

**Empowering  
staff in the  
work place...**



**Employees are your greatest asset - they're your competitive advantage." - Anne M Mulcahy, the former chair of Xerox Corporation and current chair of the board of trustees for Save the Children.**

While it might sound like a fairly obvious statement, as no company can be successful without a committed and talented workforce, it underlines just how important it is for organisations to prioritise staff empowerment and engagement.

The statistics are compelling too, as companies with engaged employees outperform those without by 202 per cent.<sup>1</sup> So it is clear that businesses should be doing everything in their power to make sure their staff feel empowered.

However, it seems there is still a long way to go, as only 29 per cent of the workforce is engaged, while 26 per cent are actively disengaged.<sup>2</sup> This underlines a disconnect, which is that despite the fact businesses recognise the value of giving their workers the platform to be successful, many are failing to put this into practice.

Virgin founder Richard Branson is a huge advocate of empowerment, as he believes it enables organisations to run in a much more effective

way. "It is up to those in charge to empower their employees - not rule over them," he stated.<sup>3</sup>

Everyone has encountered employees who are excessively reliant on their bosses, but can you be sure these people have been given the platform to develop a real sense of purpose in the first place?

The answer will not always be yes, so what can companies - and business leaders for that matter - do to make sure their staff are invigorated, energised and enthusiastic?



<sup>1</sup>Engaged employees infographic, Dale Carnegie, <<http://www.dalecarnegie.com/employee-engagement/engaged-employees-infographic/>>

<sup>2</sup>Ibid

<sup>3</sup>Empower your employees. don't rule over them, Virgin blog, <<http://www.virgin.com/richard-branson/empower-your-employees-dont-rule-over-them>>

# What are the drivers of staff empowerment?...

Savvy leaders will always look to foster empowerment in the workplace, and they should start with engagement. People who are engaged are more likely to benefit from being given the authority to make decisions about their jobs. And there are three clear aspects to engagement:

- **Relationship with direct manager** - If employees do not have a good relationship with their line manager, they are unlikely to be engaged in the workplace and will often seek pastures new.
- **Belief in senior leadership** - Staff need to have confidence in senior leadership and the future direction of the company under their stewardship. The bottom line is that they need to be able to articulate a vision.
- **Pride in the company** - Workers should be proud to work for their company and of the positive impact they are making on society.

But engagement is merely one aspect of empowerment, as organisations also have to take the leap of faith and actually hand over responsibility to their workers.

Soichiro Honda, founder of the Honda automotive company, has an interesting take on the matter. He believes that success is 99 per cent failure, and this is a mantra that has to come from the top. If staff do not realise that failure is acceptable - provided the right processes are followed and lessons are learned - real progress is not likely.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup>Engaged employees infographic, Dale Carnegie, <<http://www.dalecarnegie.com/employee-engagement/engaged-employees-infographic/>>

# A roadmap towards empowerment ●●●

Staff empowerment will not happen overnight, so it is important that a plan is put in place to help guide a company's activities with regards to its workers. So how can you make sure you are encouraging the leaders of tomorrow?

## ● A clear vision

The management team has to set the tone and make their intentions for the future of the company clear. Part of this process involves expressing that proactive, strategic actions are valued. The easiest way to successfully deliver a set of goals is to have everyone pulling in the same direction. The days of top-down communication are numbered, as organisations have to embrace a more team-based structure.

## ● Prioritise professional development

Ambitious workers will respond to empowerment, but they also want to know there is a clear path to advancement. Quality employees have to know their good work will be noticed and rewarded in an appropriate timescale if you want them to go the extra mile. Giving employees a career path centres their focus and means they have something to aim for. Savvy leaders will also give staff experience with tasks that are outside of their traditional job descriptions.

## ● Back independence

Staff are never going to feel empowered if they are constantly being supervised. As award-winning and bestselling author Kevin Daum points out, employees should be given the "opportunity to stretch out on their own and even lead others".<sup>5</sup> While they may encounter failure along the way, both the workers and the company as a whole will be better off in the long-term as they hone their skills. Best of all, empowered employees are ideally placed to help the next generation of workers embrace their own authority.

## ● Be challenging

The best workers will respond positively to challenges, be it taking on more responsibility or learning new skills that help the company move in a positive direction. It is also a great way of finding out whom the most ambitious employees are, as those people who put themselves forward for these challenges are clearly looking to progress and should therefore be well equipped to handle greater empowerment.

## ● Praise your staff

Effective employee recognition is one of the best ways to create a relationship with workers. Research shows career opportunities and recognition are always among the top engagement drivers,<sup>6</sup> while 60 per cent of 'best-in-class organisations' view employee recognition as extremely important when it comes to driving individual performance.<sup>7</sup> The statistics do not lie; if you want to have an empowered workforce, make sure you are praising them when they perform to a high level.

<sup>5</sup> 8 Tips for Empowering Employees, Inc., <<http://www.inc.com/kevin-daum/8-tips-for-empowering-employees.html>>

<sup>6</sup> Aon Hewitt, 2012 Trends in Global Engagement, <[http://www.aon.com/attachments/human-capital-consulting/2012\\_TrendsInGlobalEngagement\\_Final\\_v11.pdf](http://www.aon.com/attachments/human-capital-consulting/2012_TrendsInGlobalEngagement_Final_v11.pdf)>

<sup>7</sup> Aberdeen Group, The Power of Employee Recognition, <<http://go.globoforce.com/rs/globoforce/images/AberdeenReportNovember2013.pdf>>

# The Praxity take ●●●

Staff empowerment is very close to our hearts, as here at Praxity we believe in challenging and rewarding staff. But don't just take our word for it, as below we take a look at some of the successes of our member firms.

## Kaufman Rossin & Co

This firm landed top spot in Accounting Today's Best Accounting Firms to Work For, was named as the number one fastest growing firm by INSIDE Public Accounting, and co-founder Jim Kaufman has been recognised as a top power player.

## Aronson

The Washington Business Journal named the firm as one of the 'Best Places to Work' in the DC metro area for the fifth time. The Washington Post also ranked the firm as a 'Top Workplace' in June 2014.

## Plante Moran

In 2014, the firm was named as one of the '100 Best Companies to Work For' by FORTUNE magazine for the 17th consecutive year. For the ninth year running, the firm was also named as one of West Michigan's '101 Best & Brightest Companies to Work For'.

## PM+M

UK Praxity member received Gold status from Investors in People, one of only three per cent of businesses to do so, after being upgraded from Silver. "I believe our success is in part thanks to our focus on culture, which is underpinned by our key values of quality, achievement and fun," explained HR partner at PM+M Jane Parry.

## BKD

Chief Learning Officer Magazine singled out the firm for praise for creating and implementing exemplary workforce development practices, awarding the firm its Bronze Learning Elite status for 2014. Learning & Development Director Greg Cole also picked up the 2014 Emerging Training Leader title.

## Kyiv Audit Group

The firm has been awarded Gold approved employer trainee development status by ACCA. This accreditation comes after a rigorous assessment of the company's standards for on-going staff training and development and its overall learning environment. It is one of the few firms in Ukraine to hold an 'approved' title.

## William Buck

Two senior risk advisors received honours in financial services. Karyn Hilton, head of the risk insurance division in Adelaide, was named Life Insurance Executive of the Year. Colleague Sam Kitchen, a senior financial adviser with William Buck Sydney, collected the Association of Financial Adviser's 2013 Excellence in Education Award in the New South Wales category. The firm's wealth advisory division also received the prestigious 'Licensee Select NSW Practice of the Year' in 2013 and 2014.



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