

How small businesses can build employee engagement

 By [Viresh Harduth](#)

16 Nov 2020

Global Entrepreneurship Week is celebrated this week (16-22 November) against the backdrop of a year that has been exhausting for small and medium businesses and their people. As entrepreneurs start to think about what comes next, higher productivity and growth are very much on the agenda. One of the keys to achieving this goal is to boost employee engagement.



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As much as it sounds dry and corporate, employee engagement matters as much for smaller businesses as for large organisations. It's not to be confused with concepts such as 'employee satisfaction' or workplace happiness. Your people can be happy or satisfied without being truly engaged.

Employee engagement goes further – it is about how emotionally invested your colleagues are in the business, its goals, and their role in it. A satisfied employee will come in 9 to 5 and do the bare minimum asked in their job description. An engaged employee will put their heart into helping the business, their colleagues and their customers succeed.

So, how do you build engagement as a small business? Here are a few ideas:

1. **Prioritise employees' wellbeing**

Caring is a two-way street. Showing employees that you care is not just about their mental and physical wellbeing, but also about their growth and happiness will help boost their motivation and engagement.

Whether it's offering them access to a psychologist in these difficult times, hosting company yoga sessions and fun runs, providing them with paid training (even if it's via a voucher from Udemy), or simply remembering their birthday, these gestures can energise your team.

2. Offer appropriate rewards and incentives

If you want your employees to go the extra mile, offering the right rewards and incentives is key. In a tough economy, where many small businesses are barely hanging on, the incentives can't always take the form of a big financial reward. However, you can reward people who go the extra mile in a range of other ways:

- A thank you note and a chocolate bar
- Public recognition
- A bonus day of leave
- Access to the prime parking space for a month
- A shopping voucher for R100 or R200
- The opportunity to work on a particularly interesting project

3. Give them a voice

Employees will feel more engaged when they feel like their voice is heard. They will feel more committed when they have a say in planning and goals. Colleagues like to be asked for feedback, whether in a formal process like their performance review or an informal chat. Of course, you can't ask your team for their opinions on every decision—but knowing that you're listening to their ideas, suggestions and concerns drives better engagement.

4. Provide them with user-friendly tools

The right technology and tools can make a massive difference in employee engagement and the employee experience. If people have access to easy-to-use software that makes their lives easier, they can focus on the enriching parts of their job rather than on fighting processes and technology. Today's cloud-based solutions are slick and easy to use. You can also use cloud-based tools to keep employees engaged and connected during this time via digital self-service and employee communications.

Employee engagement is a competitive edge

Gallup has a global database which analyses the engagement and performance of 35 million employees worldwide. The company's research shows that productivity among highly engaged teams is 14% higher than that of teams with the lowest engagement. It also reveals that two-thirds of the global workforce is not engaged.

These stunning figures highlight just how much of a competitive advantage you could gain by outperforming when it comes to employee engagement. More engaged employees mean better productivity, better customer service, and better business outcomes all round. It's an ideal place to focus as you rebuild after a year that has left many people feeling burnt out and anxious.

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