

Motivating A Diverse Workforce Is Key To Business Success

Tariq Chauhan, Group CEO of EFS Facilities Services, reveals how he has led the company to create a culture of employee inclusiveness and happiness.

During the course of my corporate journey, including nine years at the helm of EFS, I have come to realise that promises or actions cannot deliver results without a strong leader that is able to have impact.

Having realized this, I decided to strengthen my own impact. I began to explore ways of ensuring that both my actions and that of my team create transformational results—ones that can make a real difference to the company and ultimately its people. This included making sure that the benefits driven from that impact are not just accrued to a select few but to all employees and their families.

This is no easy task at EFS, with over 18,000 staff and their families spanning across more than 21 countries and three subcontinents to think about, we realised at the very early stages the power and the potential of an elevated workforce. The company's employees were the formidable force behind its success, its track record and its growth—and not just the management and executives, but more than 15,000 general staff comprising of housekeepers, security guards, handy men and technicians.

These blue-collar workers have been the real heroes; the boots on the ground that made all the difference to EFS. It is thanks to them that we have retained more than 97% of our clients and achieved 20% CAG for the last decade. Their contribution is the most significant differentiator of our success story and to pay them their dues we continue to seek their input and participation in improving their motivation levels.

We remain focused and vigilant to ensure that these people remain part of the mainstream corporate strategy—I have no interest in tokenism and shallow gestures. We therefore set about creating an inclusive and coherent culture within the organization whereby everyone understands the role and importance of ground workforce engagement. It was our objective to make them feel elated and engaged, but connecting with such a sizeable blue-collar workforce and bringing them into the mainstream organizational engagement was a tricky, complicated and daunting task. Employee engagement on this scale needed an innovative touch. Another challenge we faced was the series of market downturns that constrained our capital to support this initiative. How could we maintain a balance between the due credits and perks needed for our people versus the limitations of our resources?

First, we established what it is that we wanted to achieve. Many blue-collar workers that come to this region from across the world have very low self-actualization levels. To gain their confidence leaders need to devise strategies that are focused on elevating their holistic needs. Building employee trust and instilling faith in the organization was the principal task that we addressed. As a leadership team we not only mapped their needs and

their perspective, but also sought to understand the key issues that were focal to their interests.

Most people and organizations often get lost in salary and compensation issues when looking at the motivational needs of their core workforce. They seldom look at other critical drivers of worker engagement. However, salary is primarily a market-driven factor that few can mitigate. You might pay well, but if you don't pay people on time it can make all other efforts in vain. As long as your structure is aligned to the markets and you are able to manage your costs, you have got to concentrate on the other key elements that set the dominant faith and relationship with your staff, especially in the case of the blue-collar workforce .

It is often specific sensitivities that matter. Their personal living conditions and their day-to-day upkeep needs to be of an appropriately comfortable level, along with the provision of good facilities and amenities. For instance, telephone and WIFI, family demands and finance management are essential factors. This drives their work engagement to higher levels. There needs to be an internal communication strategy in place so that workers can interact with their site leadership and apply for training and development opportunities. These all play a critical role in bridging the gap to gain trust.

So, it is not just sweat, words and actions that matter— these must transform into real impact. And impact means considering the social, economic ecosystem of a blue-collar workforce. Their family-centric needs must be built into the company's employee engagement strategy.

Companies must not use corporate social responsibility as a checklist to tick, they must seek to build a culture that encompasses its real impact on all stakeholders.

At EFS, we have extended our CSR initiatives to the extended families of our workforce by introducing child education programs, health insurance for aging parents, and support for communities during national crises. These are just some of the key measures that we have adopted, and it has strengthened our bond with our entire workforce.

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