



'Hitting on All Cylinders'

A guide to developing engaged, committed employees

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Having all of your employees "hitting on all cylinders" is now more important than ever, says Todd Harris, director of research with management consulting firm PI Worldwide Inc. Harris, who advises clients on the creation and deployment of enterprise-wide talent management strategies, offers the following best practices as a guide to developing employees that are more committed, engaged and motivated:

Invest strategically. Make all human resources (HR) decisions in a rational, strategic way. Where are the talent pools within your organization that are truly critical to your company's strategy and future success? How does your company compete and add value for your customers? Any HR decisions that your company makes should be fully aligned with your business strategy.

Work the data. Most modern organizations collect a large amount of data about employees. Analyze this data regularly to spot key trends. For example, one company recently discovered that senior managers who left the organization prematurely could be reliably identified through a combination of personality traits, job experience and promotion history, so this data can be developed into a predictive HR tool.

Analyze the job. Do you have a process in place in which the knowledge, skills and abilities required for access in a given job are consistently identified before people are hired? When identifying these, remember to use multiple sources and multiple perspectives (e.g., job incumbents, managers, customers).

Embed employees. New research clearly demonstrates that embedded employees who fit well with the job, workplace and community, who have rich personal relationships with coworkers, and who would have to sacrifice a lot in terms of tangible rewards (e.g., money) or intangible rewards (e.g., friendships) are much less likely to leave a company.

Manage early interactions. New employees form significant impressions of companies immediately, and research has demonstrated that events that occur in the first hours and days can strongly predict turnover six and 12 months later. Don't leave these early interactions to chance, and make sure that you communicate clearly and frequently about the company's values and culture, and have managers check-in frequently with new employees to see how things are going.

Assess current and potential employees objectively. The use of well developed and well validated measures of personality, technical skills, values and cognitive ability consistently lead to higher-quality hiring and promotion decisions.

Create growth opportunities. Survey findings consistently indicate that providing superior growth and development opportunities increases job satisfaction and reduces turnover. Remember that training and development is part of the "total rewards" package that can be offered to employees, and that focusing on skill development is beneficial to individual workers and the company as a whole.

Develop great leaders. The stability and excellence of a company's managerial ranks is critically important to its continued success. Do your employees view managers as committed to the long haul and committed to their individual growth and success?

Track satisfaction. The job satisfaction of individuals, teams and the organization as a whole often serves as a "leading indicator" for operational metrics such as sales, customer satisfaction and profitability. Frequently and consistently monitor job satisfaction via both formal and informal means.

Design jobs. As new jobs are created in your organization, and current ones are shifted, are you designing jobs in such a way as to produce interdependence among employees? Research indicates that jobs designed with feedback and social support from supervisors and colleagues promote job satisfaction and employee longevity.