What is employee engagement? And, why is it so important to brand-building?

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For any employer, no matter how big or small, employee engagement is crucial to the success of their company. In this article, we're going to ask the question: What is employee engagement? And we're going to explain why it's particularly important to the branding process.

At Fabrik, we nearly always encourage the organisations we work with to look at employee engagement as a fundamental part of any brand-building programme, or signification communication initiative. After all, a good time to communicate with your employees, is when you're evaluating your own business. So, what is employee engagement?

Employees understand the intricacies of an organisations from the ground up. Often, this understanding is even more profound for staff in the front line, than it is for high-flying executives. At the same time, attempting to perform a rebrand, reorganisation, or restructure without the input of your employees can result in a less than rewarding outcome.

Imagine showing up to work one day to find that everything you've come to know about your business has changed. The chances are that even if you understood the need for change, you'd resent the adaptation, and even resist it, because you didn't have time to get used to the differences.

At the start of a rebranding programme, it's crucial to stress the importance of employee engagement to your company. After all, understanding and communicating with your staff is crucial when it comes to keeping them involved every step of

the way, from the start, to the end.

Here, we're going to give you a guide to answer the question "What is employee engagement?", while also covering what your employee engagement strategy might look like, and how you can decide which crucial changes you need to make to improve your company culture.



What is employee engagement?

From a basic perspective, employee engagement refers to the emotional attachment that an employee feels towards his or her place of work. In other words, an engaged employee is the difference between someone who shows up for work to get a paid at the end of the month, and someone who actually believes in the company and really enjoys coming into work.

From the perspective of an employer, employee engagement is all about adopting new initiatives that cause your staff to feel warm and fuzzy every time they think about your brand. Ideally, you should be looking for ways to increase loyalty

and dedication amongst your workers, as a dedicated employee is also a productive employee.

An employee who's happy and fulfilled spreads his or her satisfaction with the world around them. That means a happy employee leads to a happy customer, and a happy overall business. Plus, satisfied staff are less likely to go elsewhere when they're offered a new job, reducing turnover.

Unfortunately, about 88% of employees have no interest, or passion in their work.

So, how do you go about changing that?

At the heart of this is cultivating a corporate culture that's inclusive, putting employees at the heart of your organisation. While every organisation is different, there are established methods that provide effective ways to engagement with employees and gather input and feedback. These include:

- Workshops
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Presentations
- Surveys

Depending on the size of your organisation – and the project and issues at hand – several of these techniques can be combined to good effect.

The idea is to get as much qualitative, and quantitative feedback and data as possible, which will feed into a strategy devised to steer the entire business in the right direction. The more you learn from your employees, the more you can take steps to improve communications, and bring people within your business closer together.

Ultimately, this offers a great foundation from which to build

a new communication or brand campaign, and it also covers the bases and helps to reduce negative influences further down the line.

Importantly, though a rebranding initiative can be the perfect time to start thinking about employee engagement from a new angle, it's not the only time to begin your programme. The truth is that employee engagement, like many things in branding, is an on-going initiative. It's something you have to work on, every day.

What is good employee engagement?

So, we know what employee engagement is. It's the relationship or connection an employee feels to the brand they work for. Now, what is good employee engagement?

According to research, the first answer to that question is "Hard to find".

Engaged employees are few and far between. The latest research from Gallup found that only about 13% of employees across the world feel engaged at work.

Engaged employees are different to regular employees, because they inherently approach their roles with more dedication and effort. If you genuinely care about what you're doing, then you're far more likely to go above and beyond every day for the company that you work for.

If you're only turning up to work because you need to pay the bills, then you're likely to do the bare minimum in order to get by. That's why engaged employees are the ones that drive innovation in an industry, and disengaged employees are the ones that contribute to about $30.5 billion in annual turnover.

This isn't to say that disengaged employees go out of their way to damage companies. However, they're unhappy,

unwelcoming, and generally unproductive. None of those things lead to a great employee. The good news, is that you can change bad employee engagement, into good employee engagement.

All you need to do is understand what your employees want from you, and make sure that you design, nurture and grow a company culture that's all inclusive. In other words, you need to create an atmosphere where everybody's voice counts. If you make your employees feel valued, then they will value you in return.



Defining your employee engagement strategy

One of the biggest problems that companies have with employee engagement, is that they don't know where to start.

What do you think the biggest element of employee engagement is? Hint: The answer isn't money.

While a good package of benefits, and a hefty pay rise is

definitely going to go some way towards a smiling employee, it turns out that the core elements of engagement all revolve around a sense of belonging, and strong company culture.

A study way back in 1990 found that if employees were going to feel engaged at work, they needed to also feel:

- Like they make a difference.
- That they are valued and respected.
- Secure and confident.

The same facts remain true today. If you can make your brand a community, then your employees will feel more engaged with what they're doing. After all, just like customers fall in love with people, not brands, employees fall in love with communities.

So, with that in mind, here are some examples of the best employee engagement strategy ideas.

Employee engagement strategy 1: Bottom up, not top down

A home isn't built from the roof down, so why should your business be any different? Your people are the foundations on which your brand is built. If they don't know what's going on, then you're going to hit trouble pretty quickly.

Using surveys and workshops, you can make sure that you build your business from the bottom, with a strong focus on a fundamental goal. If everyone feels connected, and joined by the same things, then the resulting company is bound to be much stronger.

Working from the bottom up means being willing to listen to your employees and take their feelings into account. If everyone in your business has a voice, you'll find that you end up with a far more satisfied workforce.

Employee engagement strategy 2: Learn to listen

No-one likes to be ignored.

If you want your employee engagement strategy to be effective, then you need to show your staff that you appreciate, and respect them. If clear issues arise, then you should act upon them, and visibly address them in whatever you do next.

This doesn’t mean that you need to do whatever your employees tell you, but it does mean that you need to acknowledge their concerns, and opinions, no matter how small.

Employee engagement strategy 3: Have a sounding board

In today’s inter-connected world, it’s not enough to send out a satisfaction survey every year to see how things are going. You also need to open channels where employees can start giving feedback and raise issues with management.

Consider using discussion forums where teams can come together to report issues, and get feedback from their managers and peers.

Employee engagement strategy 4: Embrace versatility

In school, you discover that different students learn in different ways. Some are visual learners, whereas some like to get their hands dirty. The same rules apply in business too. Some employees will work differently to others, and it’s important to embrace the different skills your employees have, and make sure you use them appropriately.

If you notice that certain people need help with something that’s important to your company culture, then help them

adapt. Training sessions and lessons can assist individuals who might be falling behind the rest of the team.

Employee engagement strategy 5: Give everyone a chance to grow

Employees are happiest in the positions where they feel as though they're having an impact. A staff member who feels as though they're stuck in a dead-end job with nowhere to go isn't going to give you their best work.

Show your employees that you value their need for personal and professional growth, by giving them access to training courses, promoting internally, and asking for their feedback on what they'd like to improve in their own skills.



What are the benefits of employee

engagement?

So far, it might seem as though employee engagement is a lot of hard work.

The truth is that it does take plenty of time, dedication, and effort. However, that doesn't mean that it isn't essential. The benefits of employee engagement range far beyond more smiles in the workplace, and less grouchiness when you ask your receptionist for a cup of tea.

Some of the biggest benefits of an effective employment engagement strategy include:

1. Higher satisfaction

Employee satisfaction is crucial to any company. You might wonder why a happy employee is such a big deal, but the truth is that if employees aren't satisfied in their job, they lack the enthusiasm to grow and innovate.

After a while, low job satisfaction isn't just a downer, it's also a drain on the company's money and time. However, when employees feel engaged in their position, their connection to the company compels them to work harder. They produce work that they're proud of, which benefits the customer, and the brand.

2. Higher retention

Hiring and onboarding new employees is a process that's more expensive than you might think. Some statistics suggest that it costs around £30,000 to replace a staff member. What's more, according to a report made this year by Gallup, around 51% of employees are already looking to leave their job.

If you keep your employees happy, then they're more likely to stay by your side, even when other employers attempt to lure

them away with higher salaries. The reason is that people would rather be happy in their job, then have more money.

3. Higher productivity

As we mentioned above, engaged employees are working machines! They're devoted to working harder, faster, and more effectively than others because they enjoy what they're doing. If you're interested in, and connected to whatever you're doing, then you're going to do it well. It's as simple as that.

Gallup tells us that engaged employees are 17% more productive. They feel respected by their employers, and therefore willing to reciprocate the feeling by putting their best foot forward.

4. Higher profitability

If your employees are more productive, then it makes sense that they'd be more profitable too. Working harder means greater amounts of higher-quality work. At the end of the day, that often points to a much happier customer.

Since the appeal of your employees is going to make your brand look better, you'll have an easier time getting repeat customers, and building up your profits.

5. Fewer sick days

If you're constantly dealing with employees that have the flu, the problem might not be with your air conditioning. Engaged employees are the ones that want to show up for work – no matter how sniffly they feel.

What's more, engaged employees get more work done when they're at work too. In the USA, highly engaged businesses see a 41% reduction in absenteeism. Simply put, engaged employees feel devoted to the company that they work for. They don't want to

let you down, so they don’t pull as many sickies.

6. Higher loyalty

Finally, one of the most obvious benefits of engaged employees is that they’re loyal to your company. In fact, a really engaged employee can even become a brand ambassador for your business – shouting the benefits of your company from the rooftops.

Marketing your company is hard enough, but if your employees are happy to confirm that you’re the best brand in the world, then you’re probably on the right track.

Employee engagement ideas: Inspiration to engage

Above, we drew attention to the fact that employee engagement ideas aren’t limited to new financial benefits or pay-rises. However, you’re probably wondering what you should be doing to engage your workers, if the road to success isn’t paved with cash.



There are plenty of ways to engage your employees, but some of the six most important steps to keep in mind are:

Step 1: Perfect the onboarding process

It's hard to force an employee to love your brand, if they're not already aligned with your goals as soon as you hire them. That's why engagement starts from step one – hiring the right people. When you're interviewing someone, make sure that their ambitions connect with what your company can offer, and ensure they have an understanding of your brand manifesto – what makes you unique.

Once you've gotten that out of the way, you should have a mentoring or buddy system in place filled with people to show your new employees the ropes. This will help them to dive head-first into your corporate culture.

Step 2: Celebrate your people

By now, you should know how important it is to applaud your employee for a job well done. Staff who feel appreciated are

typically more motivated to do their jobs well. However, it’s important to recognise your people, and not just what they accomplish.

Basically, employees are far more likely to feel like they’re “part of the family”, if alongside telling them when they did a great job on a new merger, you also pay attention to birthdays, community awards, weddings, and other personal achievements. Show your staff that you care about them, not just the results they can give your business.

Step 3: Encourage community

People have more fun at work when they feel like they’ve got friends there. Encouraging your people to socialise outside the office is a great way to enhance employee engagement and get teams working together more efficiently.

It’s up to you how you choose to encourage this community spirit. Some businesses host all-exclusive parties, while others make time for a monthly dinner that includes all the employees. Whatever you choose, the option to get outside of work and communicate with the people you see every day can help to boost your internal culture.

Step 4: Boast about your employees

Show your employees you’re proud of them by boasting wherever you can. Frame quirky pictures of the whole team that you can hang up in the break room, or make sure that everyone has their own little bio on your website. Have some all-company photo shoots like you used to get at school, and make sure that everyone feels included.

Although a few photo shoots might not seem like a big deal, the fact that you’re willing to show them off to the world is a great way to make your staff feel valued.

Step 5: Ask for advice

If you don’t know how to make the experience of working for you better for your employees – then why not just ask them what they need? Something as simple as an anonymous survey or a feedback session could be a great way to build up some excellent employee feedback.

The more you talk to your employees, the more you can find out about their opinions of your brand, their goals, and any professional obstacles they’re facing on the path to success.

Finding your employee engagement definition: Employee engagement survey

As we mentioned above, the easiest way to find out what your employees need, is to talk to them.

Whether you’re rebranding, and you want advice from the entire company about how you should progress as a business, or you simply want to ensure that everyone’s on the right track within your company, creating a culture of open communication is crucial.

While you might not have the time to sit down for a quick chat with everyone at your organisation, there’s always the opportunity to send out an employee engagement survey that will help you to understand your personal employee engagement definition.

With a quick survey, you can learn more about what your teams think about their jobs, and the brand that they’re trying to promote.

So, what should an employee engagement survey include? Well, it depends on who you ask. A lot of traditional employee

engagement survey strategies look at questions that are intended to figure out how happy an employee is. For instance, your survey might ask:

- Do you feel valued and respected in your position?
- Does your manager care about you and give you good feedback?
- Do you have friends at work?

Although these questions are important, and key to understanding the culture that you're creating for your brand, they're not quite in-depth enough to ensure that everyone's on the same page. In the face of growing uncertainty and a changing marketplace, it's important for businesses to keep their workers feeling positive about changes, and the company itself.

However, research also suggests that employee engagement can also be linked back to deeper concerns, such as an affinity with the company's goals, a commitment to co-workers, and having the right skills to excel in a job.

With that in mind, when you're coming up with ideas for employee engagement survey questions, you should remember to address all the aspects of engagement. For instance, some of the key questions you should ask, include:

- Would you encourage someone else to work here?
- How frequently do you receive recognition?
- How would you rate your work/life balance?
- Do you know what you can do to help the company meet its goals?
- Are you proud to be a member of your team?
- Do you feel like you have enough information to work productively?
- Is something holding you back from achieving your goals?
- If you were to quit tomorrow, what would be your reason?

- Do you feel like you can reach your full potential here?
- What three words would you use to describe our brand?

Engaging your employees: Your people are your most valuable asset

A business is nothing without its employees.

You might have the best logo, the best product, and the best services in the world, but if you haven't got employees holding up your organisation, then you don't have anything. And, as we've discussed, getting your employees onboard as during brand-building and communication programmes can be particularly rewarding.

Research shows that organisations with higher levels of employee engagement are more effective and efficient, and that highly engaged staff members are more creative and innovative at work. They care about the future of the brand, and therefore put in more effort to help it meet its objectives.

Having a great brand isn't just about convincing your customers that you're the best in the industry. The first step is convincing your employees of that fact.

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