

# Your Employees are Engaged...REALLY?

Recently, I dropped in on an innovative workspace for one of my software technology clients— it's a very cool office space. An open-plan, communal space with worktables in rows, very low partitions between areas, and no private offices. Note that I said workspace, because it wasn't very clear to me how a vast room offering little in the way of private work areas could become a *workplace* – somewhere to get things done.

Of course, I can't forget the large sunny cafeteria and the designated area for Foosball table and other games. Ok, call me jaded but...this hip tech culture seemed a bit year 2000 to me, but which the office manager touted as contributing to a happy, productive and engaged workforce.

Part of me remains unconvinced. How can this be?

Some of the teams that I represent as a recruiter for technology talent have 'thinking' jobs in the software development realm, which means that they need time, space, and quiet to do their jobs.



*"Well no wonder why they're more productive than us!"*

Sure, they collaborate as team members and absolutely love games and free coffee, coke and popcorn- who doesn't? These bennies don't, however, make them engage in their commitment to their employers. It would be great if employers could throw in a few video and board games and get happy employees and top productivity, but that's not how it works. Engagement is forged with different tools: trust, loyalty, open communication, clearly-articulated goals and expectations, shared values and well- understood reward systems. It really isn't about how the office is set up, or the toys gathered to distract restive employees, that build

engagement. Turns out, employees engage with employers and brands when they're treated as humans worthy of respect.

When companies like the one I visited recently tell me their workplace culture and trendy furniture builds employee engagement, I try to make them see that they're focusing on the wrong part of the equation. They're focusing on *what*, not *why*. *What* can tell you a lot about a company, but it's *why* that tells you it's a good company to work with. I consult with these organizations and hiring leaders to consider the **whys** of employee engagement.

**Here are my top 5 questions which help construct the *WHYS* of employee engagement for leaders.**

**1) Why am I here?** An employee will never get to an answer if you don't communicate a shared sense of mission, vision and **goals**. Tell people why you want them to work at your company, and why you think they'll be successful. Then you can focus on what they need to do to be successful.

**2) Why should I trust you leadership?** Open communications build **trust**, which is essential to engagement. Respect is essential to mutual trust, and also builds engagement. Communicate clearly and openly about goals and expectations. With **open communications**, you'll be able to tell the why, then move to the what: what are the tasks and actions necessary to be successful.

**3) Why should I be loyal to your company?** Engaged employees know why they're loyal – they are treated with respect and honesty. Companies which rank mutual respect and honesty below procedural activities, such as tracking time, will see engagement and productivity drop. Tell employees why you're loyal to them.

**4) Why don't you communicate your company values?** Fail to show employees your organization has core **values** and you might as well forget about engagement. Even worse, if you talk about values and then behave in a vastly different way, you'll telegraph just how little management actually believes in and practices those values. Explain why a value system is important to you, and the what – the actual list of values – will follow.

**5) Why aren't you clear about the rewards of working in this company?** People need to know what to expect – not just what's expected of them, but what they can expect in return. If you're very clear and open about the rewards system – which includes everything from pay to benefits, bonuses, vacation, and the path upward in the organization. Explain *why* you have the rewards you do, and people will sign on and believe. Be crystal-clear, consistent and unambiguous in creating and distributing rewards, or engagement will go out the window.

Innovative workspaces have their own place and some employees that I've spoken with love these creative places. If you have a multi-generational workforce, focus on the whys of working for your company before you spend a moment on the whats – what desk, what chair, what computer. Engagement is innovative when it looks at why people behave and believe as they do rather than what might motivate them.

So break it all down – focus on the why, and the whats will come. If your employees cannot answer these five questions above all the cool workplace culture in the universe will not make a difference. Please let me know how it goes leaders and employees alike. I'm listening and engaging in the interim.