

Healthy Workplaces For Better Engagement



Dr. Pi Wen Looi (*Founder and Principal, Novacrea Research Consulting*) highlights the importance of employee engagement as an indicator of organisational health

Employee Engagement For Health

THE Psychologically Healthy Workplace Program defines a healthy workplace as one that emphasises employee involvement, work-life balance, employee growth and development, health and safety, and employee recognition. In fact, these five factors are also the key drivers of employee engagement. Gallup and other studies have shown that employee engagement is positively correlated with revenues, customer satisfac-

tion, productivity, and retention. Here, I discuss ways to create a healthy workplace that boosts engagement. *Employee involvement and communication:* Effective communication is key to increasing employees' sense of involvement with their teams and company. Involving employees in decision making, soliciting employee suggestions, and inviting employees to volunteer on employee committees all help improve job satisfaction and engagement. For example, all Goldman Sachs employees are expected to contribute actively in both

internal and external client meetings. *Listen to employees and take action on feedback:* Through surveys, employees can provide suggestions to improve operations. Management can gain insights from employee feedback and take action to address the issues raised. A great majority of best employers conduct annual employee surveys and act on their results. These companies enjoy better engagement scores and profitability. *Be consistent in your message and help employees find meaning in their jobs:* In times of transition, it is imperative that HR and

senior leaders communicate clearly and consistently about the company's direction. In 2002, after the dotcom bust and post 9/11, the hotel industry was suffering. Chip Conley, the CEO of Joie de Vivre Hospitality, took all his managers and line employees to an offsite retreat for a day to talk about where the hotel was going. Employees felt invested and included in helping to reshape the hotel's future. Conley recommends that if you want your line employees to feel like owners, give them opportunities to think beyond their tasks and help them see their impact. Joie de Vivre now conducts annual employee retreats for all employees. As a result, their annual employee turnover rate is only 25 per cent, compared to the industry average of 100 per cent!

Employee growth and development: Offer employees opportunities for continuous learning and development and ensure that managers schedule times for employees to attend training. Employees can learn about the company culture, processes, and new product knowledge, as well as gain new skills to take on 'stretch' assignments. In addition to tuition reimbursement, classroom training, or offsite seminars, employers can provide qualified employees with job rotation opportunities or 'a day in the field', where employees observe and learn from their colleagues in other departments. Companies often offer 'soft skills' training where employees learn about empathetic listening, communication styles, and being resourceful in the Web 2.0 world. For instance, the Container Store, a best company since 1999, invests in more than 200 annual hours of training for its first year full-time employees, compared to the retail industry average of eight. In addition to customer service and operations, employees are trained on how to communicate, listen and clarify.

Employee recognition: Employees want to feel valued and appreciated. In addition to service awards or milestone achievement awards, employees want to be acknowledged and hear a sincere "thank you" from their managers when they have done a good job. Managers

play a key role in improving employee engagement through the means with which they provide performance feedback to employees.

Coach managers on providing positive feedback: Research by Gallup and Corporate Leadership Council found that employees who received positive feedback from their supervisors were more engaged and had better future performance than employees who received positive criticisms. These studies show that focusing on employees' strengths, rather than their weaknesses, can improve performance.

Be creative in recognising employees: There are tangible ways employers can reward employees even in tough times. Celebrate milestones and employee anniversaries with awards, reward employees with sabbatical leave at 5, 10, or 15 years of service, and make the reward personal. For instance, Curam Software gives an employee a cello as his fifth year anniversary award because they know that this employee is passionate about playing the cello.

Work-life balance: Studies have shown that companies that promote healthy behaviours and take care of employees' needs for work-life balance benefit from higher employee engagement and productivity. *Encourage usage of wellness programmes:* A recent Buck Consultants Survey of 628 organisations found that 45 per cent of respondents reported an increase in communications about available wellness programmes and 53 per cent reported that workers' use of wellness services had increased.


Promote employee accountability: Employers can offer incentives to promote participation in various programmes designed to increase employee awareness of health risks and help them make better-informed decisions. For example, Johnson & Johnson provides its employees with annual medical screenings for cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and other health conditions. After implementing its

wellness programme, Johnson & Johnson reported significant savings in healthcare costs, down from USD 13 million a year to USD 4.5 million a year.

Create a culture that supports healthier choices: According to Camille Haltom, National VP of Consultant Relations at OptumHealth, many employers are insisting on having healthier choices at their cafeteria, providing educational sessions, and sponsoring events that promote healthy behaviours, for example, smoking cessation programme, walking clubs, and softball leagues. These interventions seem to work. Researchers at Emory University found that, after one year, employees who participated in Dow Chemical's LightenUP programme - these employees were provided access to healthy foods in vending machines, cafeterias, walking trails and pedometer programmes, health education materials, leadership training, physical activity and weight management programmes, health assessments and individual consultations, and online behaviour change programmes - significantly reduced blood pressure risk and maintained a steady

weight when compared to employees who only received individually focused interventions. This shows that creating an environment that supports healthy behaviours is more likely to lead to improved employee health than only providing educational materials and annual screenings. More importantly, Laura Putnam, founder and CEO of Motion

Infusion, notes that, "For such interventions to be successful, it is critical that senior leaders embrace the culture of a healthy workplace by personally modelling healthy behaviours and providing flexibility for employees to practice healthy behaviours, such as taking a longer lunch break to work out."

Within a respectful and healthy work environment, employees can take responsibility for their own well-being. As a result, they will be more engaged at work and help their company succeed. 

EMPLOYERS ARE INSISTING ON HAVING HEALTHIER CHOICES AT CAFETERIAS, AND SPONSORING PROGRAMMES FOR SMOKING CESSATION