

Member's Quarterly

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Feature

Conversation: The Ultimate of Operating Systems

What operating system does your organization run on?



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Think outside the realm of technology. Consider what else in your company is powerful enough to keep employee behaviour in check and your business running smoothly.

It's not traditional employee engagement methods like surveys, town halls, newsletters and departmental action plans. No, it's something much more fundamental than that.

It's conversation.

Conversation, the ability to connect with people, understand them and partner with them, is the operating system (O/S) that drives vital "apps" like great sales, customer service, coaching, problem-solving, innovation and strategy.

As with any O/S, all these business apps rely very heavily on conversation. How do we know this? Because without conversation — that is, if the system "crashes" — the entire organization is disabled.

The brain science

Conversation is, essentially, the O/S of the human brain.

This is because every single message transmitted from one neuron to another enables each of us to see, hear, move... and think. If all those 100 billion neurons in your brain were to stop talking to one another, your body and ability to process information would cease to function.

Interestingly, research also shows that neuronal conversations within our brains are significantly strengthened and enhanced by social conversations "between brains."

As such, it shouldn't surprise us that conversation is also the O/S of entire organizations. That's because as neuronal conversations are the way the individual brain gets things done, employee conversations are the way that organizations get things done.

With this in mind, then, why aren't organizations integrating conversation into their own employee engagement initiatives?

Why this matters

Let's look at employee engagement surveys as an example.

Rather than pause to consider the context behind results, leaders often rush to create strategies — "one-size-fits-all" broad-brush strategies built on nothing but numbers.

Employees do not respond well to global solutions. They want to know that they have been listened to. Leaders who draft plans without taking time to consider the "backstory" practically guarantee employee non-compliance to any engagement initiative.

That's where the need for conversation comes in.

Here's why: science shows that when you have meaningful, face-to-face conversations that demonstrate value, respect and care, this boosts the brain's processing power — forming a feel-good energy cocktail of connection, calm, concentration, creativity and curiosity.

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As such, conversation can:

- create natural opportunities to unlock insight and possibility in employees' minds;
- deepen the leader–employee relationship;
- energize employees; and
- power those apps that make a business so successful.

In addition, by enabling the co-creation of conditions that generate meaningful, sustainable energy, conversation can also lead to employees beginning to manage their own engagement.

Because of all this, conversation is an O/S that costs little — but yields much, much more than you likely ever thought possible.

No time to talk?

Don't feel you have time to talk to your employees?

Consider this: concerns that are unaddressed tend to fester and simmer. Then they turn into "crucial," "fierce" or "difficult" conversations-consuming multiples of energy, time and mind-space from everyone in the organization.

Leaders save themselves a lot of headaches when they move beyond engagement as we know it today and honour how the brain works.

Also keep in mind that conversations don't have to take up a lot of time.

Short, simple "Energy Check" conversations are a proven and effective way to unlock insight and possibility in your employees' minds. It can be as simple as asking employees what is energizing them at the moment and what is depleting their energy. Done systematically, this technique can catch issues before they become calamity-based, saving time in the process.

No installation needed

Everything changes for the better when leaders use conversation to draw out what matters most to employees. And here's the great thing: it already exists within your organization.

It's simply up to leaders to embrace it as the key operating system that drives the business — and shift their mindset to include conversation in all engagement endeavours.

Brady Wilson is co-founder of Juice Inc. and author of Beyond Engagement: A Brain-Based Approach That Blends the Engagement Managers Want with the Energy Employees Need. He can be reached via email at brady@juiceinc.com.