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TRANSFORMING NEW HIRES INTO ENGAGED EMPLOYEES

Q Beyond teaching basic job functions to new associates, what does it take to bring employees into a retailer's company culture, onboard them properly, and keep them engaged and current with company communications?

Teaching basic job functions is essential but it's even more important to engage new employees by beginning a long-term two-way dialogue that lasts throughout their time in your organization. A critical first step is giving them an opportunity to learn first-hand about the culture and values of the organization. There are multiple ways to do this: engage them by providing them a peer mentor/coach, introduce them to company communication tools (one-way communication), provide them an opportunity to engage in the conversation (two-way dialogue), ask them to talk about their experience, make changes based on their responses and repeat.

Q How can retail technology help with this transition and create associates that are brand ambassadors?

Retail technology has become critical to onboarding and engaging new employees, and creating effective brand ambassadors. There are two particularly important elements of effective employee communication: an easy-to-access delivery mechanism that reaches employees where they are, and content that will capture and hold attention. Today's technologies deliver both. Retail employees are increasingly on the move — the lines between front- and back-of-house are blurred. And studies show the most effective format for memorable, attention-grabbing content is video. Technologies like breakroom TV and on-demand mobile devices deliver this kind of dynamic content in a convenient, easily accessible way.

Q Creating the smart associate involves getting a lot of information to them in real-time and in an absorbable way. How can next-gen training tech such as short-form videos, peer videos, breakroom TV, and live virtual instructor training help?

Most employees don't have time to read, and even if they do, they learn faster by watching others. New employees in their everyday lives use tools like YouTube to fix a drain, play the guitar, so on and so forth. Since employees are comfortable learning in this way, I think it's a great tool to use when an organization wants to quickly get a team up to speed and get the best results.

A variety of content including brief snippets employees can take in during a break, peer-created content that shares best practices, or manager-moderated sessions all help take employee preparation to the next level.

Q What benefits are provided by having engaged, informed employees in the store, and what is the cost of losing employees after investing in bringing them onboard?

There are many benefits to having engaged, informed employees. Most importantly, if you take care of your employees, they will take care of the customer. Engaged employees that are confident about their job are much more likely to engage with your customers and ensure the customer leaves happy. Another benefit is that employees feel that you are investing in their growth and development, and they are much more likely to stay with a company that provides them opportunities for growth. The cost of turnover varies by organization and role. No matter the cost in dollars, the more critical cost to the organization is the loss of customers when there aren't enough employees, or when there are employees that are unprepared to help them.

Lynn Loignon has over two decades of retail leadership experience from operations to internal communications. She offers first-hand experience. She was most recently the Executive Director of Operations Administration at Raley's. Prior to Raley's, Lynn spent 20 years at Kohl's. Kohl's operates over 1,100 stores across 49 states. At Kohl's, Lynn served as VP of Internal Communications where she delivered results by engaging associates, empowering leaders and building a culture of sharing, collaboration, and dialogue.

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