

# Your Best Employee Role Model? It's When You Have Active, Engaged Managers

"I love this job. The work I do is so interesting and I am finally in a job that I am learning so much. My problem is that this manager of mine is totally out of control. Everybody knows it, even her boss, but he just looks the other way. That is why I am beginning my search. We have lost so many good people over the year I have been here because they just will not tolerate it."

**T**hat was an interesting insight I was given the other day. It caused me to think of a seminar on employee engagement I ran in Cairo a few months back where one of the participants gave another interesting insight. They said, "Fire all the bad managers since that is where engagement begins." Applause erupted.

Whatever your views on bad managers, and/or engagement for that matter, it comes down to two people in the room. The relationship that managers create with their team will determine the level of engagement within your organization.

It starts one connection at a time.

**Does your department resemble a wake?**

During my career in corporate HR, I always noticed departments that seemed such a good place to be. You know what I mean — everyone



**Ron Thomas**, Managing Director of Strategy Focused HR Group

laughing, crowded into the manager's office, having lunch or coffee together, having drinks at the end of the day.

On the other hand, you notice from afar other departments and the distance of team members, with everybody going their own way whether it be to lunch, coffee or after dinner hanging out. It almost resembles a wake. Everybody walks around with their head down trying to stay below the radar.

You tell me which department you would want to work in.

In a lot of cases, the managers are not totally to blame. People were, at one time, promoted into management based on their technical skill set. Top salespeople became the sales manager.

However, today the ability to collaborate, mentor, coach, and guide will have to be the competencies that determine the selection of your future managers. The lone wolf whose mantra is "my way or the highway" should never be put in charge of managing a group of people. It is a recipe for disaster.

As my friend said to me, it can have a disastrous effect. The new manager has to understand their importance in creating an environment where everyone is connected and, for the most part, "wants" to be there.

### **A new style of leadership development**

Going forward, there needs to be a new style of development to create a culturally aware manager. This level of training should start with first level or new managers and continue up the leadership food chain. Every person in charge has to understand their role in building a culture of engagement

Why does one organization, or department for that matter, get a reputation as a great place to work, while another struggles to retain its employees? You may attract people, but that does not connect an individual personally to an organization.

The level of commitment and the willingness of an employee to recommend their employer to others is what engagement is all about. The manager plays the most important role in that equation. But, those same managers can make or break an organization.

### **The importance of the engaged managers**

Engaged managers should act as a positive role model for all employees, and this strengthens engaged teams. Engaged managers are more likely to have an engaged team; disengaged employees probably have a disengaged manager, too.

Each team or department needs to understand how its roles and tasks fit into the organizational vision. Remember — each department ties into the overall organizational vision.

- Engaged managers use a diversity of skills, experiences, and backgrounds within the team to create an enthusiastic and innovative environment.
- Engaged managers build a climate of trust within the team.
- Engaged managers see the individual members of the team and their skills, and care about them on a personal level.

I was asked on a job interview years ago about who did I think was my customer as head of HR? My answer was: the employees, and the organization, with the main focus on the employee.

Needless to say, I did not move any further along in the selection process. I was told that HR belongs to the organization and is the driving force for the organization's missions.

### **Become the maestro of your own symphony**

My thought then, and has always been, that our employees are our internal customers. They are the key assets in implementing and maintaining the culture of engagement that leads to an organization's success.

The driving force behind that prized asset is the team member in charge of producing the organization's results. That is, it is the supervisor, manager or executive that leads.

It is their job to become the maestro of their symphony. The primary duties of this maestro are to unify each team member, set the tone and tempo, listen, and finally, prepare to shape the sound of their department.

That is not a skill that everyone has, but it CAN be developed so that you too can earn your baton and begin directing your own musical performance.

*Ron Thomas is managing director of Strategy Focused HR Group, a Dubai based HR consultancy, and senior faculty member and representative of the Human Capital Institute in the MENA region. He was formerly the CEO of Great Place to Work-Gulf and has held senior HR positions with Xerox HR services, IBM, and Martha Stewart Living. Thomas received the Outstanding Leadership Award for Global HR Excellence at the World Human Resources Development Congress in Mumbai, where he was named as one of the 50 Most Talented Global HR Leaders in Asia.*