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Engage and Retain: The Power of Purpose in the Workplace



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Amy Panzarella is an HR professional with over 28 years of experience working in a variety of industries, including banking, hospitality, manufacturing, technology, government, and higher education. In 2021, she launched her business, providing consulting services, leadership coaching, training, presentations, and meeting facilitation. Amy's credentials include a master's degree in management, ACC, SPHR, and SCP. Amy was honored as one of the "West Virginia Wonder Women of 2020" by WV Living magazine. In 2018, she received the Jefferson County Distinguished Citizen award. Amy serves on several Boards of Directors and was appointed to West Virginia's Semiquincentennial Commission in 2022 by Governor Justice.

In the picturesque Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia, where our tranquil landscapes blend seamlessly with the bustling energy of Washington, DC, a common thread weaves through the fabric of our workforce: *employees yearn for a connection to a greater purpose.* This longing, if unmet, prompts them to seek fulfillment elsewhere. As Howard Schultz aptly stated, *"When you're surrounded by people who share a passionate commitment around a common purpose, anything is possible."* This sentiment encapsulates the essence of fostering a dedicated and engaged workforce.

The Need for Connection

In today's fast-paced and ever-evolving job market, the concept of "it's just a job" no longer applies. Employees are in pursuit of meaningful work that resonates with their personal values and aspirations. This quest for purpose is universal, transcending industries and roles. When employees feel a sense of

belonging and see how their contributions align with the organization's mission, it transforms everyday tasks into purposeful actions, driving both individual satisfaction and organizational success.

Employers can significantly enhance this sense of connection by providing opportunities for employees to immerse themselves into their communities through volunteering. This not only benefits local organizations but also allows employees to



showcase their talents and skills in meaningful ways. Employees seeking deeper purpose will find that their contributions are eagerly welcomed and greatly valued.

Involvement in leadership programs, such as Leadership West Virginia, offers employees the chance to expand their network and develop their leadership skills. These experiences foster personal growth and community involvement, creating a win-win scenario that benefits both employees and the company.

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The Cost of Disconnection

The absence of connection and purpose in the workplace is detrimental. Disengaged employees are less productive, exhibit higher absenteeism, and are more likely to leave the company. The cost of turnover is substantial, encompassing not just financial expenses associated with recruitment and training, but also the loss of institutional knowledge and the disruption of team dynamics. For small communities like ours, the impact is even more pronounced.



Competing with Neighboring Communities

Our geographic location prompts additional challenges for our local business, as viable talent is willing to cross state lines to find the opportunities that speak to them in rich and meaningful ways. Candidates are eyeing prospects in neighboring cities, as these areas often offer higher salaries, more extensive benefits, and greater advancement opportunities. To compete effectively, employers in our community must focus on what sets us apart: a strong sense of community, a lower cost of living, and the ability to make significant impacts in a smaller, more personalized setting.

Strategies for Fostering Connection

“When people are financially invested, they want a return. When people are emotionally invested, they want to contribute.”

- Simon Sinek

- **Align Values and Mission:** Employers must ensure that their organization’s values are clearly defined and communicated. These values should be reflected in every aspect of the company culture.
- **Invest in Development:** Continuous learning and development opportunities are essential. When employees see a pathway for their career progression, they are more likely to stay engaged and committed.
- **Recognize and Appreciate Efforts:** Recognition goes beyond monetary rewards. Regularly acknowledging employees’ efforts and accomplishments fosters a culture of appreciation. Simple gestures can significantly boost morale.
- **Encourage Open Communication:** Creating an environment where employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns is crucial. Regular feedback sessions, open-door policies, and anonymous surveys can help bridge the communication gap between employees and management.
- **Promote Work-Life Harmony:** It’s essential for employees to have the opportunity to reset and immerse themselves in activities they enjoy outside of work so they can recharge, providing the fuel to perform even better when they return to work.

The Role of Leadership

Leaders play a pivotal role in fostering a sense of connection and purpose within their teams. Effective leaders inspire and motivate their employees by setting a clear vision, leading by example, and showing genuine care for their team’s well-being. They should strive to create an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives are valued and every team member feels heard and respected.

Leaders who prioritize their employees’ development create a ripple effect that permeates the entire organization. These leaders understand that *their* success is intrinsically linked to the success of their team.

Leverage Levity

While the subject of employee engagement is indeed serious, it doesn’t mean we can’t infuse a bit of lightheartedness into our approach. Remember, even in a professional setting, a touch of humor and having fun can enhance connections and build a more cohesive team.

Conclusion

In our unique community, where the charm of small-town life meets the demands of the big city, fostering a sense of connection and purpose in the workplace is paramount. Investing in our employees can create an environment where they are not only skilled and capable but also deeply committed to their work and the organization.

Ultimately, creating a workplace where everyone feels valued, connected, and inspired to contribute their best is the cornerstone of success. As Simon Sinek wisely said, *“Customers will never love a company until the employees love it first.”* By cultivating an environment of mutual respect, fostering relationships, and building trust, we can ensure that employees find true purpose in their roles, leading to lasting engagement and success. ▽