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The SAC® Release

Consultants Highlight Employee Involvement

The Society for the Advancement of Consulting® has asked its global members to recommend techniques and best practices to engage employees and quickly gain commitment to initiatives. “The feedback was startling similar,” says SAC® CEO Alan Weiss, PhD. “Explaining *why* something matters, and its impact on others, is the most direct, least expensive path.”

“As a global business consultant and former VP of Operations of a mid-market manufacturer, I’ve found that effectively involving employees in new initiatives will accelerate business results—engaged employees consistently deliver,” points out Lisa Anderson of LMA Consulting Group, Inc. in Claremont, CA. (www.lma-consultinggroup.com). “A few strategies to involve employees successfully include: 1) Promote why the initiative matters. 2) Ensure the employees know their contributions will be valued. 3) Engage informal leaders. 4) Catch them doing right and celebrate early wins.”

Gayle Lantz is Founder of WorkMatters, Inc. (www.workmatters.com), a leadership consulting firm based in Birmingham, Alabama that specializes in organizational change and performance improvement. She offers the following suggestions:

1. Engage a cross section of employees on a planning committee or innovation team so they know their perspectives are valued. Request their input and feedback early in the process.
2. Generate excitement about the new initiative. Start with leaders. The mood at the top trickles down to the rest of the organization. If you’re not enthusiastic about the new initiative, why should they be?
3. Like any other sales process, stress the benefits. What’s in it for them? Focus on the purpose and expected results first, then tasks—the “why” before the “how.”

“Too often, too much money, energy and resources are wasted when an initiative is first announced, and there is no strategy to sustain it and drive it through the whole organization. Employees don’t understand it, ignore it, and consider it a fad that will go away, until the next initiative,” says Simma Lieberman, The Inclusionist, president of Simma Lieberman Associates, <http://www.simmalieberman.com>, a diversity and inclusion/culture change consulting organization.

“Leaders must:

- 1- believe in, and be able to articulate the objectives of the initiative to managers, and employees.
- 2-demonstrate how the new initiative will benefit individual employees, make their jobs better or easier, and positively affect the whole organization.
- 3- communicate with, and enlist the help of de facto leaders, and key influencers. In the organization. Develop good relationships with employee groups, and leaders of the union, if there is one.

4- hold managers accountable for educating, answering questions, and involving their work groups. Develop success measurements that are included in performance evaluations. Recognize, and reward employees and managers who actively promote, and play an integral part in making the initiative a success.”

“Involving employees in new initiatives is similar to getting employee buy-in to the initiatives of a company’s new owner,” states John Martinka, a Seattle-based consultant specializing in business buy-sell and exit planning (www.johnmartinka.com). “Business buyers arrive at their new company with energy, ideas and a desire for growth. Getting the employees to change their culture without feeling infringed upon can be tricky.”

“The best buyers successfully do this by asking the employees opinions, being open and implementing the employee ideas that relate with the new plan. Initiatives driven from the top down have a low chance of success.” Martinka's experience also finds “Participation by all involved in the process guarantees the initiatives acceptance. Employees often see business buyers as a ‘breath of fresh air’ because they don’t tell but rather they ask, listen and respect ideas. New initiatives need to be seen as that same breath of fresh air to increase the probability of being effectively implemented.”

Dr. Maynard Brusman is a San Francisco Bay Area consulting psychologist and executive coach and member of the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology. He is the president of Working Resources, a boutique strategic talent management consulting firm. www.workingresources.com
He offers a few insights:

“Leaders who want to succeed should clearly communicate what they believe and why they’re so passionate about their initiatives. Most people know *what* they do and *how* they do it, but few communicate *why* they take particular actions. People don’t engage because of *what* you do; they buy into a compelling reason of *why* you do it. If you don’t know and cannot communicate *why* you take specific actions, how can you expect employees to become loyal followers who support your initiatives? Great leaders tap into our intrinsic motivation when they connect with our hearts and emotions.”

Dr. Brusman notes, “Apple’s success lies in its leaders’ ability to innovate and be true to their core values, challenge the status quo and empower people. The leaders who helped create the iPhone, iPod and iPad inspire their employees to care about *why*. Strive to be one of those leaders who never lose sight of *why* they do what they do and *why* people should care. Only then will you inspire your people to be involved in new initiatives and attain sustainable success.”

“Because volatility has become a fact of life, employers’ effectiveness in involving their employees in change efforts is critical to organizational success,” states Dr. Pat Lynch, President of Business Alignment Strategies (www.BusinessAlignmentStrategies.com), a management consulting firm in Long Beach, CA. “Whether the need for change is driven by new initiatives or by organizational challenges is immaterial. The point is, management must become proficient at getting employees on board with change—and then keeping them committed to seeing it through.”

Lynch advises her clients to use a variety of approaches to ensure that employees support new initiatives. Here are five key methods that management often overlooks:

1. Communicate a clear picture of the initiative, including why the organization is undertaking it and what behaviors, processes, systems, and policies will have to change.
2. Identify, for each individual, why it's in his or her personal interest to support the initiative.
3. Ensure all managers lead by example.
4. Provide recognition for employees who engage in the desired behaviors.
5. Examine the organizational infrastructure (e.g., compensation and performance management systems) to ensure that it supports the new behaviors.

SAC is an international association of consulting professionals who subscribe to an industry code of ethics and have provided evidence of significant consulting results among their clients. For more information, please go to <http://www.consultingsociety.com>, write to info@summitconsulting.com, or call 800/825-6153 (401/886-4097).

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