



WORDS ON WISE MANAGEMENT

What's in a name? Maybe a lot more than you realize

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Management doesn't care about us—they don't even know who we are. Management walks around the office and never talks to anyone—it's like we are invisible.

All too often, it seems, you've discovered negative reviews about your company on Glassdoor or Indeed, readily available for your employees, job candidates, and customers to read. You're tired of seeing them. You're tired of feeling employee disaffection in the workplace. Instead, you want to be known as the best place to work in your area, an organization with an "engaged culture." But how do you begin changing the perceptions—or maybe even the realities—of your workplace?

In my career, I've had the unique opportunity to work directly with people who led by example when it came to engaging employees. Let me share three of those stories with you.

Call me by my name

Sam Walton, the founder of Walmart, was known to "manage by walking around" in stores, distribution centers, and the corporate office. It was important to "Mr. Sam" to be visible and greet employees by their first name. From his perspective, saying hello wasn't enough. If he could look someone in the eye and use his name, it made that individual feel important and appreciated. How did he know everyone's name? Next time you're in a Walmart or Sam's Club, look at the employee badges. By design, all employees' first names are on their badges in **bold** letters.

In the early 1990s, Limited Brands developed Bath and Body Works, selling personal care products from shelves inside Express stores. Today, Bath and Body has more than 1,600 stand-alone locations. Beth Pritchard, the first president of the brand, focused on engagement with customers and employees to grow the business. The early success of the brand was dramatic, and Pritchard decided to personally thank every corporate and distribution center employee at the company's headquarters in Columbus, Ohio. She made it her mission to shake hands and thank each employee by name, and if she hadn't already met someone, she made a point to ask their name.

The feedback from employees was extraordinary. Store leadership adopted Pritchard's actions and

thanked employees across the organization in a similar manner. The move contributed to very low turnover in a seasonal retail business, strong employee engagement, and positive comments about the culture, which allowed the company to add more than 1,500 stores in nine years.

Recently, I worked with a leader who believes employee engagement is critical to business success. David Alexander, the former CEO of TruGreen, the largest residential lawn care provider in the United States and Canada, joined the company during a time when revenue and earnings were declining and employee engagement was low. His branch visits and the results of employee engagement surveys showed it was clear that field employees (200 branches and 11,000 employees) lacked trust in the corporate team.

Before Alexander's arrival, operating systems and marketing strategies were changed without input from employees in the field. Trust disappeared across the organization. Although he had many ideas on how to build engagement, Alexander recognized that the process should begin with learning every manager's name, their location, and their identity by sight. He created flash cards to accomplish that task. As a result, in the corporate office, at company meetings, and during branch visits, he addressed managers by name and talked about their role in the company.

Alexander shared with managers the importance of knowing their employees, and his ability to demonstrate the impact of his engagement was remarkable. The executive team was encouraged to do the same. Leadership engagement rose from 49% to 78% over a few short years, and overall employee engagement climbed from 45% to 68%.

It's the little things that count

While it might seem silly to think something as small as learning someone's name can make such an impact, building a culture of engagement starts with knowing your employees. Best-in-class leaders make an effort to ensure their employees don't feel invisible.

They know who their workers are and how they function within the company. Start small and learn your employees' names.



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