

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT & BENEFITS

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The pivotal importance of engaged leadership must not be overlooked

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Ignorance is never a great business strategy



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COMMERCIAL FEATURE

Secret to employee engagement

Why bravery combined with vulnerability is a winning formula

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In a study by Mercer, 26 per cent of human resources professionals saw increasing employee engagement levels as a top priority for 2017. However, raising engagement levels in an effective and sustainable way relies on a particular characteristic of business leadership – bravery, says Stefan Wissenbach, founder and chief executive of Engagement Multiplier.

A leading adviser, speaker and author on employee engagement, Mr Wissenbach has spent more than 20 years helping business owners achieve the high levels of engagement that lead to increased productivity and profitability.

He says: "In that time, the three main challenges for business owners have consistently been how to attract and retain top talent, how to create a great culture and high levels of morale, and how to grow a profitable business. The answer in all cases lies in employee engagement, which is why, at last, it's become a hot topic for businesses today. But it's also one that many business owners have failed to understand and grasp.

"Effective engagement requires transparency and an environment where people can openly share their views or opinions on what is happen-

ing in the business. And this is where bravery comes in. Before you can take any actions to increase engagement, as the business owner you have to be brave enough to find out what is really going on in your business, the good as well as the bad."

From his experience of working with business owners, Mr Wissenbach knows that many find this difficult to do and would rather avoid it.

"Keeping the lid closed on problem areas doesn't mean they aren't there," he says. "And you can be sure that the rest of the team are already discussing them, over lunch or by the coffee machines. The bravery comes not from hearing the feedback, but from opening yourself up to showing your vulnerability while hearing it. It takes a huge shift of mindset for a business owner to realise that giving those problems airtime is the quickest way to resolve them."

There may be reluctance among employees to tell their boss what they think is wrong with the business, concerned perhaps they could be putting their job at risk. The only way a business owner will get a true picture of what is happening in the organisation is to create a safe space for honest communication.

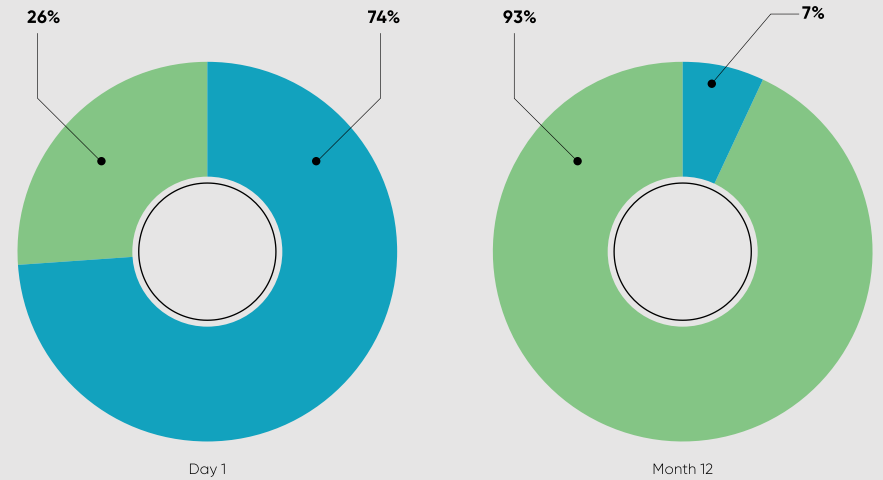
Traditional methods of inviting staff feedback have generally involved conducting surveys but, as Mr Wissenbach points out, in most cases they fail to deliver meaningful results.

He says: "There are many reasons why staff surveys don't work, from the frequency they occur to the way they are executed. When they are run internally, they create lots of work for those running them. People don't often trust them and they may not be confidential or anonymous, or certainly they are not perceived as such. Having carried out a survey it then takes a lot of time to analyse and respond, so in some cases the company doesn't do anything with the results.

"The mistake that many business owners make is to regard employee engagement as a topic that should

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● Not engaged ● Engaged



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WHAT BENEFITS DO ENGAGED ORGANISATIONS EXPERIENCE?

Companies that are engaged perform far better than the average organisation



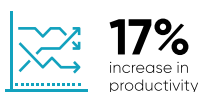
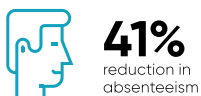
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be addressed just because it's being talked about. If you treat this as a box-ticking exercise, passing the project to HR to do something with, you are really missing the point.

"Successful and brave business owners take an active interest, and treat the topic as something they are responsible for, with the support of their HR team. The goal must be to create an environment where you have a truly engaged team and not to see that as the prize, but as the beginning of the journey. The real prize is what an engaged, motivated and productive team is able to deliver."

This is the principle behind EngagementMultiplier.com, a digital platform that enables businesses and individuals simply and efficiently to measure and improve engagement levels every 90 days.

"The simple act of providing staff with an opportunity every 90 days confidentially and anonymously to say what they think, and know they are listened to, pushes the engagement score up," says Mr Wissenbach.

"They will also understand and accept that you cannot deal with every issue raised before the next session in 90 days' time, so our advice is to choose the top three issues that emerged and find a way of addressing them."

Working primarily with growth businesses, typically employing 20 to 500 employees, programme participation rates exceed 85 per cent, while more than 93 per cent of clients achieve coveted engagement status in less than a year.

For both Engagement Multiplier and its customers, a new initiative launched at the start of the year has proved to be quite transformational. It allows firms to experience the platform and have a free engagement report produced on their business before deciding whether or not to engage.

"In every case, this free report delivers wonderful insight such that the majority of companies participating go on to become clients," says Mr Wissenbach.

As well as showing bravery and vulnerability, armed with open honest feedback from within the organisation, the strongest and most successful business leaders are those who will admit they don't have all the answers and, crucially, turn to their team for help in finding them.

"Some business owners are afraid this will be seen as an act of weakness, but the most successful business owners are gracious," says Mr Wissenbach. "A business owner who thinks they know it all is handicapping himself because the message he is conveying is that he is unwilling to learn from others."

And Mr Wissenbach is emphatic in saying that business owners and leaders who aren't brave will never win the engagement race.

"By allowing themselves to be ruled by fear, they destroy their chances of establishing a productive company," he says. "Acknowledging vulnerability is scary for most of us. But the strongest leaders turn their vulnerabilities into strengths.

"If you can unite your team members around a shared vision and purpose for the business, you can create a structure and framework that will enable people to understand how they can tell you what's really going on in your business. You will also have an environment where they are focusing on outcomes rather than tasks and with that you can build a fabulous business."

For more information please visit:

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“The strongest leaders turn their vulnerabilities into strengths