

Definitely Mabey

It is not always about the money!

Aon Hewitt conducts an annual best employer survey that measures engagement as the determinant of whether a participating firm qualifies as a "best employer." How, might you ask, is this different from many of the other surveys used to confer best employer status? For the most part, the other surveys measure satisfaction and not engagement.



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The difference is that the former focuses on “how much people like it here,” whereas the latter is focused on “how much people want and do contribute to the business' success”—a serious difference in what is being measured.

Because we live in a world that thrives on definitions and interpretations, engagement is defined as a measure of an employee's emotional and intellectual commitment to a firm.

Engaged members of a firm display three distinct behaviours:

- Say: they consistently say positive things about the firm;
- Stay: they intend to stay with the firm; and
- Strive: They strive to achieve above and beyond what is expected of them in their daily role in the firm.

The survey identifies the following six components that make up engagement:

- people
- work/motivation
- opportunities/quality of life/values
- procedures
- total rewards

Within each of these components they have identified specific factors that are seen as “drivers of engagement.” There are 21 drivers that they measure in all and establish averages for each that if achieved would equate to “best employer” classification.

Because of the level of detail and sophistication of Aon Hewitt's measurements, they can not only provide overall averages to qualify as a best employer, but also for various industry groups. Interestingly, the averages for the law firms participating in the 2011 survey are for the most part lower than the average best employer entities.

Table 1 below lists the best employer averages as well the averages for the law firms participating:

Table 1

Drivers of Engagement	Average for Best Employers	Average for Law Firms
Benefits	77	80
Career Opportunities	68	58
Corporate Social Responsibilities	87	80
Co-workers	84	79
Employee Health & Well Being	82	74
Employer Reputation	79	69
Intrinsic Motivation	80	77
Learning & Development	80	75
Manager	76	69
Managing Performance	70	57
Middle Mangement	76	67
Pay	59	54
People / HR Practices	79	70
Physical Work Environment	87	85
Recognition	83	52
Resources	71	74
Retirement Savings	68	64
Senior Leadership	80	71
Work / Life Balance	73	70

Work Processes	70	71
Work Tasks	76	71

As you can see, the average for the legal industry is below that of best employer, however it is great to see there are three law firms who qualify in Aon Hewitt's Top 50 Best Employers in Canada and full kudos go out to Bennett Jones LLP (#7), Stikeman Elliott LLP (#17) and Gowling Lafleur Henderson LLP (#36).

The meaning of most of the drivers is fairly straightforward, perhaps with the exception of employer reputation, which is defined as: "The organization is considered one of the best places to work for someone with my skills and experience."

In looking at the various drivers there were three (see Table 2 below) that struck me as ones which, if worked on, could provide a real boost in the overall engagement of staff and lawyers alike in any law firm, at minimal cost—mostly people's time and civility.

Table 2

Driver	Definition
Managing Performance	The way we manage performance here enables me to contribute as much as possible to our organization's success.
People / HR Practices	Our people / HR practices create a positive work environment for me.
Recognition	I receive appropriate recognition (beyond pay and benefits) for my contributions and / or accomplishments.

It should come as no surprise that the averages for law firms in these three drivers range from nine to 13 percentage points below the best employer averages.

Performance management done right is a continuous process, not just an annual one that is tied to compensation and promotion decisions. The key benefit that firms will derive from a continuous process of feedback and discussion is that staff and lawyers will be more open and candid as they will be secure that the year-end formal results will be more positive if their progress is documented during the year.

Much has been written on the negative impact of an emotionally/mentally unhealthy workplace and the costs associated with such an environment. For the most part this situation arises in law firms not because of an absence of written policies, but the absence of people prepared to effectively administer these policies.

It is rare that any person doesn't relish some recognition whether for a specific deed or continuous contributions. The goodwill created by the recognition is not derived from the amount of the spend but from the time taken by someone to acknowledge them. Recognition can range from e-mails to an apple to bud vases to thank you cards to a holiday stocking to a coffee (preferably from a third party as most law firm coffee is terrible) and so on.

I expect there are other drivers that, if tweaked by firms, could seriously raise the level of

engagement of the staff and lawyers in your firms. But what is clear is that there is a direct link between engagement and productivity and productivity and profitability. So perhaps firms need to pause in their quest for greater profitability through expensive re-engineering and weigh the immediacy of the impact of raising your folks' level of engagement.

Until the next column remember,

"rivers and mountains get it—they pay no attention to boundaries."

Comments or Questions?

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