

## 7 Ways to Engage Employees Who Are Just Waiting to Retire

By Bonnie F. Mattick, MA Ed., MBA

Organizations are working lean – doing more with less as they try to reduce cost in a tough economy. I wasn't surprised when I was asked recently, following a seminar on workplace behavior and employee engagement, "What can you do with senior employees who are not engaged with their work and seem to be just putting in their time until they reach retirement?" The answer to this question varies, depending on the situation.

I surveyed a group of human resource professionals, of varying ages and years of experience, to determine how they'd help engage these disengaged seniors. I've summarized their responses to that open-ended question, added my comments and a possible solution to the problem.

**1. Mentors Feel Valued.** Align senior employees who have a wealth of knowledge and experience with newer employees. The new-hires quickly get familiar with the company system and the senior employee feel valued. At the same time, the newer/younger employees share a renewed outlook on workplace life.

**2. Raise the Bar.** Ask managers to hold the employees to a higher performance standard; and encourage the employees to take the initiative to be more engaged. Find out if the manager is engaged and sees value in encouraging all employees to perform beyond what's well enough to get by.

**3. Plan for Performance.** When you set deadlines for specific assignments and goals, ask for input from the senior employees. Track their progress on a weekly or monthly basis and make sure they understand the requirements. Managers and supervisors may use a coaching and feedback model to review goals. If the employee fails to meet the goals and required work, there are three solid reasons to consider termination:

- ▶ Disengaged employees are expensive to retain;

- ▶ The disengaged employee's attitude spreads among the team like a disease;

- ▶ The manager's action sets precedence for other employees.

**4. Rah! Rah! Team.** Remind employees they are still part of a team so they have a sense of belonging. Explain how their actions and behavior contribute to the bottom line. Encourage them to be excited about their work. Create an environment where the employees can be open and vulnerable. It helps if you empower them to make decisions and provide team support for their actions.

**5. Find the SPARK!** What would bring senior employees joy in their work? What sparked them toward the job in the first place? Chances are the senior employee has worked at the organization longer than you, their manager/supervisor. Ask them about the "old days."

- ▶ What was the organization like?

- ▶ What was it like to work there?

- ▶ What did they like about the organization, the job, and the people?

**6. ASK!** Ask the employee what can be done to help them be more engaged in their work. Conduct a survey to find out how employees feel about their work. In order to ascertain the senior employee's feelings, survey all employees.

- ▶ What do they need from management to support them in their job?

- ▶ Conduct a focus group meeting with employees from different generations and ask them to give three recommendations on how employees can become more engaged at work. Listen closely to what they suggest.

- ▶ Follow-up on the recommendations



and implement what is relevant.

**7. Look at the Organization as a Whole.** Does the organization use survey questions for employees? Find out if the employees feel appreciated and valued by their managers and if they are contributing to the organization's mission? Self-worth is the greatest factor in employee engagement – have employees who feel appreciated and valued. Ask your staff:

- ▶ Do employees know whether they are appreciated and valued?
- ▶ What is communicated to employees and how is it delivered and received?

In a situation where the employee simply does not fit either the position they're in, or your organization, one option is to transfer the employee to a position in which there is a better fit. Finally, termination may be the logical action to take for the welfare of the employee and the business. Some action must be taken.

Unengaged employees of any generation simply drain resources from the organization. That doesn't benefit anyone! ☹

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