

Employee engagement trends 2017

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Engaging employees to create effective teams that win in the workplace, as well as in the marketplace, is a challenge common across industries, President of HilburgMalan Alan Hilburg told a recent forum at the Gordon Institute of Business Science (GIBS).

Hilburg said a central challenge facing human resources teams in the year ahead is the need to establish the function as an integral business partner by “being fluent in the language of business”, thereby demonstrating its contribution to bottom line.

“Business plans don’t deliver results, people do,” Hilburg said.

Becoming an integral business partner

“Human resources need to be able to talk strategy to anyone in the business, in the business context,” Hilburg said.

Sappi Group Head of Human Resources Fergus Marupen said employee engagement is central to boosting productivity: HR should decide on and implement simple enhancements to boost productivity and to engage with employees, he argued.

“Solutions must be business solutions, with an HR slant, and must be executed with speed. There is a clear need for the simplification of HR systems, policies and interactions with leadership,” Marupen said.

Head of Employee Engagement at Aon South Africa Zanele Dintwa implored HR teams to be client-focused, and concentrate their energies on leadership and people in the organisation, rather than on administrative tasks, in order to become a true business partner.

Employee engagement trends for 2017

Hilburg highlighted the importance of building trust, decision-making culture and engagement measurements as emerging trends for the year ahead.

- Trust between employees, leadership and trust of the organisation itself are all integral to employee engagement. Building a sense of trust creates teams that are motivated, passionate and engaged, Hilburg explained.

Marupen defined trust as “when you consistently do what you said you would”; while Hilburg said trust is “consistency of experience”.

Dintwa said it is only possible to overcome silos within business through the creation of trust, and this is why relationship-building exercises within the company are important.

- Decision-making - Decisions are the key link between a company’s culture and values: “Culture is the environment in which you make decisions, and organisations die or thrive on decisions. Your culture defines your decisions, which are guided by values,” Hilburg said. In today’s competitive global business environment, corporate character matters: “It is not just about what we do, but who we are in today’s marketplace,” he added.
- Leadership trends - leaders have to be agile enough to deal with volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. There is an acknowledgement that leaders develop incrementally, and that leadership is built around growth stages.

Responsibility for one's own development will continue to be transferred to the individual in 2017.

- Hilburg said organisations should abandon traditional engagement measurements and aim to achieve employee engagement, not merely employee satisfaction.

Marupen argued the most effective manner to test employee engagement is through in-person sessions with top leadership and employees. "The tone set by your senior leaders sets the culture and level of engagement," he said.

Millennials – bridging the generation gap

As the Millennial generation enters the formal workforce in ever-greater numbers, the responsibility often lies with HR for integration and management of expectations.

"Millennials see the world with different lenses - the Millennial generation is the values generation," Hilburg explained.

Managing and motivating the Millennial generation remains a challenging task for many of today's senior leadership. "They want transparency and to be a part of something bigger than themselves. You don't manage Millennials. You lead and inspire them," Hilburg said.

Yoni Titi, Chief Executive Officer of Yoni Titi Human Capital Evolution, said Millennials are frustrated and don't enjoy hierarchy. "They want access to leadership, which isn't an unrealistic request." Transparency and rotation within the organisation were also important to them.

In her experience of recruiting for high-performance companies, Titi said individuals are beginning to demand flexibility in their working hours and in company benefits.

Candidates "want increased flexibility, even a three-day working week, so it is important to recruit individuals who you can trust with such flexibility," she said.

Flexibility in benefits is also important – Millennials no longer want an office gym or crèche, as this doesn't suit their life stage. Instead, they would rather have the opportunity to take month-long sabbaticals to travel.

"Millennials get bored very quickly and have a three-year career outlook," Dintwa added. Instead of seeing this as a threat to stability, she suggested creating opportunities within the organisation where such employees can move and learn, but also stay and contribute.

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