



## PROFILE

**NAOMI SIMSON**  
CEO of RedBalloon  
which was winner  
of the 2009 Hewitt  
Best Employers Study  
in Australia and  
New Zealand and rated  
by BRW as one of the  
top ten Australian  
work places.

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Jodi Thompson writes

# Empower

YOUR PEOPLE  
TO POWER  
YOUR BUSINESS

*Keeping good staff is a challenge every business faces. The solutions lie in ensuring they're happy and engaged. It's no secret that employees are the most important ingredient in any successful business. Happy staff mean more productivity and less pricey turnover, but the trick for many businesses is keeping the good staff on board and keeping them happy enough to stay.*

That means ensuring they're engaged, but research shows this is something many are failing to do. Gallup Consulting's 2008 Biannual Australian Engagement Study showed that around 21 per cent of Australian employees are actively disengaged in their workplace, costing between \$33.5 and \$42.1 billion a year.

So what should every employer be doing to keep their staff engaged, motivated and loyal?

'You don't need a slippery slide or a pet policy at work to ensure that staff are happy and motivated at work,' says Katherine Graham, Managing Director The Human Resources Centre. 'You do need meaningful work, good communications and good leadership.'

### WORK SMART

The first step in engaging staff is making sure their jobs are fulfilling, interesting and challenging. That means matching people's individual skills with the right roles. 'Intelligent work design is the key to staff happiness and engagement,' says Katherine. Best practice here means making sure staff have a variety of tasks and have the skills and resources required to perform their role.

'This includes ensuring there's a reasonable level of autonomy and that, where possible, people are empowered to perform the full functions of the positions,' Katherine says. 'Also ensuring their roles are meaningful and they are understood to add value to the business as a whole.'

Giving staff a clear career path and an interesting work life are essential to keeping them engaged.

'People are highly motivated given the right environment,' says organisational psychologist Jasmine Sliger of JSA International Communications. 'People will hang around if they know their bosses will develop them, will build their skills and will build ongoing work activities.'

Part of this intelligent work design is surrounding people with others to enhance their work experience, building team structures with built-in support for staff. ▶

'Create leaders in your group, and know who is their second and third in charge,' Jasmine says.

'People will also stay if they're coached or mentored. Job sharing helps, too, giving people the chance to cross-pollinate and work in other parts of the organisation.'

It's also important to provide ongoing training and a structured career path.

'Provide opportunities for growth by slightly stretching their capabilities,' says Katherine Graham. 'And as projects arise that would suit individuals, think about taking them out of their comfort zones for their development.'

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## Good communication will have numerous benefits within a workplace

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### CLEVER COMMUNICATION

Along with creating the right roles for staff, it's essential there's effective, two-way communication in every workplace.

'Make people happy with lots of communication and create immediate feedback loops,' says Jasmine Sliger.

Let people know when they're doing a good or bad job, and open the communication pathways to let staff tell their managers when things are working or not.

'Reward and recognise achievement,' says Katherine Graham. 'Tell them when they're doing a great job AND when they need to improve. Be firm, fair, honest and prompt when providing negative feedback.'

Good communication will have numerous benefits within a workplace.

'If managers can really communicate to their people, and they're transparent in their behaviour it will promote respect and build trust,' says Jasmine Sliger.

### HEALTH FIRST

Just as important as the work itself is the need to look after employees' health and wellbeing while at work. Central to this is ensuring they have a good work/life balance and that stress levels are under control.

'You have to create a healthy environment at work, and you have to be on top of your people's stress levels,' says Jasmine Sliger. 'Make sure they're not working 80 hours a week.'

If they are, why are they doing it? Is it their work style? If the job requires 80 hours a week there's something wrong.'

Part of ensuring a healthy workplace means monitoring relationships and dealing with bullying, a common issue in many workplaces.

'People need to be closely supervised in the way they work,' says Ms Sliger. 'When bullying is identified, it's important to work closely with them and staff around them.'

'You really have to pull these bullies back and make sure these people are monitored and people around them don't take it personally.'

In terms of work flexibility, companies should look to offer staff more than the minimum standards.

'These might include leave without pay, secondment to other countries, paid parental leave, shifting work hours and similar,' says Katherine Graham.

Healthy workplaces will also bring benefits for companies.

'Organisations should have less absenteeism and claims of psychological injury at work,' says Katherine. ☺

### CASE STUDY: CAREER KICKSTART

One thing that keeps staff happy at Janssen-Cilag Australia is a strong focus on individuals' career development. As a result, staff are staying put and stepping up the career ladder within the company.

'Development at Janssen-Cilag is driven by each individual achieving their professional goals and potential,' says Michelle Cable, Janssen-Cilag's human resources manager. Proof is the high internal mobility figures at the company.

'In 2008 and 2009, more than 15 per cent of our employees in each year experienced a promotion or internal development move,' says Michelle. 'Further, 97 per cent of employees indicated an intention to continue their career within the organisation beyond the next two years.'

Further proof of this organisation's people management success can be seen in their winning the HR Leadership Awards 2008 Employer of Choice winner for Best Talent Management Strategy. Additionally, the company's internal studies show low staff turnover, of around 10 per cent, and high job satisfaction among staff.

'We continue to attract approximately 30 per cent of our new hires through employee referrals and in our most recent engagement survey 91 per cent of employees would recommend Janssen-Cilag to a friend,' says Michelle.

Janssen-Cilag's success here is the result of a strategic focus on staff engagement. In 2007 they formulated an Employee Value Proposition (EVP) based on the idea of staff being 'Valued as Individuals, Inspiring as a Team'.

'Through high levels of engagement, our workforce is committed and energised and expects open, two-way communication and collaboration across the business,' Michelle says.

### CASE STUDY: PASSIONATE ABOUT PEOPLE

If anyone has worked out how to create a happy workplace, it's Naomi Simson, founder and CEO of online gift retailer, RedBalloon. Along with being rated one of the top ten Australian workplaces by BRW last year, RedBalloon was also accredited as Hewitt Best Employer in Australia and New Zealand earlier this year.

It's clear when Naomi talks that she has an innate understanding of what people want at work.

'It's almost embarrassingly simple,' she says. 'We're all people and we want to work hard and be recognised and rewarded for that.'

Naomi has created a workplace, now comprising a staff of about 50, based on what's important to her as a worker.

'I want to work in a fun place, a productive place, thriving on success,' she says.

For Naomi Simson, it's all about listening to individual staff and communicating effectively.

'If we listen to our staff the

same way we listen to our customers it's magic,' Naomi says. 'It's about continually listening and honouring people. When somebody walks in the door, we need to ask Do they know what they're here to do, does anybody notice and do they go home feeling like a winner?'

Good and constant communication is absolutely essential.

'One thing I'm passionate about is teaching people to say thank you,' says Ms Simson. 'If managers just noticed the contribution of people in their team it would transform their engagement, and 70 per cent of engagement comes from direct managers.'

At RedBalloon, concepts like work/life balance and flexible hours are just a given.

'We're unbelievably flexible,' Naomi says. 'I don't believe in long hours and I believe people will contribute more if they're relaxed and have creative time.'

