

Do your employee surveys measure what matters most?

There has never been a better opportunity to learn the truth from employees about what it is like to work at your company. Your current approach to gathering employee feedback, however, may not be as effective as you think.

If, like many employers, you are using a traditional satisfaction survey, you may find that this time-intensive, less results-driven approach only amounts to piles of data that leave your human resources staff with their heads spinning. Or yours may be one of those companies that experience gaming activity among managers who try to drive up satisfaction scores.

Sound familiar? Let me share an example I heard recently from Courtney, an HR executive at a major retailer. She shared the challenges the company experienced with its annual culture survey. Courtney explained how every year, right around 90 days before the survey was due to go out, employee-focused activity in the stores would change.

HR staff would find themselves flooded with requests for services like team parties, trainings, mentoring programs and the like. Incredible inefficiencies resulted when the requests all came at once.

Managers would avoid holding confrontational performance conversations because they worried that people would score them low on the survey. They had a genuine fear of the results, because if a manager's scores went down, his store would be a targeted area and his employees would end up in HR focus groups. So managers would try really hard to keep employees happy in the months before the survey.

Employees who had been with the company for a while understood what was going on and took advantage of it. They called it "survey time." It wasn't hard to pick up on why the appreciative events were happening and why some employee behavior that would normally be reprimanded, wasn't. Employees knew that managers acted that way to game the system and drive up their scores.

This company's approach to gathering employee feedback has a few problems. For one, it incentivized the wrong actions.



ON PERFORMANCE

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Managers cared more about their scores than the activities truly needed to improve satisfaction and engagement. In addition, the results were invalid. The data was really a snapshot of employee satisfaction and engagement for the last month or two prior to the survey, not the previous year. These surveys measured short-term satisfaction and over time could not accurately be linked to employee, customer or financial metrics—the metrics that matter most.

Courtney says: "They were doing the right things for the wrong reasons. I could never understand why our company would want to create that kind of culture."

There is a better way to gather employee feedback—a much better way. All you need to do is say goodbye to the traditional employee satisfaction surveys and start measuring what matters most. I won't go as far as saying that measuring employee satisfaction is a complete waste of time. You can decide that for yourself. I will say that what you should care most about measuring is not how satisfied employees are but how engaged they are.

Engaged employees are committed and motivated to act in the best interest of your company. They know and consistently deliver your company's branded experience (your core values, brand promises, guiding principles, etc.), which delights customers and drives profitability.

The sad reality is that employees typically are not as happy or engaged as we often like to think. In fact, a recent study by Right Management indicated 66 percent of employees are unhappy at work. If employees are engaged, they are most likely quite satisfied. Are you assessing the happiness and level of engaged employees in your company?

If you don't assess the right things, the right way, then you don't know what the experience your company delivers is really like. If you don't know, you can't fix it; if you don't fix it, you won't reach engaged status.

Measuring the consistency of behaviors is a great leading indicator of success. It's easy to do, and it provides a wealth of insight into whether your workforce is bringing the experience to life—whether people are engaged. All you need to do is give every employee a list of the key behaviors you want to ensure are common practice in your company. Then use one of the many available survey tools to ask employees to rate the consistency of each behavior.

Simply ask, "How consistently do others in your work area do XYZ?" Think about it: The best (and maybe the only) way to find out from the workforce how consistently the branded experience is being performed is to get the perspective of "others" and to gather the information in a rock-solid, confidential way.

As a manager and leader, you will find that measuring behavior consistency can create superior visibility of how engaged or disengaged your workforce is and—most importantly—the impact that engagement has on your financial success.

For instance, let's look at the company that passionately measures quality defects. This company typically has \$500,000 a year in costs associated with poor quality. Now, assume it begins to measure a newly communicated behavior: "Proactively spot potential quality issues and take preventive action." By communicating the behavior to employees and setting the expectation that it is required and will be measured and reinforced, this company is creating visibility and accountability for doing it. Over time, managers will be able to tie the behavior's consistency scores to improved cost savings.

Many behavioral indicators like this can be measured and tied to the financial metrics that matter most to your company. Consider revenue-generating metrics such as customer retention and average sale per customer or cost-reducing metrics such

as employee turnover, decreased marketing expense and fewer quality issues. By considering actionable metrics like these, managers and leaders can begin to see engagement as a more tangible measurement that affects overall business success.

Are you ready to change your approach to gathering employee feedback and start

measuring what matters most? Visit www.thatslivingthebrand.com and sign up to take a complimentary Living the Brand Leadership Assessment to better understand your managers' perspective of how engaged your workforce is.

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