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Employee Engagement: Enough!

The recession is no time to worry about employee engagement. Pro or con?

Pro: Concentrate on the Business, Not the Workers

by Paul Hebert, I2I

Sure, go ahead and worry about employee engagement. After all, you're in this fix because of a lack of engagement, right? The lack of sales, lack of new product and service innovation, and the high cost to build, produce, sell, and service are all engagement issues. If only you had engaged employees, all those problems would disappear. "Damn those employees. They should be engaged, and they're not. We have to engage our employees to survive (cue dramatic fist pound on mahogany table in senior executive conference room.)"

Everyone is focusing on the employee engagement problem. But in reality, now is not the time to worry about finding ways to engage employees. Now is the time to be reflective and address the real issues in business today. Let's take a cue from Michael Jackson:

*I'm starting with the man in the mirror
I'm asking him to change his ways
And no message could have been any clearer
If you wanna make the world a better place
Take a look at yourself and then make a change*

Yep, it is all your fault.

The problem with focusing on "employee engagement" is that makes it sound as though employees were disengaged because of the lack of employee engagement programs. But engagement programs treat the symptom not the disease.

The real disease is poor management—and that's you, bucky. Employees don't need programs and engagement strategies. They need managers with vision, an understanding that employees want and need to work to the best of their abilities. Employees need managers working together toward a shared strategy for the company, not managers that worry about building individual silos. Employees don't need to be engaged—managers need to be improved. Employee engagement is

about having a well-run enterprise based on consistently applied values. Do that, and engagement follows.

Con: Workers Need a Morale Boost

by Gregg Lederman, Brand Integrity

Employee engagement will hit historic lows in the coming years and cost employers billions in lost productivity—and cost consumers in the form of a more frustrating I-don't-really-care-about-you customer experience. Employee engagement is directly related to the experience customers' desire.

A 2008 Bain Consulting study revealed that 81% of senior leaders believed their organization delivered superior customer service yet only 8% of their customers agreed. The study refers to the problem as a "Customer Service Gap." Whatever the customer service trouble is called, the root cause is leaders, many of whom have never worked the front lines servicing customers.

This "Great Recession" will widen the gap between the few companies that deliver a consistently good experience and the great majority whose employees are more disengaged than ever and deliver poor service. A Quantum Market Research study revealed that between fall 2007 and fall 2008, nearly one-half of companies surveyed had a decrease in employee engagement scores, measured by an employee's willingness to put in extra discretionary effort for the good of the business, speak positively about the business to others, and stay loyal to the job.

Think about the variables that make people most productive at work

1. Relationship with the boss
2. Appreciation for doing a good job
3. Stability and confidence that they receive a fair wage

All of the above are put to the test when leaders are more focused on protecting their jobs, making layoffs, and restrategizing on ways to survive, while spewing out pithy statements such as "employees are our greatest asset."

Should you worry about employee engagement today? Do the math. What if all employees in your company were engaged and willing to give the company 15 minutes of discretionary effort each week? The ROI would astound you and the improved customer experience just might make the difference between surviving the Great Recession and thriving in it.