially early on so they know they are on track. Remember that most people want to be accountable and productive.

Communication is the key and keeps the employee on target for what they do in their position. Evaluations done for on-boarding can help retain employees who are new and need the connection and communication of a supervisor or Trainer to train them in their new position.

9th: Performance Appraisals: Develop a Successful Appraisal System: To evaluate a person's contribution to an organization's core values, you must develop a set of core values. Then appraise the employee's contribution to meeting the organization's goals. The employee should then be appraised in light of their performance relative to specific job description and job competencies. Create Performance Evaluations/Reviews that parallel your job descriptions/duties/competencies and set a plan for how often you will hold reviews. Note that if you have one-to-one meetings regularly with your employees, there will be no surprises when you do performance evaluations.

An online performance appraisal system option: In an online performance appraisal system, an employer has the ability to customize the performance appraisal process to reflect the organization's needs. www.performancereviews.biz has a template for tailoring each appraisal to the core values of the organization as well as the key objectives and competencies required for each position. It is a customized, objective tool for evaluating employee performance. It maintains data on employees facilitating searches by name or job category. And, since each appraisal includes an overall appraisal score, employers can mine this data when making job promotions or succession planning. Additionally, the system retains an employee's appraisals over a period of time, making it easier to validate the employee's performance improvement through successively

improved appraisal scores.*

To find your best investments ever - one little mustard seed at a time, we have given you an analogy for “planting and reaping” an engaged employee and engaged team. You need the best hires to make the best teams. Simple concept, right? It can be, just do the homework one little mustard seed at a time...

* Author’s note: Thanks to Patty Nolan, Personnel Profiles, Inc. , for her contributions to this article and let us know if you need assistance in managing the hiring process put forth here and we will suggest some options. Do what you do best and let us help you with what we do best. Companies hire Personnel Profiles of KY to help them manage the hiring process and help them engage their employees through

matching jobs to people and using assessment testing and technology. Laura can be reached at lauram@persprofiles.com or at 859-750-9659.



... No two people are exactly alike either...

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