

Give employees what they really want

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If I said you can significantly enhance the bottom-line performance of your organisation - and radically improve the levels of employee engagement and customer satisfaction - you'd possibly suspect that I was peddling something new-fangled and highly expensive. If I said these things can be achieved with little or no expense, would that get your interest?

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Over the past 30 years, we've surveyed over 200,000 employees around the world, asking them: what is the most important thing you want from your employer?

Time and again, the answers were the same. Across different countries, different industries and different job roles, we can now confidently state that there are seven things that employees really want from their managers and their organisations.

What's more, the organisations that provide these seven things outperform those that don't. Their employee engagement level is 117 percent higher; their operational performance is 64 percent higher; their customer satisfaction level is significantly greater and their 'return on assets' is up to ten times higher.

So what are these seven things? To make them easy to remember, we've created the acronym R.E.S.P.E.C.T. which will be familiar to fans of Aretha Franklin. Let me spell it out. The seven elements that contribute to the engagement, commitment, retention and overall satisfaction of employees are:

Recognition : Employees want 'a pat on the back' and they want their views to count. Essentially, each individual wants to be recognised and appreciated as a valued team member - particularly by the person who should be most familiar with their work: their line manager. As a manager, you should recognise and appreciate people for the work they do. Close the gap between employee actions and when those actions are recognised. Make informal recognition a habit. Don't ignore employee performance until the annual review - and never focus solely on criticism.

Exciting work : Employees want a job that's challenging, interesting and fun. They want a sense of accomplishment and they want to feel the time they've spent at work has been worthwhile. According to our research, employees are significantly more likely to feel excited about their work if they are learning something new, or if they're involved in a pioneering project or if they are empowered to operate with autonomy. As a manager, you should discuss with employees what they like and don't like about their jobs. Try to provide variety and have fun.

Security of employment : Employees want job security. They want to feel confident about their organisation's future and they want stability and steady work so they can meet their financial obligations. As a manager, you should understand this fundamental need. Try to have consideration for the morale, welfare and well-being of your team. Empower employees by giving them a say in how they work. This will create trust and it will give them a greater sense that they are controlling their own destiny.

Pay : Employees want to be compensated fairly for the work they do and the contribution they make (through base pay, bonuses and benefits). The important word here is 'fair'. We all want to feel that we are being treated fairly and that our performance is evaluated on merit. As a manager, you should provide an annual compensation and benefits review, to underline how much the organisation is investing in each individual. You can always compensate for lower pay by giving employees time off.

Education and career growth : Employees want to be given opportunities to develop their skills and to advance their career. As a manager, you should ensure they have the necessary training and, where possible, you should provide 'stretch assignments'. They'll learn new skills, thereby increasing their engagement and job security. Hold formal and (at least) annual career discussions with employees to determine their goals and aspirations. Give people the autonomy, authority and encouragement to use their skills and to do their jobs in their own way.

Conditions : We don't work in a vacuum; what happens around us matters. Employees want a well-equipped environment that is comfortable, healthy and safe. For most, the social working conditions are even more important than the physical conditions. As a manager, you should arrange social activities to promote interaction and teamwork. Listen and respond to employee complaints and help individuals to achieve their own work-life balance.

Truth : Finally, employees want to be told the truth. They want to work for honest and transparent managers. As a manager, you should act with integrity. Communicate openly and directly: say what you mean and mean what you say. Provide honest feedback and set clear goals. Regardless of how bad things are, always tell employees the full story. They'll know if things are bad. Lying will only undermine your credibility.

The majority of these elements don't cost a lot, if anything, to implement. For example, providing recognition and telling the truth cost nothing. Finding exciting work for your team just requires you to be in touch with what motivates each individual.

Improving on these three areas alone would certainly have a positive impact on the engagement level and the performance of your team. It just requires effort and dedication.

After 30 years of research, we've reached one simple conclusion: the sure path to success is to give employees what they really want.