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Nicole Elsely

Canon triggers employee self-discovery strategy

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In the course of these turbulent times and economic uncertainty, many employees feel anxious about their future, constrained and frustrated in their career, and may subsequently become disengaged. For organisations endeavoring to save costs, whilst increasing revenues and profitability, this can be a very complicated and delicate situation.

Disbursing millions of dollars in redundancy payouts is not necessarily the best or most effective solution for the organisation to stay competitive, or for employees to maintain their resilience, confidence and self-esteem.

Canon Australia recently embarked on a unique journey to inspire and stimulate their employees to take responsibility and ownership for their careers, which has heightened relevance in the current business climate.

Canon Australia is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Japanese-based Canon Incorporated Group, a market leader in professional and consumer imaging solutions. The principles of San-ji underpin its culture. San-ji essentially means that employees should embrace the three tenets of self-awareness, self-motivation and self-management.

In 2006, a number of employees at Canon Australia were seeking opportunities to revitalise their career. Canon needs employees who recognise and appreciate their current level of engagement, and the impact of that engagement on their performance and that of others.

Taking responsibility for their own engagement could mean any of the following:

- having a career conversation with their manager
- changing jobs through a secondment, transfer or promotion
- actively seeking a change of career.

The need for a tailored career enrichment program was therefore conceived.

■ The “i-Choose” career enrichment program

The i-Choose program was developed and customised by the specialist company in employee engagement, work and life enrichment programs, Because. It set out to integrate the San-ji tenets into its career enrichment program.

The program targeted people who may have been experiencing a career plateau, desiring a career transition or who were ready for the next career step. The program involved a comprehensive review of their talents, capabilities, aspirations and career opportunities, and enabled them to make a choice about whether they wanted to:

- stay and re-engage in their current role
- explore other opportunities within Canon Australia
- exit the organisation.

The program was designed around six “Cs” – key development steps:

1. **Contemplate** their career journey and the talents and wisdom they have accumulated along the way
2. Explore their **convictions** and what drives and motivates them
3. **Consider** all of the opportunities to enrich their experience of work

4. **Contribute** their talents and unique gifts in a meaningful way
5. **Create** a powerful and compelling vision and action plan for their future
6. **Conquer** obstacles along the way and prepare for a conversation with their manager.

The premise of the program was that people do not have to leave their roles to be more engaged. Career enrichment starts in their current job, as there are ample opportunities to do things differently which enhance meaning and job satisfaction.

According to Pamela Frost, Director of Because, the program honours and regards every person as an individual who can make a significant difference in their career and personal lives. She says, “Some people seek opportunities to innovate and redesign their roles. Others realise that staying in either their role or the organisation is placing too much of a drain on themselves and their organisation, and they decide to leave. The critical thing is that the program supports them to make a choice that is right for them.”

The i-Choose program was structured around three half-day workshops and included a confidential one-on-one coaching session. Individual levels of engagement were measured during the program using the innovative Work Engagement Tool™, created by Because, and participants used the Career Enrichment Toolkit developed by Because to guide choices for development options.

■ Program delivery

A total of 89 employees participated in the program, across NSW and Victoria. The participants ranged in length of service in their current role from three months through to 13 years. The median tenure in the participant’s current role was two to three years. The median tenure for time at Canon overall was four to five years.

The participants’ career backgrounds included service technicians, sales coordinators, client services coordinators, administrators, account managers, human resource consultants, business analysts, financial accountants and general managers.

■ Background to the Work Engagement Tool

The Work Engagement Tool explores motivational drivers and identifies opportunities for increased discretionary effort and engagement in the workplace as well as shaping career decisions.

The tool measures motivational drivers according to seven blades of motivation. These are:

1. Security
2. Belonging
3. Expertise
4. Self Actualisation
5. Work-Life
6. Community
7. World Altruist



The first part of the tool measures three things:

- Each person’s motivational drivers (their need from work in general)
- What the person is perceiving they get from their current role
- The gap between need and experience, which is called motivational dissonance.

The tool also profiles where participants sit on the following engagement risk / opportunity matrix. This facilitates discussion in a confidential one-to-one coaching session about appropriate career decisions and whether they should re-engage or move out of the business.



■ Evaluation methodology

The i-Choose career enrichment program was evaluated on the basis of qualitative and quantitative data.

The qualitative component involved a brief survey instrument which was distributed to 66 participants who completed the program, and current employees.

The quantitative component of the evaluation involved the re-testing of the Work Engagement Tool to specifically evaluate changes in the participant’s pre and post course scores in

engagement levels, level of discretionary effort, and projected impact on performance and productivity, using national salary benchmark data.

Survey Responses

The response rate for the qualitative survey was 58% and for the Work Engagement Tool, 60%. Despite these being reasonable response rates, it is important to recognise that they are not representative of the career experiences of all participants.

Program outcomes

Staff Retention

Of the 89 employees that attended the Career Enrichment program, 66 people (74%) stayed working in the organisation and 23 people (or 26%) chose to exit Canon.

Out of the people who stayed and completed the qualitative survey:

- 72% stayed working in the same role
- 18% were transferred or seconded and
- 18% were promoted.

Furthermore, for those staying in Canon, since attending the program:

- 72.5% indicated that they had changed as a person
- 37.5% changed their career plans
- 50% said that things had improved.

When asked to rate their level of engagement following the program, for those who indicated they were “more” and “much more” engaged, two key variables seemed to be:

- proactively engaging their manager in a career development conversation
- taking on more challenging projects.

Post-course engagement had a significant but weak negative correlation with overall tenure at Canon ($r = -.32, p < .05$) suggesting that as the length of tenure at Canon increased, the level of engagement declined. Pamela Frost comments that this situation is not unusual, as there is a natural engagement life-cycle where people firstly become increasingly competent and proficient in their role, then they often start to experience boredom and frustration,

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which has an adverse effect on engagement. For people to stay revitalised they need to be constantly looking at ways to reinvent their roles.

Staff Exits

The exit figure is considerably higher than the Canon's average turnover rate of 13.90% and certainly higher than the national benchmark average of 18.5% .

Statistical analyses conducted on the pre- and post-course engagement levels revealed a significant difference ($p < .001$) between levels of engagement for those still at Canon (mean engagement score of 64.04) and those who had left (mean engagement score of 55.73).

This data is reflected in the results for the Work Engagement Tool shown below in the engagement risk / opportunity matrix.

Of the 26 people that chose to leave Canon (either through redundancy or resignation); the pre-testing of the Work Engagement Tool revealed that:-

- Only 6% of those were considered highly engaged (Flying High, Turbulence and Red Alert)
- 25% were moderately engaged (Automatic Pilot, Seat-Belts On and Transit Lounge (high))
- 53% reported low levels of engagement (Departure Gate, Transit Lounge and Stormy Weather)

The implications of these statistics are that the i-Choose program seems to have been successful in its return on expectations as Canon:

- a) retained the people they wanted to keep – their highly engaged people
- b) encouraged those who were disengaged to choose work more personally fulfilling for them.

Key lessons

Whilst the program has been successful in delivering on expectations, there are some lessons for Canon.

Firstly, managers play a critical role in modelling high engagement behaviours and being proactive in providing mentoring support through having career conversations with their people.

Secondly, follow-up is needed to ensure that career development action plans are indeed implemented. ■

Contact Nicole Elsely for more information about the i-Choose program at ELSLEY_Nicole@canon.com.au or Pamela Frost at Because through www.because.com.au, emailing ask@because.com.au or calling 0408 608 889.

Corporate Leadership Council Engagement Model

Research by the Corporate Leadership Council (2004) found that for every 10% improvement in levels of employee engagement: discretionary effort increases by 6%, which in turn leads to a projected increase of 2% in performance and productivity. Research data was also compiled from individuals completing Because's Work Engagement Tool™.

Canon's analysis tested the Corporate Leadership Council's model of engagement by exploring whether there was a relationship between employee's levels of engagement and their subsequent levels of discretionary effort and performance. Our results supported part of the CLC's model, that engagement was related to discretionary effort, as post-course engagement did have a significant but weak positive correlation with post-course discretionary effort ($r = .45, p < .01$). This suggests that as levels of engagement increase, levels of discretionary effort increase. As such, highly engaged employees are more likely to go the extra mile and help others within their daily activities.

A relationship between engagement and discretionary effort with performance improvement, however, was not found. No significant differences were found between pre- and post-course performance levels, even with those who increased their engagement levels. While this discrepancy has not been explored in depth, a logical explanation would be that as people become more engaged in their work they go that extra mile and take on more work responsibilities over and above the role. If their performance review is just measuring the core part of their job, then their performance review will not be a true reflection of the breadth of what they are contributing, hence ratings can get diluted.

Pamela Frost comments that the irony is that unless the performance management system adjusts to reflect all the outputs of those who are more engaged, rigid measures may in fact disengage your highly engaged staff.