

One of the challenges we face when seeking to improve our company results is staff engagement; we need to have a highly-motivated workforce so we can tap into their discretionary effort so they want to go the "extra mile" to achieve great things for the business.

Having recently taken a short cruise with my mother on the Queen Victoria, where the standards of service were consistently high, even though staff were working long hours, I have been reflecting as to how we can achieve this in our companies to sustain competitive advantage.

An excellent starting point is to have the right infrastructure. By this I mean making sure that all staff understand what the company is there to achieve and that they have team and individual goals so they are really clear about what they should achieve.

Following from this it is important that all team members are clear about what role they have to play within the team and how this fits with their colleagues.

There needs to be a plan with easily understood procedures so team members are clear about how they will achieve the goals and priorities.

Team members should be encouraged to develop strong team-working relationships with relevant colleagues, get to know each other's strengths and limitations and offer support when necessary using their complementary skills.

There should be a robust performance management system in place so that team members are encouraged and rewarded for doing "the right things".

Managers should invest time coaching team members to help them develop their abilities.

Many organisations including Gallup and the

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Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development conduct surveys to understand what effective leaders and managers should do to ensure high levels of staff engagement.

These tend to include making sure that team members have clear expectations as to what is expected from them, feel listened to and have the right materials and equipment to do a good job.

Reflecting on the results from staff engagement surveys I have conducted for clients in our region in the last couple of years, while the results vary from organisation to organisation, there is one trend that tends to be consistent amongst the majority and that is in relation to receiving praise for doing good work.

Most team members I have surveyed across different industry sectors don't feel that they are getting enough.

Research shows that we need to receive specific praise at least once a week. It seems that the art of giving specific, positive feedback which makes team members feel valued and therefore engaged seems to be a skill that leaders in our region could develop to achieve competitive advantage.

If you find that you have team members who do not deserve praise for good work at least once a week then that requires a different action plan.

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