How ‘Clock-Changer’ Employees Can Help Increase Your Bottom Line

You know that task that no one has ever bothered with? A clock-changer is the one person who steps up.

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In my career I’ve had the honor of occasionally witnessing a clock-changer in action.

What’s a “clock-changer?” It’s an employee who is willing to go the extra mile to accomplish a task that everyone else is skirting. During my tenure as CMO of Kodak, for instance, there was a clock in one of the meeting rooms which always had the wrong time. Everyone commented on and poked fun at the clock, but no one changed it. Then, one day, a female executive pulled up a chair, took her heels off and climbed up to change the clock to the right time. Everyone else just sat and watched.

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That’s what I mean by a “clock changer.” Do you have one in your midst?

In today’s competitive market, it’s hard enough finding employees who are not just rock stars but will blend in seamlessly with your company culture and fit with the vision you’re creating or building. And retaining that top talent is even harder. Then there’s the happiness factor: Happy

employees make for high retention rates, which has a direct correlation to the company's success and bottom line.

Low turnover rates mean that employees are happy and engaged in their work, a key pillar in building a strong, sustainable and long-lasting foundation. To make an impact, employees need to be engaged.

However, the numbers tell a different story. Approximately 65 percent of employees are not engaged or actively disengaged at work according to the much written-about *State of the American Workplace* report, which also cited a cost to U.S. employers of between $483 and $605 billion in lost productivity each year.

Clearly you don't need a Ph.D. in economics to know those numbers are awful. Nor is it all numbers: Some of the symptoms disengaged employees reflect are pretty obvious: absenteeism, poor attitudes, considerable time spent on social media and a constant lack of enthusiasm.

Any leader with this type of employee had better be making some changes … and *fast*!

Toxic employees

To nip this problem in the bud, organizations need to make changes to the way they approach employees. For example, I recently listened to a webinar conducted by C. Lee Smith, CEO and founder of SalesFuel, who cited his personal experience on how to properly identify toxic employees. Smith talked about hiring two employees in particular who single-handedly eroded the company's culture. What's more, Smith delved into how to identify this type of employee, the steps to take if you have one in your midst and tips on how to avoid them altogether.

How do you develop and train your own workforce to remain engaged and committed to the cause? Here are four steps.

Have meaningful conversations.

The proverbial “water cooler” is not the center of conversation anymore. As illustrated by a Talent Works International infographic, email and messaging are now the communication channels for 67 percent of the conversation that goes on in open-plan offices. Employees also spend 73 percent less time in face-to-face interactions, according to the infographic. As instant messages and other tech tools replace human interactions, leaders should be trying to bring those back.

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Personally, I love our own offices’ floor plan. Our New York City office is completely open, and everyone is in close proximity. While an open plan office is less than optimal when we have conference calls (some of us can be loud), it allows for close interactions with the people we spend the most hours with. The same goes with our Sioux Falls (S.D.) office. An open floor plan increases camaraderie and provides more genuine interactions – which in turn adds positively to our company culture.

However, office layout is not enough to keep employees engaged. As leader, you should make it a point to regularly approach your teammates and engage in a meaningful conversation. It doesn’t have to be a lengthy one, but it has to be a meaningful one.

Ask how people are doing, how their families are doing, or tell them why you value their work and commitment to the company. In fact, according to BusinessSolver, 92 percent of employees in one poll said they believed that showing empathy is an integral part of increasing employee retention. The more you recognize their contributions, the more valued and irreplaceable they feel. And the more productive they are, too.

Tell them where they fit.

We all want to know how we fit into the company's overall plan. It's human nature to want to know. Also, everyone wants to be noticed by the boss (or an immediate supervisor) and will work hard to achieve that praise.

Almost all employees surveyed by Clear Company, 96 percent, agreed that receiving feedback on a regular basis contributes to happier employees. And data from a Global State of Employee Engagement survey showed that 63 percent of employees felt they didn't get enough praise,

Clearly, it's critical that employees feel that they fit seamlessly into the bigger picture, not to mention that it's always nice knowing that clients, co-workers or other executives value you. Research from Deloitte found that turnover rates for organizations with recognition programs examined decreased by 31 percent.

Make the effort, then, to keep your turnover ratio low, because it does affect your bottom line. Turnover is expensive. On average, it can cost an amount that equates to approximately 20 percent of an employee's salary. Other studies show replacement costs being as high as $150,000 per employee.

The takeaway? Invest the time, reap the rewards. Make employees feel appreciated.

Challenge them constantly.

Everyone likes a challenge – some more than others. One thing for sure is that no one likes to be bored. When was the last time you challenged your employees? And by "challenge," I mean giving them a task that stretches their comfort zone and promises to take them to the next level.

Employees want to be challenged. And while there are parts of every job where routine is king, efforts need to be made to make work as balanced as possible. Not that skepticism isn't a problem: According to a Tolero Solutions survey, 45 percent of employees polled said they lacked trust in their leadership; and that can affect work performance. Any business leader should be working to decrease this percentage.

The first step? Creating a trusting work environment by always being up-front with your team. Transparency should be one of the main pillars of your organization. Once you've achieved that level of trust, employees will be more open to being challenged.

The grunt work required with most jobs needs to be offset by more challenging tasks, to keep everyone engaged. Not to mention that delegating tasks meant to stretch an employee's potential denotes a high level of trust in that individual. It lets this person know you have faith in his or her abilities and expect the outcome of the project to be a successful one.

Play up to their strengths and develop new projects for them, such as onboarding new employees or interns – especially if you're a small business owner without an HR department.

Don't let them get lost in the shuffle.

Every employee wants to be recognized and, to an extent, made to feel special. It's great to have a pizza party to celebrate a milestone, but ask yourself, is that fair to the salesperson who made that milestone possible? Again,a grand gesture isn't needed, but something does need to happen.

For example, every time I go to my Sioux Falls office, I try to buy lunch for the team. They work hard and lunch gives us time to take a break from the fast pace of work and relax.

However, if there’s someone who’s gone above and beyond, I either pull him or her aside and to compliment the great job or recognize those efforts in front of the entire team. Chances are the employee will be thankful: An Office Vibe employee engagement study determined that 82 percent of employees surveyed thought that it’s better to receive praise than a gift.

In sum, your employees should be one of your most important corporate assets. Every CEO knows that. Making sure your people have the tools and knowledge to perform at a high level should be a priority. Showing employees they *are* a priority creates trust. And trust increases productivity, while productivity increases your bottom line.

Related: Enough About Employee ‘Engagement’! Focus on the Digital Employee ‘Experience’ Instead.

Remember, you can always teach skills, but you can’t teach attitude or passion. So, make sure you hire clock-changers, not battery drainers.

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