



Employee

The role of engagement in great customer experiences

By **Doug Shaw**

I was recently invited to speak at a conference about the part an engaged workforce plays in delivering a great customer experience. My experience and research shows this link to be essential, so I'm concerned to read that the CIPD says job satisfaction is falling in the UK.

Job satisfaction falling

According to their latest Employee Outlook survey of 2,000 staff, the CIPD's measure of job satisfaction has dropped from a score of 46 to 37. More people (42 per cent) reported excessive pressures at work, compared to six months ago (38 per cent), while employees were also more likely to say they have seen increases in stress and conflict at work, as well as bullying by line managers.

The previous survey had shown some resilience, based on the premise that people felt "lucky" to have a job. Claire McCartney, the CIPD's resourcing and talent planning adviser, said:



In the spring we interpreted high job satisfaction in the face of the recession as a 'fixed grin', where employees felt lucky just to have a job. In this quarter, the fixed grin is slipping and the temporary goodwill is being replaced with increasing frustration.

Retaining talent

Another interesting figure from the last report in April is a rise from 34 to 40 per cent of staff that ideally would like to change jobs. My own experience shows me that workers with scarce skills are already migrating and there is increasing talk of a war for talent as the economy picks up.

This may come as a disappointment but I doubt it is much of a surprise. For months here at What Goes Around Limited we have been asking business leaders questions like:

- How are you going to motivate your people?



- How are you going to get them to give the discretionary effort that's so vital in delivering a great customer experience?
- How are you going to get your people to trust you, and each other?

Recognition and engagement

Referencing the first question specifically, our experience in large organisations shows us that simple basic recognition is poorly executed. In a global telco, we found less than 3 out of 10 could strongly agree with the statement

In the last 7 days I've received praise or recognition for good work

That's despite the fact this statement is widely acknowledged as critical in the relationship between managers and staff.

Change management and engagement

There is a strong connection between the strategy, planning and delivery of change management, and employee engagement. Our experience in organisations which struggle with engagement shows me they also struggle with managing change. In one such organisation I have observed that only 6% of employees can strongly agree with the statement *"I feel that change is well managed in this organisation"*. Examples of why this is so include;

- *We don't finish what we start*
- *We don't engage, we tend to dictate*

- *We don't communicate change effectively*

There is some interesting research published by Right Management which supports this connection. According to their recent global study, ninety-four percent of employees who report that change was not handled well in their organizations are disengaged. They also note that less than half (43%) of employees are confident in their organisation's change process and ineffective change management negatively impacts an organization's ability to attract and retain talent. They go on to identify nine drivers of successful change which in turn support high levels of engagement. They are:

1. Senior leaders implement effective change
2. Safe and healthy workplace
3. Efficient work processes and people systems
4. Fit-for-purpose structure
5. Open and honest communication
6. Employees empowered to make changes to the way things are done
7. Teamwork between business units/departments
8. Resources to do the job well
9. Line managers have appropriate skills

Empowerment

I agree with a number of these points, particularly 3, 4, 5, and 7, 8 and 9. Whilst I acknowledge that senior leadership has its place I am seeing encouraging signs of successful change being co-created by workers and customers. Sometimes this has the endorsement of senior leaders but they often have little or nothing to do with its implementation, and quite rightly so. They rarely get close enough to the customer or front line staff to have any direct experience, and so they are much more powerful as an encourager rather than a do-er.

Likewise, empowerment is a word often used to encourage people to get involved, or take action themselves. Too often though, the accepted culture is to wait for empowerment to be given, after all we define empowerment as

to give someone official authority or the freedom to do something.

What organisations really need is a culture of getting on and doing the right things for the right reasons, without waiting to be told. This comes from a culture of autonomy, trust and respect, and as my experience shows, can lead to great, sustainable business results.

So how can we make these things happen? A practical thing that one can do at any meeting is to ask, *"What have we agreed to do?"* and in turn, *"What are you personally going to do to help us achieve what we have all agreed to do?"* Then listen for a SMART objective. Anyone is more likely to deliver what he or she hears themselves commit to aloud in front of their peers than to fulfill someone else's draft of the minutes of a meeting long after the discussion. Our experience shows us that commitment and delivery builds positive trust very quickly.



10 practical tips

Also, we have a wealth of good practice at our disposal. In a recently published article on HR Zone, we offered up ten practical engagement tips for managers. These were compiled through a series of interviews with top performing line managers at all organisational levels, so they are based on people's actual experience.

1. Create the 'right' culture.

Pretty much everything you do as a manager impacts the culture. Two important aspects are contact and communications. Make sure that contact and comms are regular, concise, relevant and meaningful. As well as face-to-face, one-to-ones and meetings, use technology e.g. MS Communicator. The important thing is to have contact; it doesn't always have to be face-to-face.

2. Be honest.

Tell your people how it is and always give the rationale. It's a manager's job to translate the high level messages and make them relevant. It's also a manager's job to ensure that the priorities are clear, small in number and reasonably constant. Ensure the team understands that some things cannot be changed. Explain why this is the case and ensure they know what can be changed and importantly, how you and they can work together to achieve this.

3. Trust and respect.

Both work two ways. Show faith in people's abilities and treat them as individuals. Get to know your team and what they do, understand them as individuals and understand what motivates them. Ensure you work with your people so that they have the skills and capabilities to deliver what is needed now and in the future to meet their long-term career aims. Be creative about how you work with them on their development e.g. getting your best performer to mentor someone new to the team.

4. Lead, manage and coach.

Set direction and focus and then ask the team how they will support. Encourage your team to be creative. Turn ideas into actions and monitor performance against what has been agreed. Allow large teams to become self-managing and give them empowerment. Think about your own development – get 360 feedback from your team, manager and peers. Identify someone who you admire as a leader/manager/coach and use them as a role model.

5. Encourage people to act.

Give clear objectives and encouragement so they become self-supporting, self-managing teams. People are motivated to do well if they feel valued and if they believe that they are listened to. When trying to achieve beyond the 'norm', people need to be encouraged to be bold. When things don't go to plan, the subsequent discussion should be about recovering the situation and sharing the learning from it, not about blame.

6. Recognise good work or extra effort.

People appreciate their work being recognised, a simple 'thank you' can mean a lot to your people. Think about the form the recognition should take. Some people thrive on recognition amongst their peers. For others, it's the opportunity to spend time with their management team one on one. There are ample 'e' recognition schemes available and make sure recognition isn't only delivered in 1:1s or by email

7. Feedback.

Give behavioural feedback to your team based on evidence and encourage them to do the same for you. Do not avoid giving difficult feedback to individuals about their performance and ensure you follow it through.

8. Take responsibility.

Avoid 'I don't want to do this either'. Also ensure you are aware of any issues in the

team and follow them through as appropriate. Try and maintain consistency and avoid the 'need it now' peaks as much as possible.

9. Honour commitments.

For example, one-to-ones, and team audios. Ensure that you do not re-arrange or miss commitments as if this happens too often, your people will not feel valued.

10. Enjoy working with your team.

We all spend a lot of time together at work and no one has ever said we shouldn't enjoy it. Make sure you have fun together. **S**



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Prior to establishing the business, Doug was Director of Change Management for BT Global Services in the UK which involved establishing and leading the sustainability practice for BT Wholesale.

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