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Trust: A key driver for successful employee engagement

by Renu Jha

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Working: What We Do All Day is a new docuseries that premiered globally on Netflix on May 17, 2023.^[1] It features former U.S. President Barack Obama, who interviews a cross-section of people in their homes and at work. He asks the important questions:

- “What brings you joy in work?”
- “What gives you a sense of purpose?”
- “What makes a ‘good’ job good?”

Obama also speaks to company heads whose decisions can affect millions of lives. He wants to know how responsible they feel for their employees. Do they offer more than a paycheck?

Workplace atmosphere

What qualifies as a good job will vary from person to person. We are all different. But what is undeniable for the success of any organization is how engaged their employees are. In the satirical comedy *The Devil Wears Prada*, the protagonist, Andy, thinks she has found a meaningful job that she will enjoy. She is enticed by freebies, designer clothes, and trips to Paris. As she continues to work for her bullying boss, pandering to her outrageous expectations in the hope that she will be promoted, the harassment eventually begins to wear her out. The attractive perks are not enough to keep her motivated, loyal, or engaged. She realizes that her career ambitions have taken precedence over all else and has lost perspective on what is important in life. Andy eventually turns her back on her “high-flying” job. The movie is funny because it is so relatable.

Free lunches, fancy off-sites, on-site gyms, branded goodies, and other such temporarily attractive but meaningless freebies do not, on their own, ensure engagement. Employees can see through this superficiality and recognize it as a company’s ruse to keep people in the workplace for longer hours. What employees need and want is a workplace they feel they can trust.

To quote the wisdom of Maya Angelou: “People will forget what you said and what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel.”

So true. We remember the organizations, the bosses who made our stomachs churn going to work and dreading meetings. In contrast, supportive managers we can trust are unforgettable. They give us confidence and have a positive impression on our careers.

There is no doubt that a revolution is happening in the workplace. We live in a “VUCA” world: volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Many employees feel anxious, stressed, and unsure of their futures. That’s no wonder

because we are constantly bombarded with news of:

- Mass layoffs—even by hugely successful organizations
- AI threatening to take over jobs
- War in many parts of the world
- Growing inequity and divisiveness
- A globally increasing population
- Large scale urbanization
- Climate change

These pressures can lead to a decrease in motivation, productivity, and job satisfaction. Ultimately, this impacts the bottom line.

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