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Columns - Impressions

Employee engagement

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Employee engagement is the new corporate buzz-term. And many companies, looking at the benefits of engagement enjoyed by their competitors, want to jump on to the bandwagon and introduce practices that are mostly copied from the best practices. However, most lose steam after a few strides ahead.

What most companies do not realise is that engagement cannot be a cosmetic intervention. Corporate culture plays a huge role in ensuring that such engagement lasts. This kind of culture helps the company to connect with people; gives people freedom to ideate and experiment; grooms people for leadership roles and helps them grow with the company; where strategy is not only a lexicon of the top management but is imbibed in every action and initiative that employees are encouraged to take up. Culture is key to engaging employees.

Caring and sharing

Titan, through its initiative, 'Grow your own timber' not only created a loyal and engaged workforce but also transformed the city of Hosur in Tamil Nadu. Through this initiative, Titan created opportunities for the youth of Hosur, a sleepy town at that time, bordering Bangalore.

Titan's success triggered an industrial revolution in Hosur and today it is a pulsating and emerging corporate destination. Titan's township in Hosur and Titan school are reminders that engagement is built on a culture of caring and sharing with a genuine concern for employees at the core.

Recently, a friend of mine was selected by an MNC computer hardware major. He requested a month's time, since that was the notice period with his current employer. The MNC company sent an offer letter and mentioned a date of joining that was exactly a month away. But the financial package offered was lower than my friend's expectation, setting off negotiations that lasted about a week, after which the offer was finalised. The company, however, refused to revise the joining date, now only three weeks away.

Inhuman HR

My friend found the HR head very rigid on this count and also found that the new company would not only debar him of the joining-bonus if he failed to join on the specified date but would not allow him to join the company if he missed the joining date even by a day. My friend decided to not take the offer. Later he got a call from a junior HR executive from the same company enquiring about his final decision. When my friend narrated the sequence of events, the executive remarked that he was the seventh person to have turned down the job because of the rigid attitude of the HR head. It is another story that my friend went on to accept an even better offer with a competitor. Recently, Cisco Canada was ranked first out of 121 companies surveyed in Aon Hewitt's annual ranking of the Best Employers in Canada. Cisco's ranking is due to its exceptionally high scores for employee engagement. Corporates such as the Tata group, Bharti Airtel and TCS shine in engagement practices. And all of them have one thing in common — strong and breathing cultures. Hence companies wanting to reap the benefits of engagement should first look at their corporate culture, which is the incubator of engagement.

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