

# Re-engaging Employees

By James Judge

**Hardly a week goes by without another article in some HR magazine or journal warning us to gird our loins for the return of the war for talent. No doubt you have seen the experts and consultants clamoring to gain your attention, imploring you to urgently implement measures to re-engage your key employees.**

The economic data certainly seems to show that Australia has now pulled through the GFC, and, if the recent AIG/Deloitte National CEO Survey results are anything to go by, the next 12 months looks optimistic, especially for the manufacturing and services sectors. Of course if you are reading this in Western Australia or Queensland you don't need to look at any survey to know that the mining sector never really needed any Keynesian inspired government stimulus to keep it ripping along, at least not any local stimulus when the Chinese were making sure their "collective" foot never left the floor!

What does all this mean for your organisation?

In all likelihood there is now a large cohort of your fellow employees whose attitude has seismically shifted from this time last year when many may have been simply happy to actually have a job.

While every workplace is different, Gallup's 2008 Biannual Australian Engagement Study showed that 21% of Australian employees are actively disengaged in their workplace. Those who are not-engaged or actively disengaged are now seeing a surge of external opportunities and given these opportunities, some may be planning to vote with their feet.

According to the Advantage Job Index (formerly the Olivier Job Index) the number of online job ads rose 4.57% in March on the back of a 1.59% growth in February. In fact if you're a HR professional reading this (and I'm assuming you are) you yourself might be considering changing jobs. The survey cited above showed a jump of 12.23% in advertised HR roles in March.

One metric that many organisations commonly look to for guidance on retention are their employee engagement levels. There is no doubt that high levels of employee engagement correlates to a number of positive critical business outcomes including reducing staff turnover (Corporate Leadership Council /Corporate Executive Board 2008) and fewer days off work due to illness (Watson Wyatt, Continuous Engagement: The Key to Unlocking the Value of Your People During Tough Times, Work Europe Survey – 2008-2009).

However the link between engagement and retention is a little more complicated than appears on first blush. The Towers Perrin Global Workforce Study of 2007/08 shows that while more engaged employees are *more likely* to stay with an organisation, almost 40% of engaged employees are "passive job seekers", receptive to external offers. To make matters worse, of those who are disengaged, 50% have no plans to leave or aren't looking for other opportunities!

The insight from the data is that organisations may need to work on both increasing engagement while also having strategies in place to manage retention and attrition. If employee engagement levels are low, then hopefully HR professionals and managers will have some concrete suggestions as to what can be acted on, omitted or changed to raise them.



This seems like common sense if you have the management commitment and budgets to take the steps necessary to plan, implement and measure strategies to boost your engagement levels. Every member of the HR community would tell you that all organisations should be doing this on an ongoing basis as a matter of course. However, as we all know, common practice does not always equal best practice.

Engagement surveys cost money, are often done in yearly cycles, and getting agreement on which specific measure to implement and actually rolling them out can take considerable time.

Fortunately there is something you can do almost immediately to effect a positive change in employee engagement levels. Engaging in one on one structured dialogue with employees on the topic of careers, when conducted and supported by an appropriate framework and tools, can quickly lift employee's sense of worth and value to the organisation.

*The link between meaningful Career Dialogues and engagement becomes starkly apparent if you look at the specific elements in employee engagement instrument. Consider, as an example, the approach taken by Gallup. I can't replicate the engagement elements verbatim here due to Copyright restrictions but if you take the time to look at them yourself you will see that nearly **two thirds can be directly or indirectly impacted through meaningful career dialogues.***

Critical to obtaining maximum value from career dialogues is to ensure that managers are also trained and supported through the process. Different workplaces and different individuals may need different types of framework and tools in conducting meaningful career dialogues.

Donington has been a provider of career management which includes support, training and coaching for managers since our inception. We can assist you in quickly getting your managers up to speed to engage in these sorts of discussions. This will contribute to your employees engagement and give you a better insight into attrition risk as well as assisting you devise and create retention strategies for your business.

