

Keeping the Elves Engaged

Father Christmas (Santa or Nick to his closest friends) slumped despondently on his throne under the tinsel and the blinking lights. Another year, another crisis - if it wasn't one thing it was another.

Last year the problem had been caused by the way he went about the management role of tasking, trusting and tending to his senior team of Executive Elves. On that occasion he had been saved by some good advice from his Chief Executive Elf (CEE) Dobby ¹.

This year the problem was different. Turnover of staff was high and motivation was low. His supposed friends and colleagues in the gift giving business, the Easter Bunny and the Tooth Fairy, had run aggressive recruiting campaigns targeting his best performing elves. When he had challenged them about poaching his staff they simply said that it wasn't their problem if Santa's workers responded to their advertisements.

What really worried Santa was that people just didn't seem to be motivated for the big December push this year. Elves turned up at around 9:00am, did what was strictly required of them as per their staff contracts and then vanished (often quite literally in a cloud of smoke) at 5:00pm on the dot. Santa had not heard a rousing rendition of "Hi Ho, Hi Ho, it's off to work we go" for weeks.

As was usual when he was worried Santa turned to Dobby to unburden himself.

"Nick," Dobby responded after listening patiently, "you just don't get it do you. Christmas looks like the season of goodwill and happiness to you. You get to fly all around the world delivering presents to happy children, watch feel good movies made about your life and scoff mountains of Christmas cake and oceans of sherry. For the rest of us it is about toiling away at our individual little jobs, struggling to get through to next year when we know we will have to do it all over again!

If you want to lift Elf retention levels and get that extra bit of elvish effort that makes all the difference you need to pay more attention to keeping them engaged in the work they do."

Father Christmas leapt to his own defence, "But what about the staff survey we did earlier this year. Malfoy & Malfoy said we got a fantastic response rate and just look at the report they produced – it has over 80 full colour graphs, 300 pages, comparisons with a data base of over 1,000 other companies and a statistical analysis of the standard deviation to 3 decimal places!"

"And what did it tell you?" asked Dobby.

"Were not sure," replied Santa, "the Executive Elves spent all their time arguing about whose scores were the best and then finding reasons why the survey was flawed in the first place".

Dobby sighed – it was back to basics again.

"Nick," he said, "engagement is all about getting 5 things more right than wrong. Let's have a talk about them".

¹ <http://dghrservices.squarespace.com/storage/articles/Elves.pdf>





I want you to go away, think about these categories and come back with a clear plan to improve each of them”.

Santa left with a heavy heart and a particularly un-jolly look on his face.

A week later he was back with his plans.

“Dobby”, he said excitedly, “I haven’t got this stuff all sorted out yet, but I have been able to come up with 5 good plans to improve our levels of engagement.

Firstly, I found out that we have some people doing jobs they are seriously unsuited for. We had trolls working in the fine china department and Julia Gillard’s speech writers doing the jokes for the Christmas Crackers! I am getting Elvish Relations (ER) to conduct a skills audit, make sure people are working in the right roles and provide some re-training for those who need it.

Secondly, it seems that the foul creatures of Sauron the Great that I employed last year were really struggling to see how Christmas worked for them. We had a workshop in the workshop and they now see that few things are more horrifying than a long drunken afternoon with all the relatives that you have avoided for the last year. They are now full of the Christmas Spirit like the rest of us!

Thirdly, the guys in battery supply were a bit lost about how they fitted in. A few minutes talking to the electronic toys department got them clear on how vital their role was. They are now committed to an AA class result!

Fourthly, I realised that I hadn’t told the whole crew how much I appreciate what they do each year. I get all the credit and I am just so tired by the end of the returns period that I haven’t spent the time to let them know what their efforts mean to me. Not this time though – we organised a special surprise morning tea on Wednesday and I addressed the whole workshop and told them how I felt.

And finally, I have made plans to sit down with each one of them in the new year and talk to them about Christmases past and present and in particular about Christmases future and what important roles I expect they will have in them. It is no coincidence of course that I will be talking to all the key people just before I expect the Easter Bunny to start his annual recruiting drive!

Dobby, the workshop is humming again!”

What Dobby and Santa Discussed

Job Fit

The extent to which the job is a good match for the employee, and the company makes it possible for the employee to be successful.

Belonging

The extent to which the employee feels that their own values are compatible with those of the organisation

Clarity

The extent to which the employee is clear about how they contribute to the overall success of the organisation

Valued

The extent to which the employee feels appreciated by the organisation and has positive emotions about those he/she works with

My Future

The extent to which the employee believes that their future career wishes can be fulfilled within the organisation

