HR Insights

Engaging Employees During the Great Disconnect

Employee engagement is the commitment an employee has to an organization and its' goals. Employee engagement is crucial for an organization to perform at peak productivity and keep employees satisfied. Prioritizing employee engagement can help employers facilitate organizational growth and meet workers' ever-changing desires to attract and retain employees. However, in 2023, there is a noticeable gap in the perception of employees' wants and needs, which prevents employee satisfaction.

Namely, most employers want to return to in-person work, whereas employees want more flexibility in where and when they work. Employees feel they're most productive at home; their employers disagree. In fact, according to a recent Microsoft survey, 87% of employees feel they're just as efficient at home as in the office, while only 12% of employers feel confident that their employees are being productive at home. This newfound gap has been labeled the "Great Disconnect."

Engaging employees is vital to combat the Great Disconnect; however, methods employers will use to do this will vary, as every workplace is different. For example, some organizations may primarily have remote employees, and others may have on-site employees. Many workplaces are navigating some format of a hybrid arrangement, so each workplace will need to approach engaging its employees differently.

This article explores ways for employers to engage employees during the Great Disconnect.

Engaging On-site Employees

Many employers feel that having employees at the office more often can help increase connectedness and work productivity. With that, it's important to keep employees' needs and interests in mind to avoid creating a disconnect between employees and employers. Here are some ways to engage on-site employees and keep them happy:

- Provide some form of workplace flexibility. Providing some form of flexibility with work schedules, such as occasional hybrid workdays, could provide employees with a compromise to coming into the office. For example, schedules could allow even on-site employees to shift their hours around to attend to caretaking needs.
- Discuss needs and wants. To find out what works best for an organization, employers should have open conversations about employee needs to see if there is a middle ground between employees and employers.

Engaging Remote Employees

Engaging remote employees may look a bit different from engaging on-site or hybrid employees. Remote employees have refocused their extra time, using it to perform other tasks, work other jobs and allow time for more self-care. With this in mind, it's crucial to engage remote employees intentionally to avoid a disconnect.

All employers can consider the following suggestions for engaging employees, but these tips are particularly impactful for those with remote employees:

- **Encourage weekly get-togethers.** These meetings should be for employees to catch up with co-workers. This is a great time to learn about employees virtually or in person after work hours.
- **Embrace structured flexibility.** To engage remote workers, it can be helpful to encourage flexibility with boundaries. For example, employers could require employees to be logged on during a specific period during the day and attend all meetings but allow them to work around that structure during the other part of their workday.
- **Be transparent.** Transparency is critical when communicating with employees. It's important to be transparent in expectations about work, personal development and significant changes in the organization. Such practices can help create a transparent work culture, which helps employees feel cared for, connected and respected.
- **Properly equip managers to help employees.** Managers are the sounding board between employees and employers. Employers are able to train managers to help them evolve in their roles to become coaches so they're able to measure

performance-based outcomes versus activity. This means it's important managers are on the same page with expectations, especially in a remote environment. When changes happen, managers should feel ready to communicate and help other employees through them.

Incentivizing Employees to Work In-office

Employees are more likely to connect and be more productive when they're working on-office. If employers are looking to encourage employees to come into the workplace more often while simultaneously engaging them, the following strategies can be considered:

- **Schedule weekly lunches.** Employees are more likely to come to the workplace if there's additional socialization to participate in. Catered lunches or events can incentivize employees with a midday socialization break.
- **Host in-person workshops.** Workshops can be a great way to get employees into the office by encouraging personal growth and development. Consider specialized workshops for employees on a biweekly or monthly basis.
- **Allow flexibility.** Amping up the days spent in the office can be difficult for employees after a remote routine is developed. Therefore, it's important to offer flexibility from week to week as the days spent working in the office increase. This can include flexible start times or four-day work weeks, for example. Allowing employees to meet their work environment needs will help increase work satisfaction and productivity.

For More Information

Engaging employees during the Great Disconnect can be difficult, but in 2023, it can improve workplace efficiency and productivity for both employees and employers. Employers should start by assessing their organizations' needs, and then consider strategies to increase employee engagement.

For more information on engaging employees during the Great Disconnect, contact Weadock and Associates, LLC today.