

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Incorporating Intrinsic Motivators to Improve Employee Engagement

By Jennifer Evans

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It is Monday morning; you had a great weekend and are ready to tackle the week ahead when you get a call from a partner that he wants to meet ASAP (sound familiar?). Dreading what is to come, you load up with your third cup of coffee and head into his office to be met with – “Craig has to go. His work quality is dropping, and I am over his disengaged attitude. We’re way behind on this case!” Your immediate thought: Isn’t this the same associate he was praising last year? Wasn’t Craig on partner track? What changed?

Law firm management is continuing to be challenged with increasing demands to come up with ways to improve employee engagement. The reality is today’s young professionals are more demanding and keeping them engaged is challenging. I believe, at the core, successful engagement is a leader’s ability to understand and support an individual’s intrinsic motivations. This leads to smart hiring, improved communication, and increased productivity.

This summer, I have been listening to a series, [Top 25 Most Viewed Ted Talks](#) Included is *Why People Do What They Do* (Tony Robbins) where he shares his view on how all of us, directly or indirectly, are motivated by six intrinsic human needs:

**CERTAINTY – UNCERTAINTY – DESIRE TO CONTRIBUTE -
CONNECTION WITH OTHERS - GROWTH – SIGNIFICANCE**

Although, I am not a huge Tony Robbins fan, I found some truth to his talk. In my conversations with potential candidates, I learn most individuals are motivated to make a job change because one or more of these “needs” are not being met.

Here is where the opportunity lies. Through focusing on understanding what motivates us to do what we do, leaders are in a better position to influence individuals to engage at a higher level and to retain talent.

INCORPORATING INTRINSIC MOTIVATORS TO IMPROVE EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

INCREASE COMMUNICATION – Employees who are motivated by certainty detest ambiguity; over communication is key to higher level engagement with these individuals. Consider: Do you have the right

associates (or staff) paired with the right partners? How transparent are you when rolling out new programs? Is the track to partnership well communicated within your firm?

OFFER FLEXIBILITY – While most individuals want some level of certainty, many are motivated more by creating their own path. Are you providing opportunities where individuals can provide input to new programs or process improvements? Not everyone is going to jump on board; however, by making this offer, you will naturally pull in those that are motivated by having a voice. Allow employees to feel their suggestions are welcomed — This is a huge morale boost!

REWARD CONTRIBUTION – Well deserved positive feedback, invitations to success parties and a system based on meritocracy are essential to motivating young professionals. Are you conducting on-going 180-day reviews; or, are you still married to the annual review process? (This doesn't have to be super formal – coffee & a conversation go a long way!) Is your firm celebrating wins with associates and staff or are partners only being recognized?

CREATE CONNECTIONS – The legal industry is competitive and fiercely demanding. Leaders who create programs that connect their employees to “life” within their firms can positively influence their retention rate. I am hearing more & more how firms are having monthly happy hours, quarterly new-hire breakfasts, and incorporating gamification – All great ways to connect individuals.

PROMOTE GROWTH – It is super rare when you will find an individual who is not seeking to grow in some capacity. Employees who feel their growth is stunted will withdraw and become disengaged. Most firms have professional development plans, but I frequently hear nothing is done to support it. Consider requiring partners to contribute by hosting quarterly lunch & learns and creating mentor programs where there is accountability for the mentor, not just the mentee. Individuals are more likely to stay with an organization where there are being fed and are growing.

SUPPORT SIGNIFICANCE – A basic human need is to know that we are significant; individuals want to know their role is important. This can be supported through offering access to substantive work, providing positive feedback, and creating opportunities to give-back through firm supported community programs.

THE KEY IS TO RESPECT INDIVIDUALITY – no two people are 100% alike; therefore, one approach will not work for everyone. Strong leaders take the coach approach: having the right players in the right positions and having a playbook with a variety of programs to support a variety of situations.

**THE ROI MAKES IT WORTH THE EFFORT: HIGHER EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT =
INCREASED PROFITABILITY + IMPROVED WORK SATISFACTION + LONGER TENURE = HAPPIER MONDAYS.**

For more information and further reading on Communication + Leadership, visit our [online library](#).



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With 25 years of experience in legal recruitment, Jennifer Evans offers a depth of experience in talent acquisition that is matched by few in the industry. She is a business leader with a passion for helping organizations and individuals achieve their highest potential.

As a former co-owner of Davidson Legal Staffing & now co-founder of Access Talent, she has an extensive understanding of the California legal market. She is well-known for her work ethic, honest approach and ability to come up with resourceful solutions.

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