

When will you be an Employer of Choice ?

Do current and prospective employees covet being a part of your team? Being an employer of choice is increasingly an underpinning of corporate success. Organizations that don't provide great work environments will obviously have difficulty hiring and keeping people but more importantly, they will restrict their potential by having less talented and less engaged people. Are you maximizing your talent pool and are your people engaged?

An "Employer of Choice" retains and attracts people, based on providing a successful corporate environment in which people engage, thrive and succeed." That's a pretty clear vision, with many rewards to those organizations that successfully implement the vision. This article focuses on creating the commitment and building the process that will make you an employer of choice. The specific action that may make you an employer of choice depends on your values, management practices and what's important to your people.

Benefits from Engaged Talented People

The principal benefits of becoming an employer of choice are:

- More talented people are recruited and retained by the organization.
- Costs related to turnover, training and extended recruitments are reduced.
- More engaged and committed people.
- Increased organizational ability and capacity to innovate, execute and build value.

All of these things are intuitive to a business leader and supported by research. And all of these benefits are fundamental to success.

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A Goal from the Top—Employer of Choice

In our experience, companies that develop early and naturally into employers of choice do so because of the values of founders or key leaders. You often hear these leaders speak with passion and conviction about their companies being great places to work. Conversely, other leaders avoid the issue of the work environment and never excel in this area. You can't succeed with an employer of choice objective without thorough conviction on the part of the leader and leadership team. Human resource professionals can assist these leaders to aspire to the objective and deliver the supporting workforce practices, but it is all dependent on the leaders being committed to making the organization an employer of choice. Commitment on the part of the leadership is part of what earns employee commitment to the organization.

We think great employer of choice work environments come from the leader's conviction that:

1. Building a great employer of choice business is simply the right thing to do.
2. The employer of choice work environment will certainly pay dividends to the organization if done correctly.

Most management decisions will impact your quest to become an employer of choice and need to be made in this context. Becoming an

employer of choice is not simply about developing a set of H.R. practices. It is the every day actions and decisions that speak to how the organization and the employees succeed together.

Your Approach ---Employer of Choice

In this section we offer practical steps towards developing your organization to become an employer of choice with a view to your organization becoming more adept and confident in this area.

We believe your generic approach should include:

1. Committing to be an employer of choice.
2. Innovating with management practices and employee programs designed to improve employee engagement and company results.
3. Measuring the results and using these measurements to validate and continually improve your practices.

We have the following suggestions about developing your approach and specific activities:

1. Develop your own “authentic” approach to being an employer of choice based on your values and what’s important to your people.
2. Survey your people to understand what’s important to them.
3. Survey your people to see how they rate you as an organization on these important factors and publish the metrics.
4. Establish benchmarks of current employee satisfaction that can be compared to future results.
5. Set and publish goals for future employee engagement.
6. Review your key H.R. practices so that you can identify opportunities to improve your work environments.
7. Innovate and develop new H.R. practices with emphasis on where there is a gap between the employees’ expectations and your organization’s performance.

8. Communicate with your people regarding what you are doing and why you are doing it? Be transparent and honest.
9. Train your management team on how to successfully “walk the talk” and manage what is needed to meet the goals that you have set.
10. Measure the results and hold people accountable for achieving the goals.
11. If your progress towards being an employer of choice is slow, assess why this is, and consider whether you need to retain someone to help you achieve your goals.

Once you have implemented an authentic workplace improvement program and achieved some good results, you are ready to leverage this more fully. Now you can consider how to develop an “employment brand” (e.g. image) that serves you well in recruiting and retaining people. This employment brand will be very important to your recruitment and retention and thus you will need to consider how to build it and maintain it in everything you do.

What’s important to employees

There is no one answer to what people want and what engages them the most. It is useful to review the numerous research publications, but it is most meaningful to ask (survey) your employees and develop your own workforce engagement model that reflects your organization. In general, people want a chance to develop and use their talents, as part of an organization that they respect and that respects them, and to minimize stress while maximizing pay.

When you try to pick initiatives to improve employee satisfaction you will need to understand the differences in what people value which may vary based on age, family situation and personal objectives. You need data to show what your people truly value the most in order to choose your human resource initiatives wisely.

Organizational Success and Employee Success

In working with companies that aspire to be an employer of choice, we commonly ask three questions:

1. Do people consider your company to be well run?
2. Do people consider your company “people-friendly” and “people-focused?”
3. Is your company thriving?

We ask those questions because your company needs to be well run, “people-friendly” and successful in order to sustain an employer of choice position.

You can't sustain being an employer of choice unless the organization itself is succeeding. For the organization to provide an environment for people to thrive and succeed it must thrive and succeed. You can only continue to invest heavily in people for as long as the company is achieving positive results. For a company to be able to successfully implement employer of choice practices, it must generally be well run or the employer of choice initiatives crumble. A people-friendly environment without good management practices and corporate success is like being in a friendly traffic jam—people are being nice but soon everybody realizes that they aren't really going anywhere and frustration sets in.

Your focus on results continues to be the central management focus as you strive to become an employer of choice. Accountability and performance management have to be retained in the management process along with the other people management practices. You require creativity and good judgment in order to align the organizational interest with the interests of your people to ensure that you get the results that you need in a way that people respect.

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Final Comment

Maximizing employee talent and employee engagement, and in turn improving company results should be very exciting and productive. It creates a great “win win” for the employees and the organization as a whole. An employer of choice environment allows you to successfully compete for and retain the key people that you require. Hopefully, your employer of choice commitment is an underpinning of your success.

This article is part of a Next Stage Consulting series focused on building shareholder value through growing human capital. Larry Smith, B.Sc., MBA, CMC is the President of Next Stage Consulting based in Kelowna, B.C. Canada. Comments or Questions? Contact lsmith@nxtstage.com

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