



Creating Passion & Purpose

A business can achieve great things if employees are switched on and passionate about what they do. **Mary-Anne Baldwin** reports

At its best, employee engagement unlocks the discretionary effort staff are only willing to give once they've fully committed to a company and believe in its purpose. Getting this right can make the difference between a distinctly average workforce and one that performs to a higher level.

NATS' team of highly specialised air traffic controllers are inherently incentivised by the duty of care they owe to the travelling public. However, **Simon Warr**, Communications Director at the aircraft navigation company, is aware that additional forward thrust will be required to reach the organisation's desired destination.

"The business transformation we're going through is based on changing the

technology that underpins what they – air traffic controllers – do," **Simon** explains. "That means the way air traffic control is done starts to look a little different.

"Engagement is critical to bringing through the changes we need. We need to get employees to understand what it is we want to change, why we want to change it and get their buy-in."

NATS is early on in the process but **Simon** knows the engagement drive must focus on a strong sense of purpose. "It's about finding the beating heart of NATS – what people are really here to do – and to connect with that."

Charlie Wagstaff, Managing Director of Criticaleye, agrees that "the best way to get staff engaged is by clearly

communicating the company's mission and the journey it's planned to get there. Relating the story in a personal way will lead to commitment on a personal level".

The Trinity of High-Performance

The three Ps of employee engagement are passion, productivity and purpose. Unless there is clarity about how these are articulated across the workforce, it will be hard for individuals to relate to a business and its strategy.

Unilever, a multinational consumer goods company, is very clear on its way forward. Its vision – packaged as the Sustainable Living Plan – has what **Stephen Pain**, Vice President of Sustainable Business and Communications, calls three 'audacious' goals: To improve the health and >



wellbeing of a billion people, improve the livelihoods of millions of people it does business with and halve its environmental impact.

“For us, engagement focuses on a very clear vision of the future. We want to decouple our growth from our environmental footprint and increase our positive social impact – that vision is consistent throughout the business,” **Stephen** says.

“The ability of employees to engage with the organisation beyond the fact that they do the job, is very important. That’s focused on having a keen sense of purpose and an understanding of the relationship between what you’re doing, why you’re doing it and who you’re doing it for.”

Feedback Matters

Customer satisfaction can be a revealing indicator of how much discretionary effort you’ve unlocked. “One of the things we do from an HR perspective is look at joining employee engagement and staff turnover with customer satisfaction,” explains **Tea Colaiani**, Group HRD Director at Merlin Entertainments Group (which owns brands including Legoland, Sealife and Thorpe Park).

“We looked at the attractions with low engagement scores and found they tended to have high staff turnover and lower customer satisfaction. We monitored those attractions to see if there was a correlation between those key metrics. Usually there is.”

While the challenge and context for **Mark Scanlon**, Group CEO of employee

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benefits services company Personal Group, was somewhat different, he also draws a link between engagement and good customer service.

He motivated staff by providing them with a clearer sense of ownership. He describes the problem of having “a complaints department that was creating complaints”. In a move to address this, he ensured frontline staff received better training and greater autonomy. As a result, complaints dropped by 66 per cent, he says.

“Our biggest measure of engagement is being able to get discretionary effort – that willingness to go the extra mile. I believe, and the company believes, that there is a connection between productivity and engagement, and if you get your engagement right you can improve the performance of the business,” explains **Mark**.

For him, it’s no coincidence that employee and business performance have improved. “Our share price moved from £2.63 when I joined in late 2011 to £6.20 when we closed last year, with no dilution for the shareholders,” he says.

The trick is taking an approach that is both personal to your staff as well as the company’s goals and values. **Anne**

Stevens, Criticaleye Board Mentor, Board Trustee for charity Over The Wall and Former Vice President of People and Organisation at Rio Tinto, points to the quality of an organisation’s leadership team as the differentiator in how much effort and commitment employees are prepared to give.

“It’s about leaders that are inclusive, good at nurturing talent and building teams in a balanced and diverse way,” she says. “I always bring it back to the environment you create, the way your workforce feel valued and included and how you lead them in a collaborative fashion.” ■

This article was inspired by Criticaleye’s recent event, [Power to the People: Driving Productivity Through Employee Engagement](#), hosted by Personal Group.

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