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Recently Rambo Ramdianee wrote in *Business News* that many employers pay lip service to employee engagement and I could not agree more. He went on to say that we might begin by looking to treat employees as volunteers.

This reminded me of something I heard Jason Clarke from Mindsatwork say in an interview some years ago. It went along these lines: 'When you employ someone, you actually just rent their bodies. When you allow them to think, you get their minds for free.' This struck a chord with me as it's so true - we're so tied up with ensuring that candidates for positions in our business have the right skills and experience that we forget that their major asset for us is how they think.

So, engaging with our people actually starts at the recruiting stage when we have an opportunity to dig deep enough into prospective employees' psyches to determine how much they like to be challenged. This gets down to the culture we have developed within the business and how much we challenge people on a daily basis - as opposed to remaining convinced that it is we, as owner/ managers who are expected to have all the answers.

And this got me thinking even further - about values. We say that businesses should be values-based and that everything we do (starting with recruitment) should be based on the alignment of everyone in the organisation with the values of the business. But it would appear that many business owners pay lip service to values, much in the same way as they pay lip service to engagement. This where I agree so much with Rambo Ramdianee, and I think the issues are closely related.

Articulating the values of the business is vital for any number of reasons:

- o we are seen as having substance to all of those who deal with the business;
- o it can be used as a basis for simple solutions to complex issues; and
- o it is a basis for recruitment, as discussed.

However, it does not stop there. Does the behaviour of everyone in the business reflect those values? If not, the exercise has been wasted and the business stands bare as one that is insincere. This is a great way to lose customers and lose valued employees.

Rather than speaking about values as something that should be ticked off on a business development checklist, maybe we should replace "values" with "behaviour traits". This way, we are not talking about something abstract, but something that actually reflects how the business - and everyone in it - acts.

So, how do we translate expressed values to behaviour traits? The first step could be to have those Values clearly visible in all areas of the workplace as a continual reminder. The second could be having values - and how they have been demonstrated within the workplace - discussed within the regular meetings processes.

This way, values are seen by everyone in the business as being a way of being, rather than only a set of words.

I have seen examples of how this functions within the workplace; how people discuss often and purposely how behaviours are reflections of business values. This both reinforces the organisation's values and acknowledges the behaviour of peers. This can only be positive results.

Unfortunately, I have also seen instances where engagement of this type is not seen as having any merit. The consequences of ignoring values - and how they are actually behaviour traits - and ignoring the importance of communications as a basis for engagement can be devastating. Firstly, they are extremely expensive, when the cost of high employment turnover is calculated. Secondly, the process is counter-productive, when considering the negative effect on customer service. Finally, the impact on the whole workplace is detrimental when the culture is poor. To quote Tony Hsieh, CEO of Zappos, "... Businesses often forget about the culture, and ultimately, they suffer for it because you can't deliver good service from unhappy employees."

On balance, it is a no-brainer; business owners should take every opportunity to rate their workplace culture, start the conversation surrounding business values and highlight every instance where those values are played out in a positive fashion. Now, employee engagement starts to become real and not just a "must-have" statement.

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