



Train Individuals,
Not Employees, in a
**Human-Centric
Approach**

BY CRAIG GOODLIFFE



Employers must stop looking at employees as “assets” for the company, and instead see them as the individuals they are. Your employees are, first and foremost, people.

People have emotions. When they feel taken care of, they are more likely to return that treatment with gratitude, loyalty, and strong performance.

Unfortunately, too many companies value the bottom line over anything else, blinding themselves to the fact that there are other factors that are pivotal to their success. If you push your employees too hard to be productive and have high levels of output, they may feel burnout. In the long run, this approach could cost more money than it produces, as high rates of employee turnover mean additional spending to train and onboard replacements.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF EMOTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

In recent years, many workplaces have focused more on the concept of emotional intelligence, or EQ. As defined by Lauren Landry in a 2019 article for Harvard Business School, “Why Emotional Intelligence Is Important in Leadership,” EQ is “the ability to understand and manage your own emotions, as well as recognize and influence the emotions of those around you.” This

has become an important leadership skill in the business world because it is an essential facet of several responsibilities, such as conflict resolution and empathy.

For business leaders, exhibiting emotional intelligence with their direct reports will be pivotal in the employees’ success in the workplace. As reported by the University of Warwick in a study published in December 2015, “Happiness and Productivity,” employees considered “happy” were around 12% more productive. Therefore, it is in the best interests of organizations to prioritize their employees’ mental well-being.

Still, business leaders often mistakenly believe that employee emotions are a series of binaries. Too many companies think employees are either “happy or sad” or “satisfied or unsatisfied,” when the truth is that an employee’s emotions fluctuate within a range of feelings on a daily basis. An employee could feel happy but a little frustrated one day, and entirely unmotivated the next. The goal of any employer is to keep employees near the upper half of this range as much as possible.

One of the most important realizations that every employer must come to is that each employee is different. The strategies



that keep one employee feeling fulfilled and engaged in the workplace might not work for others.

A good place to start is to consider what makes you feel most engaged. A strategy is more likely to feel authentic if it comes from a place of personal connection. Beginning with methods that work for you will create this necessary feeling of authenticity, but it cannot be a one-size-fits-all solution. Take the time to ask your employees what works best for them.

INVESTING IN EMPLOYEE EMOTION DURING THE TRAINING PROCESS

It is important to focus on employees' emotions as early as possible in their time at the company. From day one of the training process, take steps to make your employees know that you care about their emotional well-being and success in the workplace. Remember, training is often the first real impression they get of the company culture, so it is essential to show them from the beginning that they are valued as an individual in the workplace—and maintain that commitment.

To emphasize employee emotion in the training process, companies can take some simple steps to ensure new hires are invested in the workplace's culture. For example, they can set up mentorship programs, which pair new hires with established employees, to give them a resource to turn to if they are struggling in the workplace. Additionally, establish upfront that you have a policy of open communication by taking honest feedback from new hires. They bring experience and

perspectives from previous workplaces that can be used to benefit your own business.

FORMING A CONNECTION IN A REMOTE OR HYBRID WORKPLACE

Unfortunately, many of the training strategies that were once effective in the in-person workplace are no longer a potential keystone in the new remote and hybrid ecosystem. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that many office jobs could be conducted as efficiently, if not more so, by employees working from home.

However, many employers fear the potential disconnect between employees, leaders, and the business as a whole. Rather than seeing employees face-to-face, leaders are now seeing their team through a computer screen—if at all.

Perhaps the biggest loss that companies face in the remote ecosystem is activities such as icebreakers and team-building exercises, which are a direct investment in workplace culture. Although companies can attempt to replicate these activities in a virtual environment, it is much more difficult to get employees to engage with these exercises when they are not in person. Thus, it is important to find other ways to foster a positive employee culture.

Adapting to the remote ecosystem simply means embracing the challenges this new style of work presents. Instead of resisting the new paradigm and attempting to restore things to the way they were, employers should make a conscious effort to adapt to the circumstances. The most obvious way to do this is through frequent one-on-one meetings. Show employees that their



input is valuable by giving them ample opportunity to share it. During the training process, check in regularly with employees to ensure they are comfortable as they transition into their roles. Even afterward, continue to meet regularly to keep the lines of communication open.

UNDERSTANDING HOW COMPENSATION AND HAPPINESS ARE RELATED

Another common mistake companies make is thinking that they can buy their employees' happiness. Employee satisfaction is not as simple as paying people more or giving them small incentives like a pizza party. Although these methods of showing your appreciation are nice and can bring a temporary increase in morale, the effects are just that: temporary.

When it comes to displays of appreciation, it's crucial to avoid tokenization. If employees think the act of appreciation they're shown is simply "throwing them a bone," the effects on employee morale could be more negative than positive. If an employer seems inauthentic with its show of appreciation, employees could begin to think of them as cheap and manipulative—exactly the type of perception the company is trying to defeat.

Therefore, the most important quality an employer must have when showing appreciation to employees is authenticity. If you're going to recognize someone with an award, don't just send a simple email—enthusiastically announce it at a team meeting. If you're rewarding employees for hitting their performance goals, make the reward something they actually want and can use. Don't be afraid to survey your employees from time to time to ask what rewards will be most meaningful to them.

Generally, there are five ways employees can feel compensated for their work. Of course, money is one of them, but employers must not forget time off, self-expression, leadership, and the ability to help others. Some methods will work better for some employees than others, but a good rule of thumb is to offer a combination of all these forms of compensation and, if possible, adjust the balance to meet each employee's needs.

HELPING EMPLOYEES WITH THEIR INDIVIDUAL GOALS

One of the most important things a company can do to show employees they are valued is to respect their goals and allow them room to grow. Strong leaders understand that their company is not the final destination for many of their employees, but merely a stop along their journey. When you are willing to help employees grow beyond the direct duties of their role—such as by delegating additional responsibilities or even offering a mentorship for non-job-related topics—it shows that you value them beyond their direct contributions to the company.

Business leaders must also realize that the way each employee defines "happiness" can change over time. While someone might be happy in a particular role or at the company at first, they could grow tired of the arrangement. Strong leaders can see when this happiness is waning and make adjustments and accommodations to restore the feeling of satisfaction.

However, there may come a time when an employee is simply no longer a good fit for the organization. This is not necessarily the fault of the employer or the employee—people change and grow, and as they do, a job that might have been perfect for them could leave them feeling unfulfilled. You must be willing to help these people grow beyond your organization, as it will allow both you and them to feel more fulfilled.

MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT ON YOUR EMPLOYEES

Finally, remember that energy is infectious. As a leader in the workplace, you must be willing to give your very best every day. If you are experiencing and showing negative feelings, chances are your employees will start to feel down themselves.

On the other hand, if you constantly feel excited and energetic, this enthusiasm could also rub off on those in your workforce. Although bad days do happen, try your best to make a positive impact on your employees daily.

At a time when employee retention is more important than ever, companies must recognize their employees not just as cogs in the machine but as individuals with emotions, goals, and aspirations. By better understanding and caring for employees' emotions, as well as helping them achieve their goals, you can make your workplace environment healthier and more conducive to employees doing their best work.

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