

A Look Ahead: Employee Engagement Trends for 2016

John O'Brien,
Vice President,
Employee
Performance Group,
BI WORLDWIDE

Here's an understatement for the year ahead: The workplace is changing and engagement strategies are changing along with it. Anyone involved in employee engagement knows that conventional wisdom has been turned on its head by a newly plugged-in and charged-up generation of workers. How well do you know the people who come to work every day and how will you effectively engage them in the next 12 months? Here's a roundup of top-trending strategies from BI WORLDWIDE to help make 2016 your most engaged and productive year ever.

TREND: Focus on happiness

Organisations have been trying to "sell" employees on engagement but what employees really want is happiness, pure and simple. Instead of declaring undying loyalty or planning long-term career intentions, employees want to enjoy their work, find meaning in it, be recognised when they do well and feel a sense of achievement.

What can you do?

- **Acknowledge contributions and effort.** Go beyond the cookie-cutter recognition programme and create unique recognition tailored to employees' passions.
- **Recognise service.** Don't wait for the traditional five-year anniversary. Celebrate milestones early and often, including at one month and one year.
- **Enhance your culture.** Work should be somewhere employees want to be, not have to be. Don't be afraid to give them opportunities to thrive.

TREND: Ask more from managers

Of course it's true that the standard practice is to acknowledge contributions made across every level of the organisation. But still, there's an added zing when an immediate supervisor or manager notices—and recognises—excellent work. Managers might need some help in spotting and rewarding desired behaviours but the effort will pay off in the long run.

What can you do?

- **Train them.** Let managers know why recognition is important and the value it plays in reinforcing key behaviours.
- **Empower them.** Research shows that when managers have recognition budgets to use at their discretion, employee tenure increases.
- **Communicate, then measure, then do it all again.** Spread the word and keep checking back to make sure goals are being met.

TREND: Make work meaningful

In a market that's increasingly shifting in job-seekers' favour, employees are looking for more than "just a job" and are seeking work that's

A Look Ahead: Employee Engagement Trends for 2016

personally meaningful. If employees aren't using their skills and being challenged, they'll move on. Hiring managers might be seeking someone to complete specific tasks immediately but they must also make sure even entry-level jobs provide opportunities to learn, contribute and grow.

What can you do?

- **Ask, don't tell.** Instead of doling out an assignment and dictating the process to team members, challenge them to find improvements and recognise them at every step in the process.
- **Delegate a project that would not otherwise get done.** Offer team members the opportunity to run with an idea that you haven't had the chance to explore. Give them basic parameters to follow, then make them fearless by removing any consequences for failing.
- **Let them lead.** Turn over an existing project and let your team members manage everything, from strategy development through project management to leadership presentations. Hold the team accountable to the budget and timelines while letting them know you're there for support.

TREND: Lead with compassion

Research by Dr. Brad Shuck, an internationally respected researcher on the psychology of engagement, and Maryanne Honeycutt-Elliott, expert in leadership development and executive coaching, has shown higher levels of engagement from employees who work for a compassionate leader—one who is authentic, present, has a sense of dignity, holds others accountable, leads with integrity and shows empathy. In fact, 74% of employees who work for compassionate leaders say they are unlikely to leave their current organisation in the next five years.

What can you do?

- **Translate strategic goals into individual goals.** This requires authentically listening to others and working to leverage their strengths, as well as having a willingness to be flexible and adaptable.
- **Develop others.** Focus outward—not inward—in a way that develops the skills, competencies and abilities of others.
- **Give and receive helpful feedback.** Listen deeply and communicate well, and you will create credibility, trust and influence.

TREND: Meet them where they are

Innovative technologies allow employees to speak and be spoken to with relevance, and relevance leads to better results. They're accustomed to pulling out their mobile devices whenever they have a spare minute and crave instant, easy access to news, apps, pictures, videos, statuses – all on their terms. They expect the same of their recognition programme.

A Look Ahead: Employee Engagement Trends for 2016

What can you do?

- **See it, believe it and live it.** Start with a clear direction that includes what you're communicating and use multiple channels and touchpoints.
- **Make it easy.** Give employees the ability to recognise each other on devices with which they're comfortable. Incorporate social elements like news feeds, comments and sharing, built using responsive design or in a native app.
- **Mix it up.** Offer multiple ways to communicate to employees, including traditional methods like company intranets as well as mobile, social recognition platforms and data visualisation boards in areas where employees gather, such as break rooms.

TREND: Train more, with less

Research shows that today's learner is overwhelmed, distracted and impatient. Two thirds say they don't have enough time to do their jobs properly. In fact, employees say they can only devote one percent of their time to learning and career development—just minutes in an average work week.

What can you do?

- **Make it short and sweet.** Break eLearning into Learning Snacks—two to three-minute bites of learning about a single topic or task. Learners receive Learning Snacks only when they're needed and don't need to "check out" of work for multiple hours just to complete training.
- **Be multi-device savvy.** Millennials are now the largest generation in the world and the largest generation in the workforce. Be aware that they almost unerringly reach for their mobile phones first. Make it seamless by delivering training to all major devices from a single version.
- **Custom tailor learning.** One size fits all? Not anymore. Each of your learners has previous knowledge and expertise, as well as specific gaps in knowledge and skills. Use data to dynamically configure the learning experience for individual learners.
- **Keep an eye on culture.** Chances are good that your learning audience is now a global audience, so be sure to deliver all course languages in a single version, using streamlined translation processes available through the cloud. Tweak translations to be relevant to the in-country culture, needs and limitations.

For more information on how BI WORLDWIDE can help you engage your employees in the year ahead, visit:
BIWORLDWIDE.co.uk or email
enquiries@BIWORLDWIDE.com.

