



# Human Resource Solutions

aligning people assets with corporate goals



## Special Report

### **Strategies to Build Loyalty: Tips on How to Re-engage Workers As We Move Out of the Eye of the Storm**

**W**e've certainly created a mess for ourselves. All you have to do is look around your organization to see the impact this economic storm has had on the workplace. Empty cubicles are a constant reminder of those people who are gone, but not forgotten. Then there is the issue of the walking wounded. These are the people who show up for work everyday because they have to; not because they want to. They stare at one another, with Starbucks coffee in hand, and chant, "Well, at least we still have a job." Are these really the kind of people you want handling your best customers? Yet, for many firms, these are the only people left.

A recent survey from Adecco Group North America highlights the increased dissatisfaction workers in America have with their employers. According to the survey, 54% of employees plan to look for a new job as soon as the economy turns around. The sentiment is even stronger among younger workers. Of those ages 18-29, 71% say they are likely to look for new jobs once the economy turns around, the survey said.

I like to call this phenomena the Running of the Bulls American Style. When the flood gates open (and they will) millions of workers will

flee those companies where they are being asked to do two, or in some cases three jobs, for the same amount of pay. Or better yet, they have taken the mandatory 10% across the board pay cut just so they can keep their jobs.

The damage has been done. Now it's time to focus on the process of rebuilding loyalty and employee engagement.



## Why Bother?

A recent Business Week article noted the growing trend of fewer organizations delivering a consistently good experience. That same article highlighted the result results of a research study by Quantum Market Research revealing that between fall 2007 and fall 2008, nearly one-half of companies surveyed had a decrease in employee engagement scores, measured by an employee's willingness to put in extra discretionary effort for the good of the business, speak positively about the business to others, and stay loyal to the job.

All of us have experienced situations where it is quite clear that an employee is disengaged. They may speak to you in a monotone voice or they may totally ignore you. The service may have been so bad that you've chosen to take your business elsewhere. You can bet your customers are doing the same.



Have you called into your own customer service line to learn first hand what your customer's experience? Don't like what you hear? Make some immediate changes, before your customers change over to

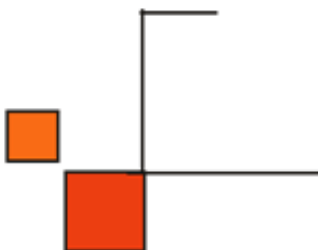
your competitors. Consider adding staff to minimize wait time, retrain workers who may not fully understand how things work in your organization and revise policies and procedures that are getting in the way of customer service.

## Laying The Groundwork

Rebuilding trust takes time. A good place to start is by accepting responsibility for mistakes made. For example, suppose you told employees there would not be any more layoffs and three months later you conducted another reduction-in-force.

Clearly it was a mistake to tell people their jobs were safe, when in some cases they were not.

Take responsibility and let you employees know in hindsight, you



were wrong. Apologize and let them know you have learned from your mistake. This will allow you and your team to move forward.

## Review Your Promises

Many organizations promised workers that they would re-instate benefits, like 401(k) matches and salary reductions within a specific period of time. That time may have come. Don't wait for employees to come to you and ask about these items. Instead, inform employees of the status of their pay and benefits. Show them this issue is as important to you as it is to them.

## Invest In Your People

People are loyal when they feel respected and valued. It's time to reinvest in your employees. Help them become better at what they do. Re-instate the training and development budget and watch your employees flourish.

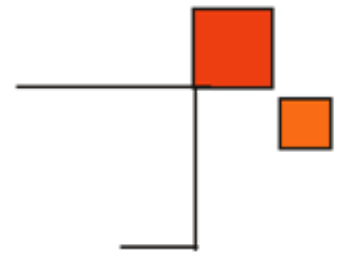
Don't worry that they may only stick around for a few years. Instead, think of how connected they will be with both internal and external customers because of how valued they feel.

## Unlock The Shackles

Employees have been chained to their desks and attached to their Blackberries during this recession trying to do their jobs and the jobs of employees who are no longer there. Many are fried, yet they stay and burn the mid-night oil.

Release your employees from their shackles. Re-staff those positions where you may have cut too close to the bone. Bring in temporary help so your workers can take some well-earned vacation time. Limit the number of hours any employee can work. Set an example. Leave the office in time to go to the gym or meet your family for dinner. Reward performance based on results, rather than face time.





## Give People A Voice

Who wants to stay in an organization where they have no say? People stay with companies because they feel they can make a difference. They feel like their voice is heard. When is the last time you asked one of your people to comment on an initiative that might not be part of their job description? Have you asked employees how the organization can better support them? Or is it all about what they can do for you?

Technology has come a long way. You can schedule weekly webcasts, implement web-based forums that are moderated, conduct teleconferences or simply hold weekly all-staff meetings. Just make sure the conversation flows two-ways so that employees feel their opinions matter.

## Be The Company That You Would Want to Work For

Many people who start companies do so because they are fleeing poorly run organizations. The people that join them, believe this time things will be different. They usually are, until such time as the company either grows too quickly or faces economic demise. The focus quickly shifts from an employee-centered company to plain old Corporate America.

You have an opportunity to change the way things are being done in your organization. Rather than making random changes, consider asking your employees for feedback on what they would like to see improved in the workplace. You can do this in a number of ways; Facilitated focus groups, employee surveys or one-on-one meetings with people who represent different areas of the workforce.

## Give Your Employees A Reason To Stay

Employees who feel connected are the ones that stay with organizations. A great way to help your employees build relationships is to invite them to

participate in a mentoring program. Pair them up with others who they can learn from. Give your high-potential employees direct access to your executives. Encourage semi-monthly meetings so ideas can flow back and forth.



## Back To Basics

Respect. It's so simple, yet so easy to forget. Act in a respectful manner and your employees will take notice. The next time your cell phone rings while you are in a conversation with an employee, ignore the call. Let your employee know there is nothing more important than the conversation you are having. When having a conversation with employees, pay particular attention to the tone of your voice. It is easy to raise your voice when you are frustrated. However, no one likes to be yelled at or put down in front of others.

Employees who work in respectful work environments are certainly more loyal than those who work in places where the furniture gets better treatment than they do. Show you care and people will respond in kind.



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### Help People Connect The Dots

It is hard to be loyal to an organization when you have no idea how your work is connected to the rest of the company. Help employees see how their work fits into the vision, mission and goals of the company. Show them how their individual performance is part of a much bigger picture.

Employee loyalty is not exactly rocket science, but the people at NASA certainly have parts of this puzzle figured out. You can bet their employees remain loyal because they understand that every person there, including the janitor, is working towards a shared vision. Failure of just one person, can have disastrous results.

Does everyone in your organization know how their job is connected to the success of the organization? If you asked them, could they tell you? It takes just one disconnected employee to create havoc in a well-run organization. What are you doing to help your employees connect the dots?

### Wake-up Call

Many executives are still in the denial stage. They mistakenly believe their workers are eternally grateful their jobs have been spared. The pendulum will swing back and employees will once again have numerous job offers in front of them. In fact, in some industries this is beginning to occur. Now is the time to rebuild trust and employee loyalty. If you wait much longer, it may be too late.



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