

Tap into the Power of Engaged Employees

By Aimee Lucas

Highly engaged employees are easy to spot. They try harder on the job and drive business results. According to Temkin Group's 2013 Employee Engagement Benchmark Study, they are twice as likely both to work after their shift ends and to do something good for the company that is unexpected of them.

Engaged employees are three times as likely to make a recommendation for improvement at the company compared to their disengaged peers. They are also less likely to take sick days and more willing to recommend a job at the company to friends and family.

These behaviors trigger a "virtuous cycle" driving good customer experiences (CX) and stronger business results. Companies that outperform their peers in financial performance and in CX have considerably more engaged employees.

Yet despite the benefits of a highly engaged workforce, companies are not doing enough – or enough of the right things – to capitalize on this opportunity. Our research found that only one-third (35%) of large organizations received high scores when rated on their employee engagement efforts. Additionally, only 15% of HR professionals reported that they are significantly helping their company become more customer-centric.

The Five I's of Employee Engagement

Companies are beginning to see the deep connection between employee engagement and customer experience. And we expect more firms to focus on their employees in 2013 and beyond. To understand how organizations are raising employee engagement in the customer experience, we interviewed employees in over 30 companies and identified five categories of activities that we call the 'Five I's' of Employee Engagement.

• Inform

Provide employees the information they need to understand the organization's vision and brand values, along with how customers feel about the organization. Employees need a constant flow of communications about company priorities and what's expected of them.

Best practices include: Follow a thorough communication plan. Communicate across multiple channels. Make content employee-centric. Create opportunities for employees to hear from customers.

• Inspire

Connect employees to the organization's vision and values so that they believe those matter and take pride in their job and in their organization. Employees who are inspired by their employer's mission are significantly more committed and productive.

Best practices include: Define, communicate, and live by a set of values. Increase accessibility to senior executives. Tell compelling stories. Give employees a reason to be

proud of the company.

- **Instruct**

Support employees with the training, coaching, and feedback they need to successfully deliver on the organization's brand promises. Companies that want engaged employees need to provide them the knowledge and skills to succeed.

Best practices include: Launch company-wide CX training programs. Embed CX training in new employee onboarding. Use managers and front-line employees to deliver training programs. Develop specific training for managers and supervisors. Tap into e-learning for distributed employees.

- **Involve**

Take action with employees when designing their jobs, improving work processes, and solving problems identified through customer and employee feedback. Involving employees creates broader buy-in and a groundswell of engagement.

Best practices include: Develop a 'Voice of the Employee' program. Establish a CX ambassador program. Develop employee-driven improvement processes. Facilitate cross-role, cross-functional employee connections. Invite employees to thank customers. Find simple, informal opportunities to involve employees.

- **Incent**

Deploy appropriate systems to measure, reward, and reinforce desired employee behaviors and to motivate employees to give their best. Employees do what is measured, incented, and celebrated and will behave consistently with the environment they work within.

Best practices include: Enable peer-to-peer recognition. Provide on-the-spot rewards. Formalize CX incentive programs. Celebrate high-performing teams. Turn employee engagement into a management metric.

Mastering the 'Five I's' requires collaboration across many groups including senior executives, managers and front-line supervisors, marketing, IT, and human resources. While all of these groups make important contributions, companies that want to raise employee engagement and improve their customer experience need their HR professionals and CX teams working together. Companies whose CX performance is above average in their industry are twice as likely to have significant involvement by HR in their efforts. CX professionals and HR leaders looking to team up should consider opportunities in the areas of training and employee onboarding, measurements and incentives, employee review processes, recruiting and hiring, and awards and celebrations.

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