BUILDING LOYALTY IN THE WORKPLACE

HOW WILL WE MOTIVATE AND MANAGE DIFFERENT GENERATIONS IN THE NEW WORKFORCE?

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With four generations existing at the workplace today – traditionalist, baby boomer and millennial (Generation-X and Generation-Y) – along with the rapidly evolving business environment, the need for us to continually change and adapt to address the various needs of each individual have never been so demanding.

We spend a major part of our lives at the workplace, so it’s very important for us to look at the motivation factors and values that drive our work and the organisation we serve.

Loyalty to a company is highly esteemed and often deemed as a valuable trait whereby an employee with a long tenure is seen as a valuable asset to the organisation.

1. RETHINKING WORKPLACE LOYALTY

Unfortunately, loyalty is now suffering a prevalent decline in the workplace. Our current social climate indicates the lesser likelihood for codependence, or to be tied to a particular place or person – a dominant and ongoing trend within the millennial generation.

These days, employee loyalty has been reconceptualised as not just a commitment to a particular company or organisation but a stronger association of their career or allegiance towards a relationship. Employee loyalty is an area of concern for organisations and employers across the board as it is associated with productivity, employee retention, and satisfaction.

The lack of it can trigger disruption such as absenteeism, attrition and high exit cost.

2. WATCHING OVER ME

In the last 40 years, stability and patrimony has driven many organisations – it was understood that the company would look after you and give you a career.

Hence, loyalty is expected in return. It is not surprising to find employees who have worked in the same company for decades.

However, over time the definition and value of loyalty has been redefined. Serving the same company for too long is no longer viewed in a positive light.

One of the reasons for the shift in worldview is due to the perception that long tenures deny an individual of growth and exposure to different environments.

Another reason is caused by the impression that long attachments promote habits that are hard to break.

3. SETTING REAL EXPECTATIONS FOR EVERYONE

Millennials are often accused of not understanding the value of loyalty. On the flip side, they actually adapt well to change, thriving in dynamic environments that provide them with a multitude of challenges and opportunities.

With the various demands of managing diversity and differing needs in the workplace, how do we then motivate this generation of individuals to have “loyalty” or organisational commitment?

Getting everyone working towards a common goal is one way. Shared values are able to keep people glued together. Thus, with our multifaceted diversity in the workplace, it has become imperative for leaders to manage not only generational differences but the many types of individual differences in the workplace.

4. TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS FOR EMPLOYEE LOYALTY AND ENGAGEMENT

There needs to be a fundamental shift as to how we view workplace relationships. People are more attracted towards individuals – such as caring employers – and not companies. Instead of focusing on achieving loyalty as an end goal in the workplace, it can be viewed as a result of a caring relationship where loyalty is an outflow and natural expression of mutual reciprocit. More importantly, it is crucial to view loyalty beyond just being an obligatory compliance of a contractual affiliation but a reflection of a strong interpersonal relationship.

An organisation that takes on a care-based approach and mirror personal relationships would reflect a better relationship model in running organisations or teams.

5. TRUST WITHIN THE ORGANISATION

The heavy emphasis on workplace commitment and loyalty is noteworthy, as a research done by Brown et al. (2011) shows that these two factors have an effect on workplace performance and productivity.

Furthermore, three factors termed as workplace spirituality dimensions – meaningful work, sense of community and alignment with organisational values – are positively correlated to employee commitment.

The point of contention with regards to loyalty can be addressed as to what it means to the individual. We do have to consider that loyalty is not just a moral virtue nor a duty but the context in how commitment is represented.

According to Oxlery and Wittkower (2012), the sense of loyalty employees feel towards their companies can take in various forms and degrees: the pursuit of personal interest, an obligation, an allegiance, a self-sacrificial act or just merely a feeling.

IN CONCLUSION

In my opinion, the moral value of loyalty is not declining but rather has taken on a different form in how it is defined and played out in the society. Instead of sticking to someone or something for the sake of obligation, commitment or compliance of expectation, or attaching oneself to an abstract construct of a company or organisation, it would be more meaningful to build relationships based on trust.

Such a relationship would include one who would give their best and is fully engaged at their workplace during their tenure in their company. Consider this quote by Korkki (2011), “Loyalty is about the future — trust is about the present.”

Loyalty is a result of trust. So let us live in the moment and focus on building a company and organisational culture rooted in trust rather than just for the sake of loyalty.

Amanda is a strong believer in interdepartmental/cross-collaboration initiatives as she has personally witnessed the immense benefits they bring to both individuals and the organisation from her experience as a talent accelerator manager with the Leaderonomics Talent Acceleration Programme. To connect with her, email amanda.chua@leaderonomics.com.