

Attraction and Retention: A Culture for Employee Engagement

By Bobbi Kloss

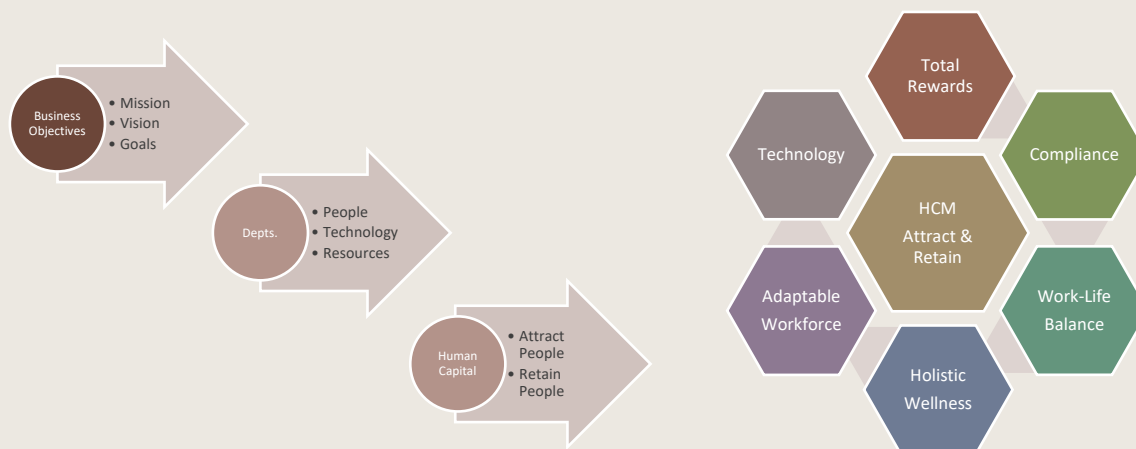
In Part 1 of our three-part series from the October 2017 newsletter, [*Company Culture is the First Draw for Candidates*](#), we explored the converging forces that are creating a competitive labor market for employers. At 4.1% - the lowest unemployment rates in 10 years based on January 2018 Bureau of Labor Statistics data - employers are concerned with the scarcity of talent. In Part 2 from the February 2018 newsletter [*Company Culture is the First Draw for Millennials*](#) we took a deeper dive into the characteristics of past and current generations and how advancement in technology is the driving mindset of the generations that carries over into the workplace.

The ability to attract and retain quality employees is always a top-of-the-list business objective for any employer. How well a business runs is dependent upon the workforce being productive. With the tight labor market and one of the highest turnovers in generations, how can an employer establish a culture of employee engagement to not only attract but retain their employees? Let's first look at the value your organization places on its employees.

Back to Basics - Elevate HR within Your Organization

You can generally tell how an organization perceives their employees by looking at the HR Department. A company's Human Resource Department should be a strategic partner with the C-Suite, connecting the employees to the mission and the goals of the company as well as to the success and challenges in meeting those goals. Why?

When the C-Suite is working off a defined, continuously updated business plan, the direction of the company is established, the needs of each department within the company can be identified, and the ability to attract and retain a workforce is mapped out, budgeted, and executed upon through HR. Everyone is rowing the boat in the same direction. The following graphic shows what this would look like.



A challenge for management, and one which HR should be adept at being able to guide the organization through, is directing the employee through the trials of the outside world that they bring inside to the workplace. Physical ailments, financial struggles, emotional turmoil and social disconnections are a part of everyday life. No matter how hard we try, they affect our productivity.

An HR Department can work to ascertain today's needs, as well as future needs, and engage with their benefits provider for necessary resources. As the health and welfare agency's role has expanded to not only select a competitive benefits package but also provide education and additional resources to help an employee maximize their plans in all areas of holistic wellness and work-life balance.

A Two-Way Positive Communication Street

For an effective culture of employee engagement to occur, it comes in knowing that for an employee they are defining job satisfaction as a mutual relationship based upon values of trust, respect, and appreciation. How does this look?

Employee engagement articles will name benefit after benefit and program after program that employers should implement for an effective employee engagement program. These include but are not limited to onboarding programs, flexible work hours, non-traditional worksites, pets on the worksite, job sharing company volunteerism opportunities, wellness programs, student debt reduction plans, borrow forward on paychecks, recognition, and rewards programs.

I would agree that these are all great possibilities for an organization to survey and determine if any of or combination of these and other benefits/programs work for their needs. Employers, be forewarned though, you can pile on these benefits and many more and they can all be meaningless if there is not first a value-based system established built upon mutual trust, respect, and appreciation between employer and employees. This begins with an environment that respects each person for who they are.

There are many lessons that we learned from the Me-Too movement that developed off the sweeping sexual harassment allegations throughout the movie Industry. First, discrimination and harassment still rampantly exist in this country. Another lesson is that within today's generation, both males and females are uniting to say this must stop!

Employers must not allow these behaviors to continue. Not only is discrimination and harassment behavior illegal but it is also costing employers thousands upon thousands of dollars for violations of EEOC regulations. The EEOC investigated over 84,254 workplace discrimination charges, obtaining \$398 million for victims and 6,696 sexual harassment charges with \$46.9 million in monetary benefits for victims of sexual harassment. These behaviors are toxic to the work environment and can harm a company's reputation in the community, which affects its ability to attract and retain employees.

Employers must have not only a written policy and continuous management and employee training, but an environment must exist that says, "We prohibit discrimination and harassment and we will ensure that the policy is upheld." All the written policies in the world will not help an employer – from the CEO to the employees – if all are not working in harmony to support the policy.

What are next steps?

Now that your employee value system is established, and HR is supported to meet that value system, an employer can now look at the needs of its workplace to determine what benefits and programs will support those needs. Communication needs to continue. Employers should be surveying their employees so that they can build a foundation of policies, tools and resources including benefits and programs that are not only compliant but based off meeting today's needs and future needs. Again, an advisor can guide you through this process. Helping you balance the needs of the employees against the strategic business objectives of the organization an advisor will assist an employer to establish programs that drive the organization forward with engaged employees.

Then HR should manage your expectations of your programs. Once your programs are implemented, they may not immediately provide a return on your investment. Continuous communication, feedback, and retooling will need to occur for long-term success.

Today, turnover costs a company anywhere from six-to-nine months of an employee's salary, according to SHRM. With unemployment at 4% and millennial turnover already at 34% more than the average, why wouldn't an employer start employee engagement with recognizing the value of their employees and elevating the HR Department to support the value? Seems like a no-brainer.



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