

Why listening to your employees is key to successful employer branding

 By [Celeste Sirin](#)

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The strong focus of companies on employee engagement is unmistakably evident through the inundation of emails that are flooding through my inbox. McKinsey & Company's latest research confirms that employees are reaching critical levels of burnout, mental anxiety and stress, all fuelled by the uncertainty of that which we are trying hard to manage: the ongoing global pandemic. This obviously has a direct knock-on effect on employee engagement and decreased work performance.



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Leaders are still attempting to write the rulebook to best manage their remote workforce amidst the vaccine roll-outs, returning to work and threats of yet another pandemic wave. Now more than ever, companies are prioritizing managing the fluctuating stress levels of employee uncertainty. Leaders are providing their dispersed workforce with as much peace of mind and stability as they can, but at the same time reluctant to offer empty promises.

My question though is - are employees voices being adequately heard? Are leaders truly and genuinely listening to employees shifting needs? Are companies properly tuning in? And more importantly, what is being done about managing the expectations of employees who so willingly give of their time to generously contribute in focus group research discussions? Employees are often vocal about how disheartened they become upon diligently completing quantitative employee engagement surveys or participating in focus group sessions, without ever hearing what action plan – short, medium or long-term - companies are taking to implement gathered research. Whilst this research can offer you insurmountable insights into how engaged your workforce really is, all credibility will be lost if you [do not have a clear path to action the outcomes](#).

Having recently facilitated and been an observer within focus group sessions, what became so glaringly evident is how hungry, forthcoming and selfless employees are in wanting to work with companies towards understanding how they can personally assist in the collective well-being and needs of fellow team members and the greater good of their employee workforce.

What hit home for me were the following obvious, but sometimes overlooked important areas/steps, when you seek to correctly engage, align and enhance your thinking through focus group discussions.

Defining and aligning

It is essential that employer and employee need to be correctly aligned in their interpretation of an employee value proposition (EVP) pillar/attribute otherwise your departure point can be flawed from the get-go! For example, the words growth, recognition, work life balance and flexibility mean different things to different people. Misinterpretation by either party can lead to one expecting a completely different behaviour, action or deliverable that what is actually required of them. Some employees might regard and value recognition as an inexpensive gesture of thanks or praise, whereas companies might assume recognition to be a promotion or monetary reward.

Walk the talk

EVP pillars remain merely words if employees are unable to share their real experiences and/or examples of the company core values or behaviours in motion. Surely this is what brings your employer brand to life. Refuelling employee engagement, with assurance to employees not becoming detached, especially in a remote working environment, is important. This is the glue that continues to build the culture of a company. [Stories](#) immediately provide you with the emotional connection, purpose, belonging and understanding of what employees might be experiencing or missing.

Ask what is missing or what can be improved

You might think that this is the obvious next action point, however the gold really lies in asking employees with “their feet on the ground” as to what is missing, what can be done differently, what intervention is required from leaders to remedy or improve on what’s not working.

Often the strategic leadership team are so far removed from the people on the frontline that they lose sight of what operationally can affect the “engine room” of their organisation. Whether employees are interfacing directly with customers, or employees are working in a support role, they are tuned in, in touch and connected to the operations of the company. Why then are the strategic thinkers not doubling down on inviting in the operations (not necessarily operational heads, but employees) into the boardroom to gain first-hand account from employees on how they can impact/improve on the customer value chain and experience. Operationally employees can be the next great change/shift in the business. Communication is key and through leaders simply providing the right platform through which employees can have a voice, strategic decisions can be made from the ground up or anywhere within the organisation.

Employees are increasingly seeking a stronger sense of [purpose, belonging and impact](#). They want to understand how their role fits into the bigger picture of the company, their contribution within their team, a better understanding (and non-siloed thinking) of how their department inter-relates with others to deliver on the company’s mission, vision and goals.

The shift from current values to desired/aspirational values

With employees needs shifting, for companies to remain relevant, they need to make a concerted effort to listen more closely to what new and emerging culture values employees are looking for. Companies should listen to employees, encourage participation, honour and encourage their feedback. Companies have so much to gain and little to lose through just providing employees with the time, space and opportunity to provide constructive input.

ABOUT CELESTE SIRIN

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