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Let's face it, employees are human "beings," not human "doings." Today's managers must make it a priority to get to know them so that they, in turn, can provide whatever's needed to keep their teams fully engaged in what they do. This creates wins for everyone. With that in mind, here are nine management tips for creating and sustaining employee engagement:

1) **Let go of any negative opinions you may have about your employees.** Approach each of them as a source of unique knowledge with something valuable to contribute to the company. Remember that you are co-creating the achievement of a vision with them.

2) **Make sure employees have everything they need to do their jobs.** Remember when you started a new school year and you'd prepare by getting all new school supplies? Why not build just such an opportunity into your department simply by asking each staff member, or the team as a whole, "Do you have everything you need to be as competent as you can be?" Remember, just as marketplace and customer needs change daily, so do your employees' needs change.

3) **Clearly communicate what's expected of employees - what the company values and visions are, and how the company defines success.** Employees can't perform well or be productive if they don't clearly know what it is they're supposed to do — and the part they play in the overall success of the company. Be sure to communicate your expectations — and to do it often.

4) **Get to know your employees — especially their goals, their stressors, what excites them and how they each define success.** I'm not suggesting you pry too deeply or start counseling your team members. What I am suggesting is that you show an interest in their well-being and that, when appropriate, you do what it takes to enable them to feel more fulfilled and better balanced.

5) **Make sure they are trained — and retrained — in problem solving and conflict resolution skills.** These critical skills will help them interact better with you, their teammates, customers and suppliers. It's common sense - better communications reduce stress and increase positive outcomes.

6) **Constantly ask how YOU are doing in your employees' eyes.** I know it can be difficult for managers to request employee feedback — and it can be equally if not more challenging for an employee to give the person who evaluates them an honest response. To get strong at this

skill and to model it for employees, begin dialogs with employees using conversation starters such as, "It's one of my goals to constantly improve myself as a manager. What would you like to see me do differently? What could I be doing to make your job easier?" Be sure to accept feedback graciously and to express appreciation.

7) **Pay attention to company stories and rituals.** Are people laughing at each other or with each other? Do they repeat stories of success or moments of shame? Stay away from participating in discussions that are destructive to people or the organization, and keep success stories alive.

8) **Reward and recognize employees in ways that are meaningful to them (that's why getting to know your employees is so important).** And remember to celebrate both accomplishments and efforts to give employees working on long-term goals a boost.

9) **Be consistent for the long haul.** If you start an engagement initiative and then drop it, your efforts will backfire, creating employee estrangement. People are exhausted and exasperated from the "program du jour" initiatives that engage their passion and then fizzle out when the manager gets bored, fired or moved to another department. There's a connection between an employee's commitment to an initiative and a manager's commitment to supporting it. A manager's ongoing commitment to keeping people engaged, involved in and excited about the work they do and the challenges they face must be a daily priority.

Ultimately, you must keep in mind that employees are a company's greatest asset. Their collective ideas, feedback and enthusiasm for what they do can help your business grow and succeed. Some people are naturally wired to give their all and do their best no matter where they work. But the majority of people require the guidance of skilled managers who welcome their ideas, ask for feedback and generate enthusiasm in order to have a sense of purpose and energy about what they do. ☞

Brandi is publisher of the Customer Care Coach®, a weekly training program on mastering "The Art and Science of Exquisite Customer Care." She is the author of "Winning at Customer Retention, 101 Ways to Keep 'em Happy, Keep 'em Loyal and Keep 'em Coming Back" and "Building Customer Loyalty - 21 Essential Elements in ACTION." For more information, including free e-mail tips, visit www.customercarecoach.com and www.customerretention.com, or call 561-279-0027.