

Engaging the next generation of leaders

Offer them pride, growth and the tools for performance

When it comes to discovering, nurturing and keeping the cream of the crop of the next generation of leaders, employers need to keep two simple words in mind: employee engagement.

If a company's strategy doesn't include a focus on employee engagement, then it's on the wrong track. The more employees care about what they do and how they do it, the more they will contribute to the bottom line. Young leaders of the future are looking for three things from their employer: a company they can be proud of, the ability to do the job they way they want and an opportunity for personal growth and development.

Pride in their employer

Future leaders need to have pride in the company they work for. They care about whether their company is polluting the environment or cleaning it up. They are eager to work for a company that's improving the planet. They'll put in the extra effort if they can see a purpose. This is why corporate social responsibility is becoming so important.

Does the company encourage employees to actively participate in its environmental and philanthropic endeavours? This philosophy and the corresponding activities are engagement drivers that go a long



■ ON ENGAGEMENT

DAPHNE WOOLF

way in promoting employee pride.

Doing the job on their terms

Future leaders want their individuality respected, but not in terms of family status, cultural preference or wardrobe choices. They want respect in how they choose to get their job done.

Employers tend to think it's only managers who want the tools with which to measure employee performance. But all employees are clamouring for such rigour. One group of employees that worked for a major bank asked to be given regular written tests to ensure they stayed current. They wanted to ensure they knew about the company's products in order to be accurate and effective with their customers. They had a high "care" factor.

Future leaders are looking for employers to let them do their job on their own terms. They are asking the employer

to tell them what is wanted as an outcome and then to let the employee themselves figure out how best to make it happen. They say, "Give me the right tools and support, tell me the outcome, and I'll figure out the process." More and more, these future leaders want to know their company's mission, vision and values — and then within those parameters they want to decide how to best get the job done.

To that end, a structured performance measurement protocol is warmly welcomed by these employees. It is a safeguard to ensure they are adequately recognized for their contributions. Providing individuals empowerment in how to get the job done, together with an effective performance measurement system, is an ideal way to promote employee engagement.

Fostering personal growth

These workers are an ambitious and impatient lot. They want to be promoted quickly and given more responsibility. They want to deliver and don't want to be disappointed. Far from being afraid of a challenge, they want the training to rise to challenges.

But here's an important point: They don't want to be given training for the job they currently hold. They want to be trained for the job they will

have two promotions from now.

Younger employees are also eager to learn from each other. Networking events, opportunities to share ideas with each other and conferences are big. They want to learn from each other's mistakes and share best practices. Although there is some inherent internal competition among young employees, management can foster an environment of shared learning.

To respond to this demand, one telecommunications company developed "cohorts" and organized networking events for employees who joined the company in a given year. These employees "grow up" in the company together. They compare their career progress with each other and share on an ongoing basis how they overcame challenges along the way. They become support teams for each other.

But there's one little hitch in all of this. Getting it right means really understanding what employees need individually. Feel comfortable asking them what they need and ensure they feel heard by responding with direct and meaningful action.

Daphne Woolf is managing partner with the Collin Baer Group Ltd. She can be reached at dwoolf@collinbaer.com or (416) 461-5600.