Employee engagement... the only people management imperative for the public sector

Why are so many public and private sector organisations not taking employees seriously, asks Raffaela Goodby

ne could be forgiven for skipping yet another article on a people management panacea for all that is employee engagement. I believe it’s now widely recognised that people are the driver of economic performance, yet such performance has not been enough to deliver the required differential in the market place today and that ‘discretionary effort’, higher morale, high levels of happiness are key to an organisation’s brand and customer satisfaction levels. The evidence is clear, we all seem to know it... so why are so many organisations across public and private sectors still not taking our employees seriously?

We are in an economic crisis I hear you say, ‘We don’t have the money to engage our staff and make them feel happier – we need to focus on delivering our savings targets, we can’t afford that soft and fluffy engagement malarky’.

Birmingham City Council HR director, Andy Albon, says: ‘In Birmingham we would absolutely challenge that view and our political and officer leadership understands that having switched-on talented individuals drives more innovation, creativity, new thinking and brings fresh ideas into our organisation. We simply cannot achieve what we need to without putting employees at the heart of our people management strategies.’

There is swathes of research demonstrating that having highly motivated, talented, engaged employees who understand the key priorities for our organisations, understand communities and most importantly feel empowered to take calculated risks and have an option on ‘getting it wrong’ without getting it in the neck from their manager and leaders is absolutely critical. A highly motivated workforce delivers business goals from the personal to the organisational – and in the case of the public sector can drive community engagement and impact. Lancashire CC who were the winners of the PPMA (Public Sector People Management Association) sponsored ‘Workforce Transformation category of The MJ awards, clearly demonstrated this by setting out the financial challenge they faced and enabling employees themselves to work out how to respond to that challenge. Through their delivery of ‘The Lancashire Way’ morale actually increased during this difficult time and absence decreased, a shining example of the workforce delivering when leaders demonstrate trust and confidence.

The ability to flex people beyond their perceived limits and yet stay resilient is expected if not demanded in the current climate. Building manager and employee resilience has been key to managing effective change at Serco, workforce. David Macleod OBE will share the national picture from the E4S Movement, and the PPMA will host a regional practitioner event for public and private sector practitioners. Steve Walmsley – regional employers director for Yorkshire and Humberside Regional Employers Organisations. The unique inclusive structure of this engagement event with chief executive presence and inclusion of the private sector to challenge our thinking, reflects the importance and imperative to genuine employee engagement both in the North of England and across the UK.

If you need some inspiration, ideas, evidence or a shoulder to cry on there are lots of ways to get involved regionally and nationally both online and offline. You could attend one of the events mentioned above, or check out other events in your region through www.engageforsuccess.org, read case studies, contact a regional ambassador for guidance, or get in touch with your PPMA regional chair for connecting in Local Government through http://www.ppma.org.uk.

Each Monday at 4pm we at Engage For Success host an internet radio show, that attracts over 1,000 listeners, previous speakers include David Zinger from the American Employee Engagement Network, Peter Cook on Punk Rock HR, Phil Sherwood from the Games Makers Programme London 2012, Serco’s Engagement Director and more. Visit http://www.blogtalkradio.com/engageforsuccess.

Don’t trick yourself into thinking that employee engagement is anything but embracing the best in people – getting it right involves the belief by everyone that everyone can do an exceptional job. Harnessing the power of people needs an organisation with the strength to listen, the tenacity to act on what is said and the faith that it will drive your business forward. There is clear evidence that there is a robust return on investment when you take your employees seriously. It’s not soft and fluffy and only for the good times (if I had a pound for every time someone said that to me I’d be able to plug a very small budget gap) – it’s THE imperative for people management in 2013.

For the latest on engagement you can follow @ppmawestmids @ppma_hr and @engageforsuccess.

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