

Kim's Response to interview questions about an HR Survey by HRE

We had 613 respondents to this year's survey, in which we asked participants to name the biggest HR challenges facing their organizations at the moment (choosing a maximum of three from a list of challenges). This year, "ensuring employees remain engaged and productive (35 percent)" topped the list, followed by "developing leaders (28 percent)" and "retaining key talent as the economy recovers (25 percent)." These findings are very much in line with past HRE surveys, which have found these three challenges near the top of the list each year. **Why do you think these issues remain so significant for HR leaders year in and year out, and why are they particularly stressful for HR at the moment?**

As noted in the question above, employee engagement remains the top concern for HR executives. Getting a clear picture of employee engagement within the organization can be a tall order for HR, with many organizations relying largely on surveys to measure engagement. **Why is engagement so critical for organizations right now, and what else beyond surveys can HR do to get a good sense of engagement levels within the company, and identify areas in need of improvement?**

Developing leaders is likely to be an ongoing concern for several reasons: a) it's easy to make the case that of all the drivers of organizational success, the quality of leadership is the most powerful, and b) although organizations are slowly getting more savvy about it, most are far from great developers of talent. Some organizations fail to prioritize leadership development and/or fall victim to fads. But even those organizations that follow through on good intentions are prone to three common errors: 1) they fail to adequately differentiate talent, especially as it relates to identifying potential; 2) they don't taken an aggressive, hands-on approach to managing the careers of their leaders; and 3) they trust talent management issues to HR instead of holding operational managers accountable. It follows that if it's difficult to develop leaders, retention is going to also be a significant concern, especially since the most capable leaders will have the most opportunities and likely represent the greatest risk.

So that brings us to engagement. Employee engagement is highly correlated with retention (in fact, intention to stay is one of the defining characteristics of engagement). Short of bribery, I don't know how to retain talent in a world of opportunities other than to engage the talent. Engagement continues to be a concern because engagement levels continue to be low (from a norms standpoint they started to rebound in 2012 after falling off a cliff in 2008-9) and engagement is such an important contributor to organizational success. We define engagement as a mindset in which employees take personal responsibility for the organization's success and apply discretionary effort to help the organization achieve its goals. If you buy that definition of engagement, you can see that enhances organization performance by definition. A valid, research-based engagement survey can give us a picture of the engagement health of the organization. The drivers of engagement are the remedies the organization controls that can improve engagement. Here are 11 research-based engagement drivers:

1. Immediate Manager Relationship
2. Trust in Senior Leadership
3. Strategic Alignment
4. Peer Relationships
5. Personal Influence
6. Nature of the Career
7. Career Support
8. Nature of the Job
9. Developmental Opportunities

- 10. Recognition
- 11. Pay Fairness

In our book, *FYI for Talent Engagement*, we provide 10 suggestions for addressing each of those 11 drivers.