

TRACKING THE MOOD OF YOUR EMPLOYEES

How a new wave of real-time, data-driven tech tools can turn a disengaged staff into a passionate one

FOUR EMPLOYEES TO 250 in less than seven years is the type of growth most entrepreneurs would envy, but it was a management abyss for Assurex Health. “Engagement was so straightforward when we all sat around the same table,” says co-founder and COO Don Wright. “We could jump up on a desk and yell at each other when we had to.”

But as the Mason, Ohio-based pharmacogenomics company mushroomed from one table to three offices, it became harder to keep a handle on the company culture. Some employees struggled to understand its financial state amid so much growth. Others had ideas for how to make the company more transparent, but didn’t know where to take them. By the time HR would send out its annual survey, the feedback was no longer relevant. “You can’t force people to spend two hours answering 50 questions every week,” says Wright.

Enlightened companies understand

that a passionate work force leads to higher profits, productivity, and retention, yet many feel stuck using engagement tools that are arduous and untimely. Several new startups are setting out to help you by pairing the convenience of smartphones with the aptitude of real-time data analytics.

Didier Elzinga, co-founder and CEO of Culture Amp—which has an engagement-analytics dashboard used by Airbnb, Pinterest, and Adobe, among others—says companies need to interact with their employees just as they do with customers. “Marketing has found amazing ways to get customer data and turn that into actionable insights,” he says. “Yet there haven’t been great tools to look inside a company to see who’s motivated and who’s not and figure out how to fix it.” Ursula Adams, director of employee engagement at United Way for South-eastern Michigan, says using the daily-engagement app Niko Niko—which tracks employees’ mood data with its

mobile “happiness meter”—has helped her avoid sinking money into fixing the wrong cultural problems. “When people think about engagement, they think hoverboard and foosball, ice cream and ponies,” says Adams. “But when you dig into the data, you find that people are



Illustration by DAVID PLUNKERT

THE HIGH PRICE OF A GRUMPY WORK FORCE

Fewer than a third of American workers are giving it their all on the job. According to recent polling, 66 percent are either unengaged or—more starkly—“actively disengaged.”



3X Engaged teams grow profits three times faster than disengaged ones. **Highly engaged employees are 87 percent less likely to leave a company.**





asking for things like greater role clarity and more information about strategic vision.”

To stay on top of its rapidly growing work force, last year Assurex Health began using BlackbookHR, an online platform that lets a com-

pany lob questions to its staff on the fly and track them via dashboard. A manager can send a question from a mobile phone, and then slice and dice feedback on the basis of variables such as tenure or department, to identify real-time trends.

After a recent overwhelming all-hands meeting, Wright used BlackbookHR to ask his staff whether such meetings were valuable. It turned out the meetings weren’t a problem, but the logistics were: Lunchtime worked well for the team in Ohio, but not for West Coast schedules. Remote workers struggled to follow along on the phone. By the next all-hands, Wright had overhauled the format: new time, new structure, video streaming. “The smallest things can often

be the most irritating to an employee,” says Wright. “While we’re focused on trying to solve the next big thing, they don’t understand why we can’t solve something as simple as making a meeting work for all time zones.” —KATE ROCKWOOD

OPTIMIZING HAPPINESS

Want to get the most from the newest engagement tools? The people who created them share their insights

1 LET YOUR EMPLOYEES DEFINE WHAT HAPPINESS MEANS

“Think of engagement as less about asking how happy your employees are and more about measuring if your employees are having the experience both of you want them to have. Until you know what’s most important to your culture—say, a sense of open dialogue or supreme creativity—it’s hard to ask specific questions around it, to see if the company is measuring up to that goal and how it can be stronger.” —**DIDIER ELZINGA**, co-founder and CEO of Culture Amp

2 SET UP A RESPONSE PLAN BEFORE YOU GET THE DATA

“Some companies are hungry to collect data, but they don’t have any idea of what’s going to happen next. I’d tell them to wait until they have people in place who can take this feedback and work on making changes. If not, you risk lowering morale even more. When employees share their feedback and personal feelings, it’s frustrating if nothing happens.” —**DIA SERAZUTDINOVA**, co-founder and CEO of Niko Niko

3 REVEAL THE WARTS

“Trust and transparency are the two biggest factors that impact engagement metrics, and if you don’t share survey results, you’ll erode both. You don’t have to do everything the employees want, of course, but explain why you’re moving forward with some ideas and not with others. Organizations tend to do a poor job with the ‘why.’ They tell the team the ‘what,’ but not the reason behind it. That’s a quick way to kill engagement.” —**CHRIS POWELL**, CEO of BlackbookHR

An unengaged worker costs an organization approximately \$3,400 for every \$10,000 in annual salary.

70 The percentage of CEOs who delegate culture and engagement issues to HR.



98 PERCENT of CEOs look at employee engagement surveys once a year. Yet 62 percent agree that hearing from workers once a year isn’t enough for timely insights.

SOURCES: GALLUP, CEB CORPORATE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL, MCLEAN AND COMPANY, MOTIVOSITY, WAGGL

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