

# Rebuilding Employee Engagement

(Rural Business, 2010)

Survived the GFC? Now the challenge is (re) engaging with employees writes Mick Hay <sup>\*1</sup>.

One of the ongoing challenges for those companies that survived the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) is the need to either build or rebuild the bridge with employees. Some of the human resource practices required to survive the GFC – eg. Reduction of hours or, in many cases, the reduction of head count, may have damaged the ‘psychological contract’ with employees. This contract must be rebuilt through employee engagement.

A recent recruitment industry study reported that the most common trigger currently causing employees to seek alternative work is limited career opportunities, and the key driver that turns their search from passive to active is frustration with their current employer.

This report, the Chandler Macleod Post GFC candidate Study, found that almost two thirds of those surveyed (around 1000 people) currently employed were actively looking for work! The report also found that the key drivers that caused candidates to move from merely keeping an eye on the market to actively searching and applying for jobs included :

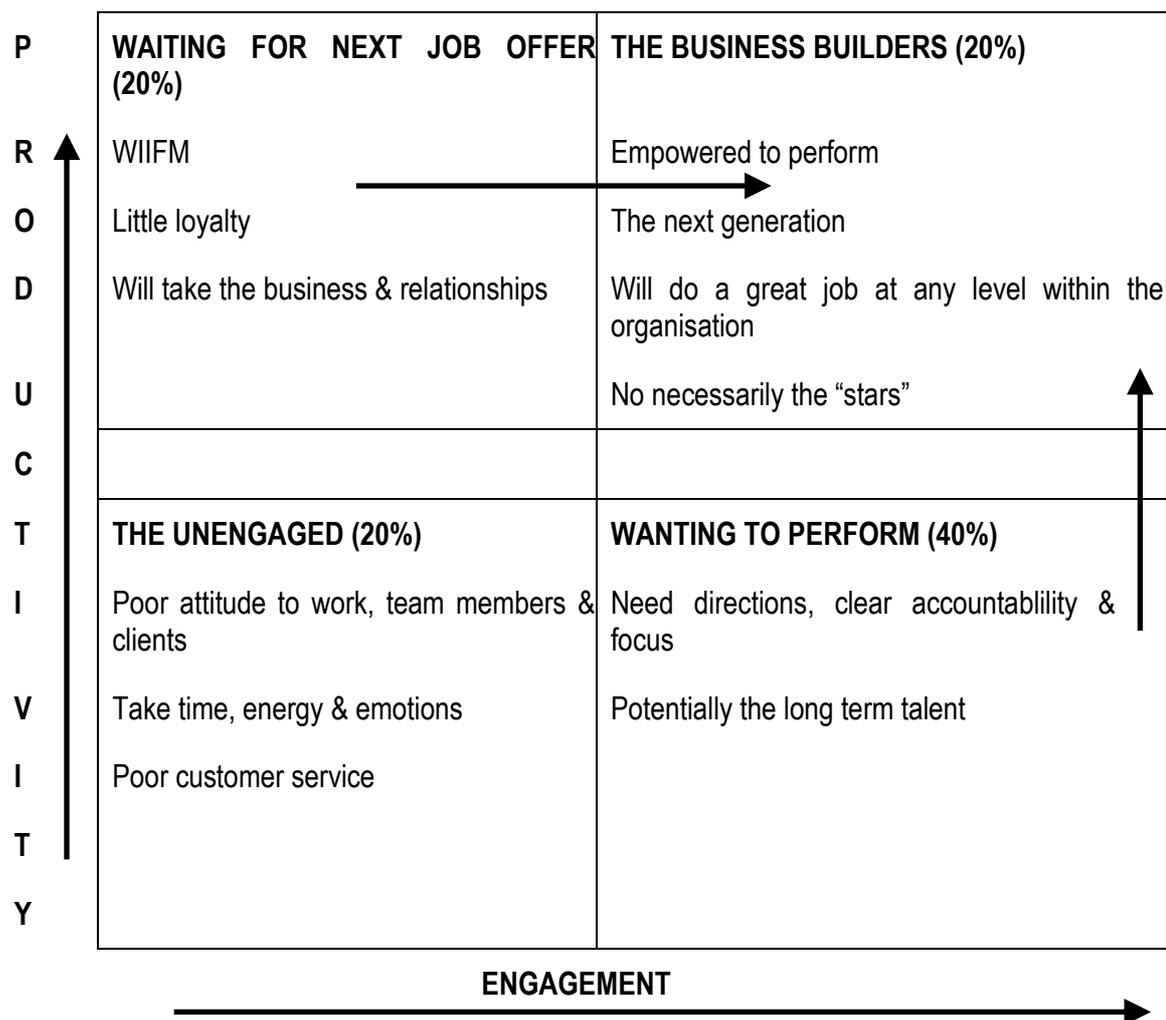
- Frustration with a current employer (35%)
- Dissatisfaction with salary (29%)
- Poor leadership and vision (27%) and
- An increased number of job ads (27%)

While this research is not agribusiness specific, the results should make employers in our sector think about implications for their businesses and to develop appropriate strategies to avoid losing key people during this period of recovery and potential growth.

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- Not understanding the link between engagement and productivity and keeping staff, ie



Employers need to somehow “get inside” their people minds to understand why someone would want to work with your organisation and as importantly, to understand why they would want to stay with you in the long term.

The answer to these questions provide you with your engagement strategies.

Why do people want to work with you and what are they looking for from their employment with you? Is it a career, an interesting work, the opportunity to work with good people, learning and development opportunities, remuneration benefits, etc.?

If possible, survey your employees as to :

1. Their reasons for working for you.
2. Their level of satisfaction against those reasons.

This can be done through a range of techniques such as conducting tailored employee surveying mechanisms or performance management discussions.

Be proactive in your engagement strategies – don't wait until there is an issue. Know your people, know their wants and needs and know the market – what are the trends out there? What are the remuneration strategies being applied?, and how do you compare? Participate in an industry specific remuneration survey as a way of monitoring trends in your market place.

Importantly, increase the employer-employee dialogue. Do people understand the direction the business is taking and their role and opportunities in it for them? Can they raise issues and be treated as a valuable asset within the business?

Increased engagement has real returns for business. Our experience tells us that there are real opportunities to build the productivity and profitability of the business through engaged employees. It also gives you the opportunity to think about the type of people you have, want and need in your organisation. (*see diagram on page opposite*).

However, regardless of your engagement strategy, there are some people who through low engagement offer low productivity. These people – and they could be up to 20% of your workforce – take up significant management energy and unfortunately offer little back to the business through customer service, business results etc. Think hard about these people as to whether they have a long term future in the business.

There are also those people who, while producing good results, still have little engagement and are really waiting for the next offer. These people – and they could be up to 20% of the workforce – seek an answer to the WIIFM question – what's in it for me? While these people can be tiring in line management energy, they can offer real returns to the business, so answering their WIIFM question can result in long term engagement.

There are also other people – in our experience possibility up to 40% of the workforce – who, while their productivity may be not as high, are highly engaged and want to do a great job for the business. Through training, mentoring, coaching, leadership and communication, these people will increase business results while being engaged. They are as critical as the previous group.

There are another group who are fully engaged and produce good quality business results. They are your builders. These people still need to be constantly motivated, acknowledged and rewarded to ensure they remain the business builders that you require long term.

Finally, answer these questions to assist in determining the level of engagement and engagement strategies that you may apply:

- Do your people know the direction of your business and the role they can have it in?
- Do they know and believe in the vision, the dreams and the story of your business?
- Are your line managers taking personal interest in their people? Do they know their aspirations, dreams, wants and needs?
- Do your employees know what's expected of them and are they receiving the communication through performance management as to how they are performing and how they are perceived?
- Is the training they receive contributing to their personal and professional development?
- Are they being remunerated fairly and equitably against positions within the business and within the sector?

Applying some of these strategies will increase their level of engagement and increase your productivity.