

GEN X on Engagement - by Anne Howard

The series of newsletters on engagement continues. The following are the views of Michelle – a Gen Xer on what it takes to build engagement.

What it takes to create employee engagement:

1. A belief in the value of the organization's goal. If I am going to work somewhere I need to believe in what the organization is doing. How can you work in a place that goes against your beliefs system? I guess this is why I have worked so long in the non-profit industry. The difference that I could make was more important than how much I got paid. Not that money is not a part of the motivation to get up every morning and go to work – it is a big part of it. But I also need to know that what I am doing is important. You can't get that from working in an organization that has values different than your own. I don't believe that you could be happy and constructive in a job that does not follow along with your beliefs.
2. A belief that they will benefit from the achievement of the goal - I think that everyone needs to be recognized for their achievements. If we don't have this need then what drives us to even try? Recognition can range from a pat on the back; "way to go", to a raise or promotion. I want to know that what I am doing and working hard to achieve is being noticed by my superiors. I want the credit for my work. Pats on the back are a good place to start. The more pats on the back though, the more I want the raise or promotion. If I went to work every day and did not try and did nothing of significance, I would not expect anything in return. If I went to work and worked my butt off while others did not put in the same effort, I need to know that they are not going to be rewarded the same as I am rewarded. Even in a team situation, I think that all members should be rated together and separately. Not all members will work at the same level and I don't think it is fair for all team members to get the same reward for different effort and results.
3. They know what they need to do and want to extend their energy and effort in that way. I think that having a clear goal, even if it is not a formal goal, helps one to do their job well: seemingly silly things too, like when you start a new job; *learn and remember co-workers names by the end of the week.*; and serious things like sales revenue goals. Having goals helps me focus and work harder. Setting smaller goals to reach a larger goal is important too. It prevents or reduces procrastination and helps keep me focused and on track with what I am doing.
4. They believe the other people involved are committed to the same goal – This is a major issue for me. I just started a new job working with a lot of generation Y'ers. I am finding it difficult to hold my tongue at times because they just have a different work ethic than me. Even though bartending is not my calling or what I want to do with my life, or something that I feel is benefiting others, I still think it is important to do my best. You never know what it could lead to and I don't want to be looked at as someone who doesn't care. Part of it is pride but part of it is the way I was taught: *"No matter what it is you do your best."* Some of the younger people I am working with look at me and think, *"Cool, Michelle will do the work and we all get credit!"* That makes me not like my job as much.
5. They trust the leaders and believe they care about the goal and the people working toward it. Does my boss understand and acknowledge the work and effort I put forth? Does my boss have the same goal that I have? If the boss doesn't believe in the goal, then what is it that I am doing? Knowing that the leaders are there for the same reasons motivates me. To me, it means that they are working just as hard and are able to appreciate me and the work I am doing. Knowing that the leader cares about the goal and the people working toward it creates trust and respect and is what brings the results.





Why these points are important to me and my Gen X friends:

We have learned that working can be both rewarding and challenging. The jobs that I remember fondly are the ones that possessed the things mentioned above. They had their hard times, stressful times and times that I wanted to walk out and forget about. But in the end I feel like they are the ones where I made a difference and made a mark. I could still walk into any one of them and the boss and other employees would remember me. It has been 6 years since I worked at the Boys and Girls Club but my old boss still says that if I called her and said I want my old job back, she would give it to me in a heartbeat.

The jobs that I remember in a darker light are the ones that did not possess the above mentioned points. I worked at Baskin Robins one year. I did not like my boss. He was lazy, barely ever there and when he was, he was usually napping in the back. He always had us doing everything and showed no respect or acknowledgement for our work.

My girlfriend is a nurse. She decided to go into oncology after her mom died of breast cancer. She had a great manager who treated her staff like gold. She was caring for patients and helping them. She was constantly doing some sort of new training or learning. She had co-workers that all worked hard and looked out for each other. She loved it. She says she had the perfect job. I can't imagine going to work every day and being reminded of my mother. She couldn't imagine going to work every day and not being reminded of the quality of care that her mother received while she was sick.

Some Ways To Engage Employees

- A little competition can help motivate employees – they have fun and get excited about even small goals: at my old job (Heart and Stroke) we had one of those “easy” buttons from staples. Whenever we got a registration form in or reached a benchmark or goal, we would go to the button and press it. Everyone in the office would yell out congratulations and cheers for you. It was a simple little thing that made you feel like you accomplished something much bigger.
- Relieve stress - There needs to be something in the week or day that employees can participate in that helps them to breathe or de-stress. It could be a Friday morning trivia question with a prize like a closer parking space for the next week or, a pep talk on Monday mornings to help get you going for the week. At the golf course the boss takes everyone to his office before a big event takes place (weddings/banquets) and does a pep talk and a happy shot! It has the tiniest trace of alcohol but it is good and gets everyone excited.
- Train people – Even long time employees should be participating in staff training regularly. At the Heart and Stroke we went to Toronto for a few days and met with all the other employees who worked on the same programs. We would discuss successes, challenges, new ideas, old ideas etc. It helped us to regain focus and motivated and got us excited again. I always came back fired up and excited about all the new ideas I was going to try out in the upcoming year. And, the more years I attended the more excited I came back. You can never know all there is to know and you can always learn something new.

I think the above points are all important when it comes to employee engagement. They mold a productive, inspired, creative workplace that people enjoy working in.