



Perks = Employee Engagement (NOT)



Many of today's leaders cling to the time worn idea that, because they offer incredible benefits to their employees it naturally follows that employees will enthusiastically engage in the work of the organization. Perks are seen as part of a quid pro quo—I scratched your back, now you scratch mine. Maybe it *should* be that way, it seems right, and yet it's not, primarily due to human nature.

You see, we humans very quickly become used to having something and, once that happens, it is no longer seen as "special".

Think of the last new car you purchased. Before you got it, weren't you incredibly excited? You thought, "Once I get this, I won't ask for anything more. It will be enough to make me happy."

Then you got the car and for awhile you were over the moon, enjoying the feel of driving it, exploring all the new features, boring friends and family as you waxed poetic about it—and that new car smell! Nothing beats that!

But gradually, over time, you got used to it. And eventually it became...well, just a car.

So it is with benefits and perks. When employees are in the process of being hired, they become very enamored with the benefits your organization offers. They go home and tell their families about them. They think, "If I get this job, I won't ask for anything more. It will be enough to make me happy."

Your existing employees, when presented with *new* benefits your HR department has worked to acquire for them get excited. Unfortunately, just like the new car, over time, they get used to having these things. And now they're just...well, benefits. Ho Hum. If you're the owner of the company, this likely makes you a bit angry. But if you're a leader within the company, you probably have the same attitude. You quickly got used to having all these wonderful perks.

Alas, Employee Engagement is not about money and perks. Wouldn't it be great if it were? It would make the job of leadership so much easier! Of course, if your organization is limited as to how much money it can pay and how many perks it can provide, it would be bad news. But study after study places money surprisingly low in employee rankings of what's important to them. For example, a 2015 survey by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) found 72% of employees ranked "respectful treatment of all employees at all levels" to be the most important factor in job satisfaction. The other factors in the top 5 were trust between employees and senior management (64%); benefits (63%), compensation/pay (61%); and job security (59%).

So what's the answer? **Employee engagement most often occurs when workers have opportunities every day to use their creativity.** If you want engaged employees, if you want them to own their results, you're going to have to do something to inspire that ownership which, by the way, every one of them wants but may not know how to produce on their own. It has nothing to do with their intelligence; it's more about whether they feel they have permission to be creative. Can they apply their own style or are they simply supposed to do the job as they were taught?

One way to allow your team to use their creativity is to build a culture of continuous improvement. Let each team member know he's in charge of improvement for his specific job. I promise you, they have ideas. Your role, as their leader, is to create a culture in which their voices can be heard. Build a culture in which the motto you exemplify is: there are no stupid ideas. And watch as your people become more engaged.

Silver Rose is an Employee Engagement Thought Leader who works with organizations to implement practical, proven and timesaving strategies for: (1) improving employee engagement, (2) increasing profitability, and (3) freeing leadership from the need to micro-manage.

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