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organisation

HRD INTERVIEW:

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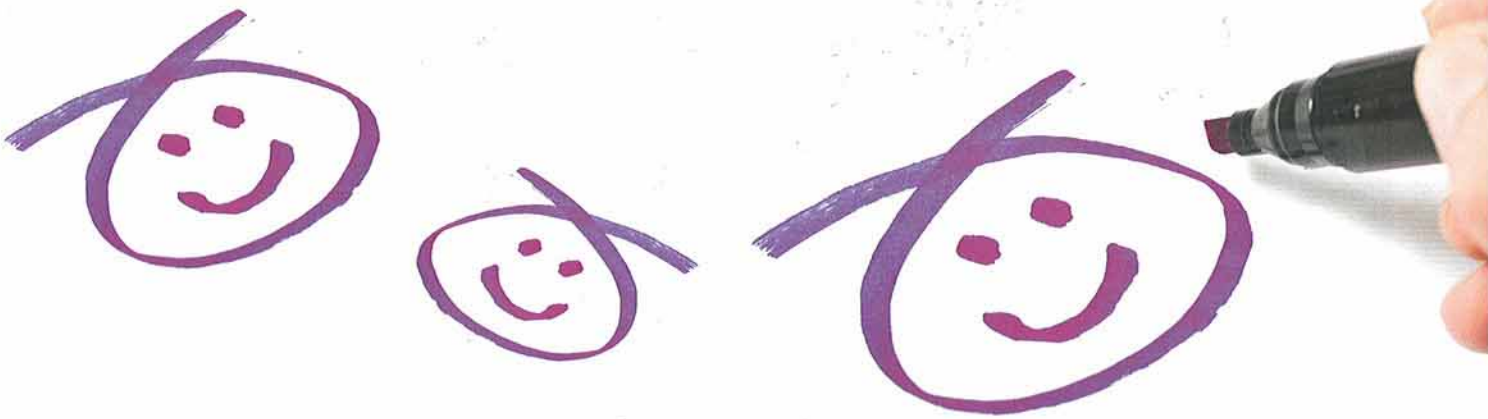
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Enjoyment = engagement

Motivating staff is a challenge multiplied by the current economic climate. Rebecca Gray, HR Director for construction consultant John Rowan & Partners, explains the processes they have implemented to tackle disengagement.

Redundancies, forfeiture of bonuses, pay cuts and recruitment freezes are all by-products of recession and the obvious outcome is damage to employee morale. Cost cutting and survival are the key initiatives for businesses, and the situation continues to look bleak. If employers are relying on job market turbulence as a reason to reduce their commitment to engagement, they run the significant risk of losing their key talent to the opposition.

Because employment is in turmoil, businesses that rely too heavily on remaining staff on the premise that they should be thankful for having a job and expect them to pick up the slack left behind by their redundant colleagues will be ploughing ever deeper furrows between employees and organisation. Businesses that champion job satisfaction and workplace enjoyment will gain a strong advantage, if they remain committed to transforming the business as a place that people actually want to stay associated with. This, in turn, will stimulate outside interest in potential incoming talent for the future. But the key question remains- how to achieve this?

Research has shown that work is the second most important influencing factor in peoples' level of happiness and fulfilment, but it is only a 'positive' influence if people feel in control of how and when they deliver at work. At JRP we have long understood that our people are integral to the success of the company. This is not a theory, it is a fact, and so like all companies it is critical to us that our staff remain engaged and motivated. In order to achieve this we have implemented a system where professional people are trusted to deliver work to a high quality within overall agreed timeframes. We have introduced a new

management ethos that is based on trust and empowerment, and a practical requirement that everyone agrees tasks and deadlines for a period ahead, leaving staff essentially free to deliver work in a way that best suits their skills and personality.

The process has taken about a year to implement and has involved constant staff consultation and management re-training. The emphasis is as much upon the management teams learning to relinquish control, as it is upon their teams demonstrating personal responsibility and accountability. Staff are now given complete control over how they choose to manage their time and workloads. If employees want to access Facebook at 10am, work in the park or at home, take a long lunch with friends or go to the gym in the afternoon, that's fine. The key is that work is completed on time and to a high standard; how staff choose to accomplish that end is up to them.

We did extensive research on our current management practices, looking at the key issues and challenges. It was clear to us that we were not managing our people consistently across the company and although some managers were already allowing a certain degree of flexible working, it was clear that we had to introduce consistency in our approach. Fundamentally, this has meant a change in the business culture, with very clear expectations now in place as to how our managers and staff should approach management relationships.

This was a natural progression for us and the benefits speak for themselves, as staff are more engaged, productive and well motivated, something which as consultants is integral to our client facing capabilities. In addition to this, the

process itself acts as a tool to improve everyone's competencies and to share knowledge. If a manager is sitting with a member of staff who says a task will take five days and they know a quicker or more efficient way of completing the task, they have an opportunity to pass this information on, facilitating a continual process of mentoring and training.

Some may see this HR method as risky in the current economic climate – indeed many are implementing a polar approach, micro-managing and withdrawing freedom in a bid to control the costs. But this is only likely to lead to staff disengagement and a lack of motivation, which will ultimately be reflected in profits. Ultimately, every business is different, but a long-term vision and an understanding of the issues ahead are critical in driving strategy and policy. Involvement and communication are key components for effective change management and by showing your staff you trust them, you will empower them to not only create a happy working environment, but also a happy bottom line.



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