



What's the temperature in your office?

I love this time of year. I look out my window at a fantastic blue sky, with white contrails streaking through the heavens like a child drawing chalk lines on a bright blue background – I think it always looks so inviting to be outside.

Yet when you step out of the warm office you discover that the temperature outside in no way justifies your optimism. In short – it's freezing. After that momentary shock when your lungs scream out in discomfort, you adjust your coat and set off on an errand, happy to live in a country with real seasonal changes in the weather.

Occasionally when you visit some offices and workplaces, you wonder if they have set the thermostat on the heater wrong. It should be warm and inviting... but there's a distinct frostiness in the air... and it is coming from the people...

Just the other week I had such an experience. I'd gone in to purchase some materials for a building project and was amazed at what happened. First, I was surprised to see nobody in the shop. Not even a salesman.

That's fine – it allowed me time to mooch about and check fittings unmolested by an over-anxious salesman. But having made my selection, I discovered that the larger challenge stood between me and my building project. Paying for the gear I was buying.

Have you ever been asked to wait until after smoko to get served in a business? What does it tell you about the level of staff engagement?

The cash register was there, the key was in it, yet nobody came, despite me calling out to the back of the shop. I thought about leaving some cash on the counter – but couldn't be sure it would not be taken by somebody else, so I dropped my purchases on the counter and went in search of a staff member to serve me.

I eventually found a couple of guys out the back playing cards and drinking coffee. I asked if they could serve me and was amazed when I was asked if I could wait until after smoko.... I said no and respectfully asked they take my money and then return to their coffee, which with a deal of exaggerated reluctance, they did.

At that point I started to wonder what on earth was really going on here. So I asked the logical question... "Is the boss out today?" – "No" came the reply, "the boss is never here, he couldn't give a dam about us and the business as long as it makes him lots of money".

The frostiness of the reply was amazing. So I probed further. Turns out, the boss had a new interest, was not spending time with his team, and didn't want to hear about the problems of the business (or any ideas on how to make it better).

In short, the boss had disengaged from the business, and as a consequence, the staff had disengaged as well.

It led me to wonder how many businesses suffer from poor performance as a result of disengaged staff (and in some instances, even a disengaged boss)?

Sometimes it is hard as the owner or manager of a business to feel like you are really getting the full story from your employees. You sense there is more, but your people keep things from you. All you see is a range of emotions being displayed by your team without understanding what is driving specific behaviors. Common issues you see include:

- **Resentment** - why should I help them get richer off the back of my advice?
- **Inadequacy** - they know it all already – I can't tell them anything new
- **Security** - as long as things don't change, then my job will be safe
- **Superiority** - I know more than them – why should I help them?
- **Frustration** - they never listen anyway, so why should I bother?
- **Lack of Trust** – if they told me what they were really thinking I would be more included to help them.

Occasionally you do have “bad

eggs” which disrupt the business (these are often a consequence of your recruitment policy). But let's make one thing perfectly clear. In the vast majority of cases, these negative emotions are seldom seen unless the owner/manager has displayed a series of behaviors which have resulted in your workforce to disengage.

Often, the first step in reengaging with your workforce is to let them speak their minds in a risk free environment... then act on the feedback you receive

So how do you start to (re)build the bridge of trust and reengage with your employees? Many companies (big and small) use engagement surveys to gather feedback from employees. These measure a number of different aspects of the business and the attitude (or temperature) of your employees towards you as the owner/manager and the business in general.

There are three reasons why a

good staff engagement survey will receive valuable feedback.

First, good engagement surveys are conducted at arm's length (i.e. you don't do it yourself). Second, the results are anonymous (you can't track them back to an individual). And third, they demonstrate to your team you are both willing to listen and willing to change.

Without these three critical factors you risk further disenfranchising your team. It doesn't mean you have to agree with everybody on everything. It does mean you have to be more pro-active and allow your employees a glimpse of your vision for the business.

If you feel that it's time to start improving the temperature in your office (or you're not even sure what the temperature is), then it might be time to conduct an engagement survey.

Next month, we'll take a look at how to deal with staff feedback from engagement surveys.

Accretive offers actionable engagement surveys. For more information contact us for an obligation free discussion.