

Javier Bajer

When perks don't work

Dear colleague,

A real story from last week. Senior Management Team talks about employee engagement during a meeting: they are losing talent, cannot attract Millennials and rest of the workforce struggles to drive consistent customer value. The HRD is charged with finding a solution to rescue the organisation. But the conversation is stuck inside an old paradigm: "There must be something that we could *give* to our people to motivate them to come, stay and do the right things. Please find it!".

We know that perks have little impact on long-term engagement, let alone performance. Perks work as substitute motivators, with the risk of leading people to chase red herrings, while moving away from performance, markets and customers. True engagement, however, requires individual and collective commitment to create value out of conviction rather than as part of a trade-off. Having a strong sense of purpose is the best motivator an organisation can aspire to have.

However, perks are unavoidable these days. Employees expect them in the same way as they expect comfortable chairs and fast wi-fi. For many, perks have become the main reason for coming on board and also for jumping ships.

In this issue, we collected some interesting examples where engagement was achieved without the use of perks, driving sustainable high performing teams with a strong sense of purpose:

- In *engaging employees: three critical roles for managers*, Elissa Tucker looks at specific actions managers can take to remove barriers to employee engagement.
- In *engaging employees beyond the office freebies*, Sue Eaglebarger sets out to define engagement and its importance in attracting and keeping top talent.
- In *who benefits from benefits?*, John Fisher examines the role of benefits within the employee engagement mix of activities, and provides several areas for strategic improvement.
- In *real-time, ongoing employee feedback: the perk that actually retains*, Michael Heller discusses how a simple ongoing feedback loop retains employees and helps leaders with their performance management.
- In *the challenge of building support for human resource programs*, Rick Maurer presents a practical, straight-forward approach to boosting employee engagement and building support for – and reducing resistance to – new HR programs.
- In *employee experience: the new human resource management approach*, Josh Plaskoff looks at how putting the employee's total experience at the centre produces a very different approach to engaging the employee in the workplace.

I hope these articles will help you start new conversations within your organisation to form a deeper, evidence-based understanding of human motivation at work. I believe that we are beginning to turn the corner, seeing truly engaged workforces where perks will be remembered as something from the past.

You will not get a freebie if you share your thoughts with me, but I am sure we will both enjoy the conversation.

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