

Episode 31: Summary

Episode name: Employee engagement

Guest(s): Breda Diamond

What topic(s) does this episode consider? Employee engagement, motivation and feedback

Why is this topic relevant? Law firms are facing a potential retention and happiness crisis, lagging behind other industries significantly in terms of employee engagement. Engagement is important for many reasons. Firstly, it's a driver of productivity. Secondly, engaged employees are less likely to leave an organisation improving retention. Thirdly, there is a positive link between engagement and well-being, engaged employees are happier.

What concepts and / or models are considered in this episode?

- Employee engagement
- Motivation
- Employee retention
- Accessibility
- Organisational structures
- SBI feedback model

What are the main points?

What is engagement?

- Engagement refers to the connection to the work and tasks an employee is completing. Engagement is about driving discretionary effort. This is the level of effort that is above the minimum required. Discretionary effort has a positive correlation to productivity. If someone is putting in discretionary effort they are going above and beyond what is expected of them which creates and reinforces a culture of strong employee engagement.
- Employees can be personally engaged but show some antipathy toward colleagues and dishonesty towards those they report to. Often the disconnect is between the individual and the broader team. The individual themselves is engaged, but not invested in their team – which overall results in pseudo-engagement.
- Discretionary effort is expected in the legal profession. It is expected that lawyers will work long hours and weekends but that is not sustainable without engagement.

What about motivation?

- There are two types of motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic.
 - Extrinsic motivation refers to external sources of motivation such as pay rises, time off, bonuses, gifts, praise or avoiding punishment.

- Intrinsic motivation comes from within the employee who is driven to achieve, produce high quality work and build trust with team members. Intrinsically motivated people get a lot of job satisfaction out of what they do. It can be challenging to motivate someone who is only driven by extrinsic factors so it's important to try to encourage and cultivate intrinsic motivation within that person.

How does organisational structure impact engagement?

- Typically law firms have a hierarchical structure which is an artefact of organisational culture. In this structure, partners sit at the very top of the pyramid with graduates and legal assistants at the very bottom.
- A hierarchical structure will impact structure – if you want to increase engagement in a hierarchical structure, consider improving accessibility and communication so that people at the bottom of the structure feel comfortable communicating and engagement with people above them in the hierarchy. Everyone needs to both be, and be seen to be, accessible to their team.

What are the practical takeaways?

- Engagement is needed from everyone with an organisation; in a law firm this means legal practitioners as well as legal assistants, office managers, paralegals as well as facilities, human resources, business development and tech advisors.
- Breda provides an example of the tension that can exist between an organisation and its board of directors. The tension described by Breda is not uncommon, a CEO will often wonder how much to tell the board about what is happening within an organisation – and on the flip side the board needs to be comfortable that they are being provided with all of the information needed to effectively do their job. And as Breda mentions, the most effective boards are those that are valued by management and people working within the organisation.
- Just like motivation, different people will feel engaged by different things. For example, some people may need to be constantly learning, or they may need positive feedback, while some need to experience meaningful interactions with their colleagues or clients to remain engaged. For many, 2020 has been a difficult year and there is no doubt that with so many people working remotely engagement is a challenge.
- Giving and receiving feedback can be challenging. The SBI (situation-behaviour-impact) model can assist in providing feedback. Here are a few tips:
 - For the person giving feedback: firstly you describe the **situation** (“*at this morning’s meeting when I was presenting my findings to the team*”), following by the **behaviour** you observed (“*you took out your phone and opened Facebook*”) followed by the **impact** on you and your team (“*this made me feel like you were uninterested in my findings, it put me off whilst presenting*”). And finally state the change that needs to occur (“*when we have team meetings, you should try not to be distracted by your phone so that you are present and engaged*”).

- For the person receiving feedback: take the time to listen and digest the feedback. Resist the urge to respond straight away, as this can often appear defensive. Thank the provider for the feedback and, if you feel like you would like to respond, ask for some time to consider the feedback. Consider the feedback over a couple of days and then organise a time to discuss it.

Show notes

Sinek, Simon, *Start With Why*, (Penguin UK, 2011)

[SBI model, Center for Creative Leadership](#)