



*Are You*

**POWERING  
YOUR PEOPLE?**

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**usiness has improved and the staffing industry is hiring again. Your people may be getting calls from recruiters, but turnover doesn't have to be inevitable. Beyond their relationship with their next-level managers, how employees perceive that the senior leadership of the organization is supporting them may determine whether or not they take those calls.**



## **Better Times Bring More Pressure to Drive Productivity**

The staffing industry is leading the economic recovery and celebrating the return to double-digit growth. No more sleepless nights, no more harrowing calls with the board of directors trying to explain missed estimates. All is right with the world once again, your staff is motivated and productive, and everything is humming along.

Well, maybe ... and maybe not. If your staff is truly energized, you're poised to take full advantage of the influx of new business. But if you think your firm has work to do in this area, don't wait to see if things improve; take action now, because as client demands increase, so will the demands on your people, and they'll need your full support to deliver.

Think of the company as an automobile. Your employees are the engine, and as the leader,

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you are the oil – the lubricant that keeps the engine running efficiently. A return to growth means your team must shift into fifth gear and be able to stay there for a sustained period of time, as more orders have to be filled. While this new pace is energizing and welcome after two years of sluggishness, staffing leaders must now ask themselves, how effectively am I powering my employees to perform? Because when the quality of the oil is poor, the engine runs less effectively. As the leader of the organization, you can make the difference between sluggish and supercharged.

### **Employee Engagement Hitting the Radar of the C-Suite for Good Reason**

Evidence continues to mount linking engagement with productivity, and because business is steadily improving, ensuring your workforce is fully engaged is critical to your firm's success. Human resources is warning operating executives of potentially crippling turnover ahead if they don't get out in front of the issue today.

Towers-Watson, in its 2008 Global Workforce Study, defines employee engagement as "the level of

connection employees feel with their employer ... as measured by their willingness ... to help their company succeed ... by providing discretionary effort on a sustained basis." Research shows employees will go above and beyond for an employer they feel a personal connection with. It's this heightened level of energy an employer should be looking to harness in its workforce. If an organization's executive management team consistently works to foster high engagement, its employees will reward it with their best energy each and every workday. Conversely, if employees get the message that they are not valued, engagement wanes – and along with it, productivity.

So just how critical is it for you to turn your attention to powering your people to produce at their best? Very. Only one in five workers admits to giving their full discretionary effort on the job. The Conference Board's 2010 study of job satisfaction shows more than half of U.S. workers (55%) are downright unhappy with their jobs – the highest since the annual survey began in 1987. Far from producing above the mean, unhappy employees are likely to

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# **THE GALLUP ORGANIZATION ESTIMATES THAT “ACTIVELY DISENGAGED” WORKERS COST U.S. BUSINESSES UP TO \$300 BILLION A YEAR.**

produce much less, opting instead to spend work time searching job boards, uploading the latest family photos to Facebook or shopping eBay. So not only should employers be concerned about productivity waning, but also they should be gravely concerned about seriously disengaged employees who have mentally checked out taking up a valuable seat in the office. This unhappy group is particularly toxic to an organization; in fact, the Gallup Organization estimates that “actively disengaged” workers cost U.S. businesses up to \$300 billion a year.

Maybe you’re reading this and telling yourself you have no work to do in this area. You believe your people are fully engaged, operating on all cylinders. Before you dismiss the issue, be aware that a disengaged employee may be hard to spot. With unemployment still stubbornly high, people remain fearful for their jobs so it’s more likely that someone who isn’t committed to the organization is hiding his or her dissatisfaction from management. After all, who wants to call negative attention to themselves and risk losing employment because they complain? So they show up, but they’re not really there ... and they produce very little.

The risk of turnover is one that senior leadership must own mitigating. Historically, as business continues to improve, companies find they are less and less able to sustain productivity and are forced to hire. When that happens, unemployment declines and workers start to have choices again. And that spells serious trouble for business leaders who have ignored the welfare of their workforce through the recession as key people leave for greener pastures. In fact, as the industry leading the recovery, the pendulum is already swinging in favor of your sales reps and recruiters. Staffing Industry Analysts reports that over 60% of members surveyed plan to increase spending on internal hires this year overwhelmingly in these two

mission-critical positions. Now is the time to get personally involved in supporting their success.

## **Strategies from Your Peers for Powering Your People**

We asked the top executives of three high-performing large, mid-size and small firms to share their best practices for driving productivity and mitigating the risk of employee defection to competitors. Despite differences in the size and scale of each organization, their approaches were remarkably similar. Three themes emerged as significant drivers of strong financial performance.

**Be visible in the field regularly.** Seaton Corporation CEO Patrick Beharelle believes establishing a routine of being out in the field “keeping a hand on the pulse of what’s happening with your people and your clients” is a strategy too often overlooked by senior leaders in ensuring company policies are both realistic and effective. Beharelle likened his hands-on philosophy to that of the hit TV series “Undercover Boss” where a senior executive at a large corporation works incognito as a new entry-level hire in the company for one week to learn how work really gets done. The series showcases how the impact of “corporate policy” is felt firsthand by the very individuals who design it from the ivory tower, providing the top executive with a unique opportunity to evaluate the logic of the leadership team’s own decisions. Descending from 30,000 feet to ground level on a routine basis also gives Beharelle visibility to the unsung heroes of the organization who he can then recognize company-wide for their contributions. Studies show employees who perceive the big boss really identifies with their day-to-day challenges and is working to alleviate them will, in turn, reward the company with full engagement and higher productivity. Indeed, Beharelle credits Seaton’s employees



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# IT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER FOR SENIOR EXECUTIVES AND OWNERS TO TAKE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PRODUCTIVITY OF THE COMPANY'S WORKFORCE.

with remaining fully engaged and producing at high levels through the recession, which is evidenced by the company's strong financial performance.

## **Strive for excellence, not perfection.**

ATR International Cofounder and CEO Jerry Brenholz says his firm has weathered three recessions and emerged stronger after each. "We grew 20% during the last recession." Crediting his father for instilling in him a passion for quality service, Brenholz coaches his team to capitalize on what they are best at. He believes concentrating on the capabilities of individual workers and making them partners in setting goals motivates people to strive for optimal performance in their greatest areas of strength. "I don't focus on what they can't do ... on their weaknesses. I ask them what they can commit to." When everyone works hard at what they are best at, the result is quality service delivery for the client.

**Trust plus fun equals results.** For Gary Graham, owner, president and CEO of Graham Personnel, it's important that his team "understands that management has their backs. I ask them to step out to the edge and feel free to make mistakes. It's how they learn. If something goes wrong, we will sit down and talk about what their intent was"

and how the outcome could be achieved an alternative way. Graham says making informal recognition fun helps to continually bolster a core group of tenured employees he relies on to consistently meet the firm's financial objectives in the face of the ever-changing priorities. The number one sales person each month is awarded the "Golden Buffalo" statue. "Everyone wants that coveted statue on their desk!" Involving the team in local events like Turkey Trivia and Bark in the Park give employees an opportunity to disengage from the harried pace of the office and have a good time together.

With disengagement at an all-time high, while at the very same time demands on employee productivity are increasing for staffing industry workers, it's more important than ever for senior executives and owners to take personal responsibility for the productivity of the company's workforce. Take action to implement strategies to consistently demonstrate you understand and are responsive to the challenges of those on the front lines. Recognize and celebrate the individual strengths of each contributor, create an environment of high trust and make work fun. Calls to your people from recruiters will be more likely to go unanswered. **SI**

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