

Happy + engaged = productive

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A Centre for Workplace Leadership survey has provided further evidence that "happy and engaged employees" can have a direct impact on increased productivity.

A business with a positive, motivated workforce is more likely to retain skilled and valued employees, have low absentee rates and minimum staff turnover.

High morale in the workplace can give an employer a strong competitive advantage. So how does a business ensure its employees are happy?

For many, there is more to being "happy and engaged" at work than what's in the pay packet every fortnight.

Knowing you are receiving your full lawful entitlements is obviously important, but it won't necessarily motivate everyone to achieve their best.

Those who give their utmost are usually part of a workplace culture that supports autonomy, innovation, creativity and collaboration - where managers are not the only ones encouraged to show leadership.

They're probably part of a team who are allowed to try things in different ways, who think outside the square about how things are done, and who evolve - and continue to evolve - the company's strategy, policies and procedures.

These employees are encouraged to make choices and decisions and express their opinion when they think there is a better way of doing something.

They are expected to inject their own ideas and creativity into the work they do, and they're part of a culture where it's normal to be able to question things and engage in two-way dialogue.

Managers and leaders should not under-estimate the optimistic effect these types of freedoms can have on someone's outlook, motivation and productivity.

Perhaps they should consider how they would react if they worked in a regime which dictated every step they took, without consideration for alternative options or ideas.

If any of us look back at past working experiences, particularly where we felt "connected" to the job, I'm sure we achieved better results than colleagues who were, or felt, disconnected.

To assess the mindset of employees, a first step for business should be to ask if the workplace culture motivates them - and if it does, how?

Do they feel encouraged to be creative and innovative in their jobs? Do they think there are genuinely open channels of communication to share ideas and express opinions?

It is then possible to learn about how different teams operate and make comparisons, and then assess which teams are producing better results, keeping in mind there is often not a one-size-fits-all approach.

Importantly, find out what employees think of the way their team operates, and whether they have any suggestions for improvement.

If they do have suggestions, ask them why they haven't put their suggestions forward before. This could potentially give valuable insight into just how open internal communication channels are.

You could find that these insights - some of which may be expected - could provide opportunities to consider changes to other areas of your business.

Having these conversations will also help build relationships with your staff, which in turn increases their interest in, and commitment, to your business and its success.

Such an exercise will also provide feedback on how individual managers operate and the management theories and practices they choose to apply.

Employers can then assess how their own management style translates to the output of their team.

Only by communicating with people from all levels of the organisation can you gain a clear understanding of the culture and what steps, if any, are needed to ensure the workforce is "happy and engaged".

The Fair Work Ombudsman oversees and has a keen interest in workplace relations - our legislated mandate is to promote co-operative, productive, harmonious workplaces.

I encourage employers and their managers to visit our website - www.fairwork.gov.au - and use the free materials and resources we have produced to assist them achieve happier, fairer and more productive workplaces.

Robert Hortle - Director Small Business Strategy, Fair Work Ombudsman

Page reference No: 2602

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