



The author is pictured third from left with the engaged team.

Employee Engagement

By Jessica Gunawardana, RCM

I am a firm believer in the saying “a chain is as strong as its weakest link,” which in essence defines that the success of an entire group depends on the success of each member of the group. As property managers carrying out our daily juggling acts, we understand the importance of a strong team that helps to ease some of the burden, and pave the way toward our success. From the concierge who greets each resident with a warm and friendly smile, to a cleaner who stops in the midst of her task to direct a new resident to the party room, each individual plays an important role in creating a sense of ease and comfort in a building that residents call home.

Therefore employee engagement should be on the top of our priority list, and needs to be nurtured in order to gain the trust and confidence of our teams. An employee truly feels part of a

team when their ideas are shared and the views expressed are taken into account. This in turn leads to enhanced levels of service, by instilling a sense of pride and loyalty in working for the organization.

So How Do We, as Managers, Lead Our Teams to Success?

It is important that we gain their trust and confidence, through commitment and effective communication. I am fortunate to manage a corporation that cultivates a “team huddle” concept, when we gather together at the start of the day for a quick 15 or 20 minute meeting. The manager will share project status updates, recognize any team member achievements and provide relevant information on resident requests for the day. This practice provides an opportunity for employees to engage with each other, voice their concerns on any issues, and simply interact with each other before they carry on with the rest

of their day. These few minutes create a bond and strengthen ties between the team members.

A survey report by WeSpire titled “The driving forces of employee engagement” explores the relationship between formal employee engagement programming, and employee satisfaction/engagement levels. The good news is that overall 79 percent of respondents reported that they are somewhat excited about their jobs; however, the bad news is that 30 percent said that their employer does not have an official employee engagement strategy. For the most part, companies oversimplify things by viewing personal satisfaction as a proxy for engagement. As a result they miss key behavioural signals. What use are John’s positive thoughts about his manager, if he is not giving his maximum effort at work every day? Some companies use people analytics to examine employees’ behaviour and organizational performance, but fail to

take the individual's perception into account. John may be interacting well with residents but is he happy doing so, or is he burned out and miserable? It is important to look at these factors – employees' perceptions and behaviours and their effect on company performance. And to figure out which levers to pull to engage the individuals who work for you. The levers that matter to John won't be the same as it is for Jane. As an employer or manager there are things we can all do to help those working for and with us deal with stress.

- **Active listening** – sometimes all a person needs is an avenue through which they can voice their stress. Try not to offer advice or a list of things they need to do to feel better. Turn your phone on silent, and give the person 100 percent of your attention.

- **Laughter** – Take time to smile or share a joke with your co-worker. It makes a world of difference and just makes you feel good.

- **Change your environment** – being in your workplace for more than eight hours a day, can get monotonous. Think about

hosting your next departmental meeting outside, if there is a suitable venue ... and providing the weather cooperates. A change in venue can contribute to creating a different mindset and adjust people's attitudes.

- **Downtime** – find some time to get your colleagues together for something other than work. If there is an option to host a complimentary yoga session in your building or perhaps a round of bowling on a weeknight this can break up the monotony of work and is a stress relieving activity too. Time spent together will help your colleagues build stronger relationships with one another.

- **Gratitude** – Most people work hard and give their best effort every day, but few people actually hear how grateful their colleagues are. Reminding someone how grateful you are that they are here to help can make a person's day. A simple "thank you, I really appreciate it" also works, and is often forgotten.

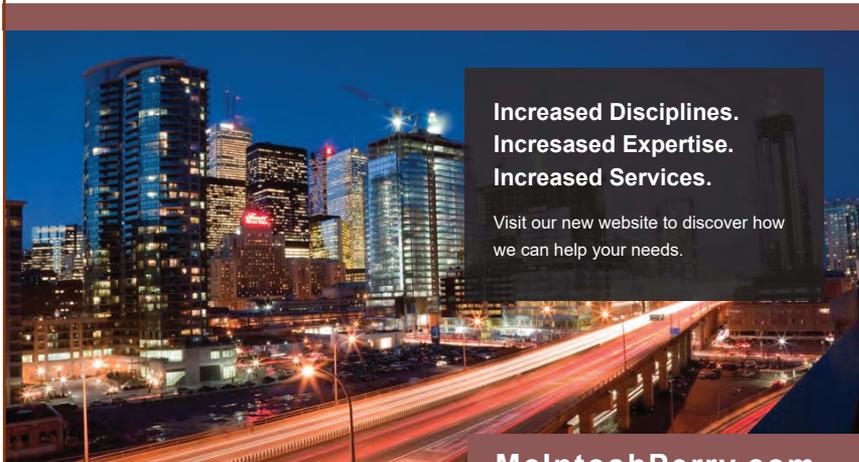
Taking into consideration how important the above factors are, we have worked hard to create and instill a culture that engages and motivates our team. It begins with our email communication where we never fail to thank someone who has completed a task that was requested. A list of each employee's birthdays is pinned to the notice board in the management office and we celebrate with a birthday cake or lunch for each team member. We never fail to host a staff luncheon at Christmas or gather the team together to decorate the Christmas tree in the lobby. With holiday music playing in the background we treat the team to hot chocolate and cookies in the spirit of the season. Residents passing by often smile and join us in a quick photo or two. I am fortunate that our board of directors supports and encourages this holistic approach, and understands that engagement will yield people who stick around and do their best at work. Hopefully more organizations will be able to understand how employees perceive them, and how that perception relates to their behaviour.

The difference between success and failure in a business usually comes down to one thing: good teamwork. For that reason it is important to identify the values that predict teamwork and success. ■

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