Building Belonging – The Path To Personal Commitment

Jason at Wragge & Co acknowledges the firm drives him mad at times, but he also knows he’ll defend them to the end. “Like with a sibling, you may fight, but no one else can say anything bad in my hearing!”

That’s a strong sense of belonging. It’s what makes employees go the extra mile and pull out all the stops to ensure the company thrives. It’s a major benefit of building a great culture and worth working for.

When I visit great companies I hear people speak as if it’s their own company – ‘I’m comfortable here, I have friends here, I love this place’. Think of the difference it makes when you feel ‘at home’– how much easier it is to get on with the task at hand. Building belonging enables your people to do their best work and that has to be good for your business.

What builds belonging?

You need to demonstrate to people that they are included, involved and valued. This begins with the basic ‘housekeeping’. Make sure people have enough money to live on and provide the best benefits you can. It isn’t necessary to be an upper quartile payer, but you must be fair. Give the best maternity/paternity leave and pay that you can; look for ways to encourage health and well being; and do what you can to secure the future e.g. in pension, if that’s what people want.

Then look for ways to build extra benefits into the system. Be creative and, if in doubt, ask people what they want. Your aim should be to make life as simple as possible. This isn’t just altruistic – if people are comfortable and relaxed, then they do a better job. It also means that people experience a level of care that makes them feel valued which leads to a sense of belonging.

Pay attention to what people need in their lives. If you have a lot of young people build active celebration – you’ll reinforce the behaviours/ results you’re looking for and work becomes a lot of fun. Flight Centre have a regular ‘buzz night’ – one evening a month of fun and dancing, plus reward for the best consultants. If your workforce is mainly family based, consider giving time on the web to do the shopping that will delivered to work at the end of the day. For more ideas look on Sundaytimes.co.uk and pinch ideas from the 100 Best Companies to Work For.

Health warning - give what they want, not what you want

It’s a great idea to ask people what they want, as long as you listen carefully to the response. It is so tempting to go ahead with your own ideas, believing
you are doing the very best thing, when actually it’s what you’d like yourself. The best gift I ever gave my husband was dry chain lube oil. I’d have spent a fortune on beautiful clothes, books etc, and not pleased him nearly as much as with that £5 pot of oil! It was hard to do, because to my mind it was deeply boring, but to him it was fantastic. It’s the same at work, you might be aligned to what your people want or what they consider to be fun, but take the time to check it out. You could avoid a great deal of heartache!

Recent legislation demands regular staff consultation, which is the perfect vehicle for this element of great culture. Use it to share ideas and canvass opinions on specific issues. It’s both informative and demonstrates your willingness to listen, which in itself builds the belonging.