

Engaging Employees – One Size Does Not Fit All

By Natalie Smith, SVP, PadillaCRT

It's 5:15 p.m., and you've just finished drafting a report summary requested just an hour earlier by the CEO. She's a stickler for correctness, so you head down the hall to have your ace proofer, a 27-year-old research assistant, give it a quick review before you send it.

But when you get to her office, it's clear she already left.

So you walk across the hall to find another good resource, a 50-year-old department manager who not only is a research expert, but has enough seniority to understand why it's a good idea to respond to the CEO's requests sooner rather than later. He's just walking out of his office door, coat in hand.



"Sorry," he says. "Can't do it now. I'm meeting some friends for drinks."

Just as you're thinking, *If there are any typos in this thing, I'm screwed* – you run into a 30-year-old colleague from the Finance Department, who also is heading out the door. Before you can finish your tale of woe, he takes the paper from your hand, says “I’ll take a look and get it back to you ASAP,” and heads back into his office. Thirty minutes later, your paper is back on your desk with several typos and a blatant research error corrected.



Why does that one coworker make an extra effort to help you when others won't? Chances are, he's actively engaged with your company. But you all work for the same company. Why is he engaged when others are not?

The answer is . . . well, there isn't one answer. **Employees are motivated by a wide range of workplace factors**, from flexible schedules to opportunities for growth to unique office environments. And while it's tempting to make assumptions about differences based on generation, employee engagement is not only tied to an employee's age, but also to the life and workplace stages they are in.

Maybe your 27-year-old colleague is heading out to an evening job to help pay for a down payment on a house. We know that many millennials are saddled with large amounts of student loan debt. An ORC International survey commissioned by PadillaCRT found that one in four millennials owe more than \$30,000 in college debt and expect to take more than 20 years to pay it off. This feeling of financial instability can push them to delay traditional life events and impact their commitment to and engagement with their company. But it's also an opportunity for companies to be creative with what they offer employees; the PadillaCRT study also found that 59 percent of millennials value student loan repayment assistance

over other benefits, including more workday flexibility (51 percent), a new finding compared to previous studies.

Weighing Down Workplace Engagement

The unseen impact of millennials' college debt



Workplace Engagement Opportunity

Programs that millennials say would boost their engagement:



59%

Student loan repayment assistance



51%
More work time/
workday flexibility



46%
More training/
development opportunities



39%
First-time home buyer assistance



Source: ORC International survey, commissioned by PadillaCRT.
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What about your older colleague, surely he isn't still working off college debt? Probably not – but after 20 years with your company, it's likely he's a Career Rester, comfortable with his job, doing what needs to be done almost automatically and not putting an ounce of extra effort into work. How can you engage him? He might feel energized if he's given the opportunity to serve as a mentor or advisor to younger employees, a role that lets him share his extensive knowledge

but also exposes him to the excitement that newer employees bring to the job.

When it comes to employee engagement, options are essential. Employees value the ability to choose benefits and opportunities that best fit their ages and work/life stages. And engaged employees don't just raise morale; they play a big role in business success. According to a 2013 Gallup study, highly engaged workforces outperform less-engaged companies by 147 percent higher earnings per share and enjoy a 90 percent better growth trend.

Companies that understand why one size does not fit all will have a distinct advantage when it comes to attracting and retaining employees. So let's get started. What makes you want to go the extra mile for your colleagues and your company?

About the Author: As a senior vice president in PadillaCRT's Corporate Practice, Natalie brings a strong background in public relations strategy and program development with a heavy emphasis on change communication, corporate social responsibility, issues management and employee engagement. She leads two areas of expertise within the company: RC² (Reputation, Change and Culture), which helps clients to establish a strong corporate reputation, manage change and create a culture that attracts and retains the best and brightest employees; and AEI (Awareness, Education & Influence), which works with clients to increase awareness of issues among key stakeholders, educate them and influence changes in behaviors and opinions.