Creating a truly engaged workforce and workplace
A bit of give and take on both sides can create just the right environment

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What do the people you employ really want? This is the question that I asked an audience of HR professionals last week in London.

The discussion started as to why an individual joins a particular organisation in the first place. The answers included ‘money’, ‘position’, ‘role’, ‘career path’ and ‘reputation’.

Employees usually start out with expectations of what they would like to accomplish. Everyone’s reasons may be different, but in the end the chances are that they will want to achieve job satisfaction and feel that their contribution matters and they are not just a small cog in a large wheel.

The following are the eight key learning points which we covered that day:

**Employees want to feel valued**
They want to feel that what they do is appreciated by the organisation and they are considered integral to the growth of the business and its vision for the future.

**Employees want to feel secure**
We know there is no such thing as a job for life. Those days are over. But what is not over are the steps that an organisation can take to show they care for employee well-being. Health care initiatives, medi-care programmes and gym membership are all indications the organisation sees you as a whole person and not just an anonymous individual who draws a monthly paycheck.

**Employees want to feel safe**
Bullying behaviour is still rife in many organisations and employees want to feel that they are safe from harassment or intimidation. They will want to know the organisation has a ‘no-tolerance’ policy on bullying and that this cascades from the top of the organisation through to the bottom. Unacceptable behaviour needs to be identified quickly and remedial action taken by management.

**Employees want to feel challenged**
Boredom can create stress in the same way as work overload and there is nothing worse than sitting behind your desk and counting the minutes until you go home. If an employee stagnates, chances are that the organisation will do so as well. There needs to be creativity, innovation and the creation of opportunities for employees to grow and expand their knowledge base.
Employees want to be involved
People like to feel part of a decision-making processes. Asking employees what they think and what ideas they might have can generate a feeling of pulling together. Even if their ideas are not implemented, they know they were given a hearing and their suggestions evaluated.

Employees want to have autonomy
If you are looking for job satisfaction, chances are that you are also looking for a degree of autonomy. Giving freedom and flexibility in terms of role or even working hours will almost certainly pay dividends.
People don’t like to feel micromanaged as it will not help them grow and perform productively.

Employees want to receive feedback
Making time to speak to an employee about how they are getting on can deliver great rewards — and I am not just referring to a once a year appraisal system. I am talking about an ongoing appraisal system where there is a constant dialogue between the boss and all team members.

Employees want to be listened to
Now I know that usually everyone has a full schedule — often to the point where it is frequently the case where no one has any time to speak to anyone, unless it is a quick email that delivers an instruction. However, the primary point is to make time to sit and actually listen to what someone is saying.
Of course, it takes time and as a manager with targets and schedules you may say you don’t have the opportunity to listen. But I would say that as a team leader, managing people goes with the job and, somehow, you have to find and make the time.

In a nutshell, this approach is not complicated. Does it always happen? Unfortunately not! However, the comparatively simple measures enumerated are, in fact, necessary to bring growth to both individual workers at all levels, and to their organisations.

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