

## Apprentices are a boost to your company, but engaged apprentices can be game-changers.

From 2017, the way the UK Government funds apprenticeship schemes is changing. All employers with a pay bill of over £3 million will pay a levy which will be invested in an apprenticeship fund. Companies can then draw funding to train and develop their apprentices. It's hoped that access to this funding will re-energise apprenticeship schemes, and broaden the ways that young people can access a range of different careers.

So if you're the person who recruits and develops the talents of cohorts of today's young people, how will you decide to hire each of your new apprentices? It will probably be something different in each person. In one instance, excellent grades; in another, a fiercely ambitious nature. Maybe someone else will just have that certain something, a spark that lets you know they'd be right at home in your company, or will show a passion for developing something you didn't even know your company needed.

So, it's likely that the apprentices you recruit will be there for a range of reasons. And once they're part of your company it won't serve you – or them – well to put them all into one box marked 'Youth of Today' and treat them as one homogenous batch, purely because they share the Generation Z moniker.

### Engagement is a choice we make

As the leader, you're not responsible for keeping everyone in your team totally engaged, all of the time.

Surprised by that statement? If you read a lot about leadership, you might be. After all, that's the opposite of what most of the literature will tell you. But at Insights, we think the responsibility for engagement rests mostly on the individual, and your part as a leader is to help them get there.

It's each leader's role to create the context that will allow every apprentice under their care to get totally

engaged and invested in the company they're an important part of. And that will mean different things for every person.

So you'll have to do some thinking about the individuals involved, and also some quiet detective work. As your apprentices join your team and begin to get to work, keep a weather eye on how they react to different projects, problems, opportunities. Have regular catch ups with them and talk about what makes their heart race. If that sounds soft, and like a nice to have, it isn't – engaged employees **show up more often**, and work harder once they're through the door.

### Engagement looks different on everyone

Every single person in your team is unique, with a set of singular passions. It's their job to take a good look into themselves and work out what makes their heart sing, but it's your job as a leader to provide the space to make that happen, by encouraging a culture of engagement. Businesses where everyone is engaged are up to **22% more productive** and 21% more profitable than companies that don't engage their employees. For those reasons you need everyone to be all in; to give the very best of themselves, to be as consistently productive as they can be, to show up with their game face on every single day.

But there's more than one way to do that, and you should give the youngest people in your organisation – your apprentices – your full support as they begin to work out what engages them. The answer isn't likely to be financial – after all, your apprenticeship scheme will probably have an attached pay scale – but in truth, **engagement isn't really related to money** anyway. It'll be something less tangible and more personal than that.

## Making it happen

We hear a lot in the media about the 'special snowflake' generation who expect to be handed the keys to the boardroom simply for showing up, but appealing to what will engage your youngest employees isn't pandering – it's pulling the levers that you can, in order to get the best from your team, from the very beginning.

For example, one of your apprentices might be fuelled by recognition amongst their peers; is there an Apprentice of the Month Award that they might be motivated to win? Or someone else could be motivated by opportunities to work in other areas of the business; as a reward for their hard work could you give them half a day per week to spend in other departments, learning the ropes as they go? Or maybe someone has a burning desire to do something a little out-there; you could do worse than take a tip from companies like 3M or Google, who encourage their employees to devote up to 20% of their time to their own innovative projects.

## Inspiring lifelong loyalty

This is key stuff to get right from the beginning of your apprenticeship scheme, because you have the potential to inspire young people to bring their best work, become an ambassador for your brand, and turn into lifelong loyal employees with your ideals at their heart.

But if you miss the opportunity to help them figure out what engages them, and don't encourage that engagement regularly, you could be missing out on years of high productivity, truly excellent customer service, and the next generation of inspiring, engaging leaders.

Insights helps companies all over the world get the very best from their people. To find out how we can partner with you, contact us today at [letushelp@insights.com](mailto:letushelp@insights.com), or visit [www.insights.com](http://www.insights.com) to find out more.

"Engagement is not just a warm, fuzzy thing. It's about giving people the tools they need to succeed in their careers, which in turn drives the outcomes that we're seeking in the marketplace. When you look at it through that lens, when people ... feel good about their personal growth opportunities, and receive the appropriate rewards and recognition for their contributions, it's a win-win proposition."

– Mike Rickheim, VP of Talent Management,  
Newell Rubbermaid