Over the last decade the business world has shown significant interest in the concept of employee “engagement.” Identified as an internal state of being – physical, mental and emotional – employee engagement brings together concepts of work effort, organizational commitment, job satisfaction and optimal experience. But does the social engagement of employees lead to a lasting and successful marriage? Yes, says this author.
Employee engagement is about being positively present at work by willingly contributing intellectual effort, experiencing positive emotions and meaningful connections to others. This gives employee engagement three dimensions:

- Intellectual: related to the job and how to enhance it;
- Affective: linked to feeling positive about doing a good job; and
- Social: concerned with taking opportunities to discuss work-related improvements with others at work.

Extensive studies have demonstrated the importance of employee engagement to organizational performance as a business concept that addresses employees’ levels of interest and commitment to the job, resulting in a positive attitude towards one’s occupation and firm and consequently leading to greater productivity. Gallup’s Q12 Meta-analysis of 1.4 million employees conducted in 2012 and examining business performance, shows a positive correlation between employee engagement and business outcomes despite tough economic conditions. More specifically, Gallup found that engaged employees are more productive and customer-focused, as well as more likely to stay with their employers (Gallup® and Q12®, 2013).

Enter the Millennials

The study, which covered different dimensions of employee engagement, shows that employee engagement with corporate volunteerism is increasingly being identified as a key element in attracting and retaining top talent (see box). This correlates tightly with a prevailing characteristic of the current Generation Y, or the Millennials: defined as being between the ages of 21 and 35, the fastest growing segment in today’s workforce and the most sought after talent despite the prolonged recession. Perhaps one of the most distinctive characteristics of Gen Y is their search for meaning in the workplace, a platform that encourages them to contribute to society. It is important to understand and engage with members of the Millennial generation as they will represent the bulk of the workforce, the future of economic and social life and the future of business.

While many have claimed that employee engagement predicts employee outcomes, organizational success and financial performance, a considerable number of leaders question the return on investment (ROI) in terms of the amount of time and resources spent trying to address employee concerns. In fact, some observers warn that fixating on ever higher engagement survey scores is wrongheaded and may backfire if employers fail at improving the metrics and ensuring that their more “engaged employees” are behaving in ways that promote higher productivity.

Perhaps one of the most distinctive characteristics of Gen Y is their search for ‘meaning’ in the work place, a platform that encourages them to contribute to society.
The importance of social engagement

Recognized or not, without a motivated and engaged workforce, even the most brilliant business strategies can falter. The affinity that employees feel toward an employer has the power to create a competitive advantage that can be hard to imitate and is inextricably linked to organizational performance (Deloitte, 2011). Studies indicate that organizations that have engaged employees actually outperform those who do not. In fact, employers who take into account the connection between corporate volunteerism and employee engagement can reap substantial rewards. By sponsoring volunteerism, a company has the opportunity to communicate the values it shares with its employees, which in turn can result in a more engaged and committed workforce that drives the firm’s competitive advantage (Madison, 2012).

Companies seeking to enhance organizational commitment by means of volunteerism may have more success if their employees have the freedom to select from a wide array of volunteer opportunities. This is driven by the increased agreement with organizational values and increased perception of the organization that employees report as a result of participating in employer-sponsored volunteerism (Madison, 2012).

I do. Do you?

At the moment, employee engagement initiatives addressing community involvement and corporate volunteerism are being incorporated into the backbones of leading organizations. Forward-looking companies seeking a lasting “marriage” with their employees are encouraged to embrace the trend and establish social engagement as a differentiating agent of their firms. These organizations should emphasize the importance of employee engagement through offering a holistic kind of experience to their workforce and aligning with their passions if they wish to retain the talent that other firms are competing for.

by Soughit Abdelnour, senior manager, Human Resources, Deloitte Middle East

While many have claimed that employee engagement predicts employee outcomes, organizational success and financial performance, a considerable number of leaders question the return on investment (ROI) in terms of the amount of time and resources spent trying to address employee concerns.

Endnotes


