



# Staffing Insider

## Issue 6

## Employee Satisfaction vs. Employee Engagement

Do the terms “empowerment”, “synergy”, “change management”, “corporate culture”, “core competency”, “strategic fit”, “redeployment”, and, one of my favourites, “thinking outside the box”, sound familiar to you? These are some of the common buzz words that you’ll hear today in many conversations. Oftentimes they are used in business to sound knowledgeable, informed and current with new approaches to managing people.

Some would argue that buzz words are merely an efficient way to communicate a concept in fewer words. But the fact is that buzz words often do little more than over-inflate, and sometimes misstate, the intended message. They are subject to misinterpretation and can lead to false conclusions and, through over-usage, they eventually become clichés.

“Employment Engagement” is a phrase often used as an alternative to, or a more sophisticated version of, “Employee Satisfaction”. However, upon closer examination, the two are quite different. Experts define “Employee Satisfaction” as “the extent to which employees are happy and contented, fulfilling **their** desires and needs at work”. “Employee Engagement” is defined as “the degree to which an employee is: involved in and enthusiastic about his or her work; committed to the values of the organization; and, goes beyond the basic responsibilities to drive the business forward”.

An important distinction is that employee satisfaction centres on how employees feel – how satisfied they are with their employment experience. Although a high level of employee satisfaction can sometimes benefit an employer in terms of staff retention, it is determined primarily from a “what’s in it for me” perspective.

In contrast, employee engagement serves both employees and their employers well.

Research shows that employees who are fully engaged in their work are likely to have higher morale, exhibit greater loyalty, progress in their careers, and even enjoy a more rewarding personal life. The employer gains significantly through a measurable reduction in turnover and positive employee behaviours that provide a competitive advantage and contribute to organizational success.

Studies conducted by several management authorities indicate that only 11 – 17% of staff are fully engaged, while 55 – 70% are merely doing their job with little emotional connection, and an alarming 10 – 20% are actively disengaged, often inciting discontent amongst their peers. Oddly, individuals from this last group may very well have an elevated degree of job satisfaction because their personal needs (such as salary level, benefits coverage, vacation entitlement, etc.) are met, but their negative impact on the business highlights the important difference between satisfaction and engagement.

Are satisfaction and engagement connected? Indeed they are; but they are not synonymous, nor does one necessarily guarantee the other. Although it’s unusual for staff to be highly engaged without a great sense of job satisfaction, it is certainly possible to have the reverse. In its most simplistic terms, employee satisfaction is actually quite easy to achieve...pay them lots, give them great benefits, increase their vacation time, provide attractive perks and ensure their work is somewhat interesting. Engagement, on the other hand, requires a broader approach and is a long-term initiative. It is a process, not an event.

How do you recognize poor employee engagement? Low energy, absenteeism, passive-aggressive behaviour, lack of teamwork, frequent complaints, little attention to quality and lack of commitment to continuous improvement are telltale signs. You may notice a general emphasis on things that affect them as individuals rather than on things that affect the business.



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When these symptoms appear in your company, some questions need to be asked:

- Is our workplace environment built on trust and integrity, where mistakes are accepted as learning opportunities?
- Do we offer career growth and development and welcome input?
- Do we have the right employees in the right jobs? Is there alignment between talent and the requirements of the job? Are job expectations clearly defined?
- Do we have a culture of respect where excellent work is valued and openly appreciated?
- Do we have an effective performance management process that encourages two-way feedback?
- Do we have a fair and appropriate reward system that provides sufficient recognition for work well done?
- Does our leadership team exhibit the right behaviours? Are they themselves highly engaged?
- Are our business strategies sound and do we involve our employees in the process of building these strategies?
- Do we have a distinct vision and has that vision been clearly communicated throughout the company?

## Employee Satisfaction vs. Employee Engagement

These are just some of the engagement essentials; many other factors may apply to your unique business or circumstance. The important thing to remember, though, is that even if you feel that the answer is a resounding 'yes' to all or most of the above, what really matters is how your staff would answer these questions!

While there is no 'quick fix' for dwindling employee engagement, the good news is that it is very easy to start on the right path. Even a small change can make a big difference to the general level of engagement within your workforce. Sincerely invite input and encourage open and honest feedback from employees. Once you have received feedback, take action. Highlight the changes you are implementing and make a connection back to the comments you received. Reinforcing the process will persuade others to participate, and you will soon find previously disengaged employees are more open-minded, if not fully engaged. Remember that employee engagement is a long-term journey, not a destination.

We will continue to share insider information about the employment and recruitment marketplace in future issues of the *Staffing Insider*. We would encourage you to [subscribe to our electronic newsletter](#) if you are interested in joining the discussion about HR issues and solutions in the upcoming recovery.

This issue of the Staffing Insider was written by Shelley Trenouth, President of Placement Group. The Staffing Insider is a regularly published insider's view of human resources issues and staffing industry best practices, trends and success stories. Aimco Staffing Solutions, Allen Professional Search, La Banque de Personnel, Placement Group and The People Bank are all specialty divisions of Design Group Staffing Inc.