

EPISODE 10: BUILDING ENGAGEMENT (TRANSCRIPT)

- [CC]: Welcome to Engagement Matters, the podcast for business professionals who want to effectively engage with stakeholders and increase the productivity of their teams brought to you by JHW Corporate Training. For more resources and to subscribe to the show, visit JHW.com.au. Hello there and welcome to episode 10 of Engagement Matters. My name is Christina Canters and I'm joined today as always by Mr. John Williams. John, how are you going?

- [JW]: It's a good day today.

- [CC]: It is a very good day because we're recording this podcast for which I'm excited about. It's all about how to build engagement with our stakeholders. John, I feel like this relates back to the whole concept of this podcast which is of course about engagement, so I'm excited to dive deep into the real specifics of what it means to build engagement. So, John, can you share with us why this topic is so important?

- [JW]: Yes, I'm very pleased to. I've got three real reasons. Picking up from the last episode, and during the last episode we talked about understanding needs learning before offering solutions leading. And we talked about, our stakeholders are looking for solutions from us and that there is no such thing as a solution without a problem. So, we have to understand our needs before we can start moving forward with solutions.

We also found out from the last podcast that people don't share their needs, their problems, their requirements, their opportunities with strangers. And in fact, in many situations, we can be defeated because we can't get our stakeholders to either meet with us or when they do meet with us, to share with us, opening frankly what their requirements are. Engagement to us means that we have built the relationship to such a level that that will not be an issue for us.

We have built the relationship to the point where they will happily open up with us. They will give us the time to meet and during that meeting they will answer our questions openly and fully so that we get a clear understanding of what their needs are and that will allow us to move forward with the best solution that we can offer in the clear knowledge of what their true requirements are.

Another aspect of the engagement, for most of our listeners here, certainly I know for you and for me and a lot of the participants that take part in our workshops, their jobs are really complicated and difficult, so difficult that they can't succeed without the cooperation of people around them.

Our proposition is that if you have good engagement with the people around you, you get cooperation from them and that helps you succeed. Taking the other side of it, if you don't have that level of cooperation, it is almost impossible to succeed in some of the complex outcomes that most of our listeners are trying to achieve.

- [CC]: And I'm sure all of our listeners have experienced a situation where you can tell when you've got good engagement with someone and it's easy to work with them and things get done and you're more productive, and then on the other side, you've got people who you know you don't have great engagement with and things might be a lot more difficult with them. And you don't get things done as productively and it's just not as easy to work with them, so I think everyone listening will have an idea of what good engagement and not so good engagement looks like.

EPISODE 10: BUILDING ENGAGEMENT

- [JW]: I think you're right. And I would go further, if after working with a stakeholder or a manager for a certain amount of time, let's say, four, six or eight weeks, numerous touch points, if by the end of that time, that stakeholder doesn't have an opinion on you, that would be very sad.

Mostly, by the end of that period of time of working with you, they would either have an opinion that says, "Yes, you're one of the good guys, or one of the good girls." Or, "You're one of the duds." Frankly, we don't remain ambivalent about our service providers. They either eventually move up the curve to one of the good people or they're not. They're part of the business-prevention department as I heard them described in some organizations.

- [CC]: Sure. So, in this episode we're going to talk about what engagement actually looks and how you can go about building it. And if you want the transcript of this episode, it will be at JHW.com.au/podcast and that's also where you can find all the other episodes as well.

And at the end of this episode, we were discussing this beforehand, we really hope that you will have a better understanding of how to build this cooperative engagement with your stakeholders so that you can get more of the results that both you and the stakeholder wants.

- [JW]: Exactly.

- [CC]: Let's talk about what engagement is. What does it look like?

- [JW]: What engagement is, we've derived this model from many, many workshops with talented people, much like the listeners and going through what works and what doesn't work in relationships and so on and so forth. And we believe that we've got this well ironed-out now. There is three major components. I think most of our listeners will also be able to relate to each of them.

The first one we talk about is trust and integrity. If you don't trust me, if you don't believe I'm going to follow through on my promises, if you don't think I'm going to retain confidence with the stuff that you ask me confidentially, then that isn't going to work. For the most of us, we get this whole thing about trust and integrity. I want my business partners to be somebody I can rely upon.

The second bit is a bit more interpersonal. It's rapport. It's about a business-level of friendship. It's about, we can see eye-to-eye together on stuff beyond the business, we can relate with one-another, I feel comfortable dealing with this person. However you want to describe it, but I'd summarize it by the word rapport.

We've got, "I trust you" and "I like you", the third element has got to be a perception that you've got some value to add. I'm a serious manager, I've got tasks I need to complete and just liking you and trusting you isn't enough for me to spend my time with you. I've got to believe you've got some value to add to the things I'm trying to achieve. Otherwise, I'm sorry; I'm just too busy to see you.

- [CC]: Can you give an example of a situation at work where trust might be quite low, or you might be starting out and trust is important to build up. Can you give an example of a situation where that would be the case, where we need to really focus on building that trust?

- [JW]: Yes. I think of a series of workshops centered around, recently for major corporate utilities. And the assignment was preparatory to a reorganization and a reorganization of the culture of the organization.

EPISODE 10: BUILDING ENGAGEMENT

This organization, quite insightfully I think, whereas taking a bottom-up approach as much as a top-down approach, so the seminars were for the staff of the organization, giving them the opportunity to make suggestions about how we can improve the performance of our department.

Now, I was being brought in by the head of that organization as an external consultant. None of the participants of the workshops we were running had met me before and for all they knew, I was the hatchet man, I'm the guy that's going to see 20% of them retrenched or I'm the cost-cutting expert, I'm the toe-cutter.

Whatever you want to describe me. I could see how getting cooperation from that group of people could be highly contentious because I have no trust coming in and let's face it; they have every reason to be suspicious of our motives.

The way I tackled that, understanding up front that there was this trust gap that I needed to bridge before we could get their full cooperation, I spent a lot of time on my call plan. You remember, we talked about call-planning in Episode one, our podcast one. I spent a lot of time on my opening statement, addressing those trust needs and I thought through exactly how I could kick that conference off and give them assurance that their involvement was for their positive gain and was not going to result in any untoward happenings for them.

- [CC]: So, being in that situation, if you had gone in trying to make people like you, i.e. build rapport or demonstrate how good you are, i.e. your value, that wouldn't have been as successful because the thing that was lacking at that moment was trust and that's what you needed in order to get their buy-in to get the situation moving forward.

- [JW]: Absolutely right. And we did also need to address the value and rapport as we went along, but number one, up front, the big issue for that particular situation right up front was we had to resolve that trust issue. And happily, we ran the same event for... I ran 60 or 70 people, I think we ran seven episodes, seven different groups of about eight or 10 people.

And we got the full cooperation and engagement of virtually every person in that entire group and I think back on it and largely believe it was because we addressed that trust issue up front and gave them confidence that they could contribute without risking their jobs, their future careers or anything like that.

- [CC]: Let's talk about rapport. Can you give me an example of a situation where rapport is really important to build from the get-go over the others?

- [JW]: Yes, I think rapport is my strength. It's one of the things that comes naturally to me. And I can think of one situation in particular, again, dealing with a major corporate. Having to achieve success with one department and getting a referral through to another department.

The head of that department agreed to meet with me, but I believe he was just being polite, I don't think there was any real interest there. His colleague had referred it, he felt he needed to follow through with the appointment, but I've just got the feeling up front that he wasn't all that thrilled about having to spend this time with me, wasn't really truly engaged.

- [CC]: But can we safely assume that he had a level of trust there because it was referred by a colleague who he would've trusted?

EPISODE 10: BUILDING ENGAGEMENT

- [JW]: Yes, yes.

- [CC]: So, the trust is there and the value I suppose is also there because you've done it before.

- [JW]: Yes, the value is portrayed by the earlier customers.

- [CC]: But the rapport was missing, okay.

- [JW]: Interestingly enough, we decided to go for a coffee rather than have an office meeting, and on the way to the coffee bar, it quite quickly became clear that we were both keen cyclists. And actually, we spent quite a bit of time talking about cycling before we got on to the business side of it. But interestingly enough, that cleared the blockage if you like. Once we got that rapport sorted out through the common interest in cycling, all of a sudden there was now an interest in what we had to offer.

- [CC]: That's a great example. So, what about value then? What's a situation where value is really important to build from the start, where it might be initially fairly low? And maybe you've got rapport, maybe you've got trust, but the value is not there.

- [JW]: Yes, a really interesting one. Originally, when we started up in 2003, the by-line of the company was building better business relationships. A whole lot of people get that intuitively, they understand that that is goodness, that that is worth achieving, that it will lead to a better working environment, perhaps better productivity. But yes, some people automatically get that.

Other people need to see the bottom line, they want to be more analytical about it, "I need the facts and figures and I need to understand where I'm getting my return on investment from." So, we recently changed our by-line to productivity through effective engagement. And this now addresses the value side of it. We get straight into that productivity side of it. As part of that rebranding, we did a fair bit of work around the return on investment.

When I'm meeting people that I know have a bend towards that analytical, that bottom-line, that ROE-side of it, I can open the conversation with a demonstration of the sort of value, of 10, 15, 20% uplift in the productivity of your people through them gaining better cooperation with their stakeholders. That really is a value proposition and for certain people that is really important before they are going to engage with me.

- [CC]: Absolutely, and will actually talk more about that in detail, as to how do you know which person wants to know the value or is rapport more important or is trust more important, we'll talk about that in upcoming episodes where we talk about the different personality styles.

- [JW]: I think you're going to be talking with my colleague Ralph about that.

- [CC]: Ralph, yes.

- [JW]: And yes, that's going to be very important. The key thing here, Christina, is we each have a strong preference for one. Maybe it's value, maybe it's rapport, but we all have one that really, we need to satisfy first before we're going to fully engage.

EPISODE 10: BUILDING ENGAGEMENT

We also have another one at the bottom of the list which can be a little bit of a blind spot for us. Certain people who may focus on the bottom line, the analytical, the value-side of things, may say that rapport stuff is not so important.

And I get that, I understand that, but what those people need to understand is, whilst they might not see the rapport side as very important, half the world do.

And half of their stakeholders probably see rapport as being very, very important. So, you can ignore it at your peril. Just because it's your blind spot doesn't give you an excuse to ignore it for other people because if that's somebody else's number one, and you're not touching it, then you're missing their point very badly.

Similarly, if your stakeholder's number one is value and that's not very high on your list, you can't ignore it just because it's not high on your list. You got to step outside of your comfort zone and address theirs.

- [CC]: Less chit-chat and making friends and more about, here's what I'm going to do for you, here are the benefits.

- [JW]: Exactly, yes.

- [CC]: Because it would be very difficult to get business that way, if all you focus on is making friends.

- [JW]: Exactly, yes, yes. For certain people they need to see the bottom line, for other people, they want to know that there is a personal relationship. And for another group of people, the most important thing is, until I understand that you are trustworthy, I don't want to go any further with this discussion, so until we can prove that to them, we're going to be stagnated.

- [CC]: It was really fascinating when I first learned this from you on your workshop, because when I thought about it, I realized if someone is the best in the world at what they do and they can offer the most incredible value, if I don't like them, if they're a real jerk, I don't care how good you are, I'm still not going to work with you.

Because that's personally for me, I'm like you, John, I'm a very relationships-focused person, but then I know there is other people who would be like, "I don't care how well we get along and how matey we are if you can't get the job done or you're not as good as the next person, I'm not going to work with you. I'd rather work with a person who is amazing at their job, but they're a real jerk, I'd rather work with a jerk who's good at their job."

- [JW]: And being able to pick the different person is the topic of the next three or four podcasts that my colleague Ralph will be taking us through.

- [CC]: Yes, we'll dive deep into that. They are great, so make sure you keep an ear out for those ones, they'll be coming to you in the coming weeks. All right, John, any other further comments you want to add about this topic of building engagement?

- [JW]: Not really, I think probably enough there. I think, probably to summarize, if we want to get the cooperation of our stakeholders, then we need to build engagement with them. If we're going to do that truly, we need three elements to it, trust, value and rapport.



EPISODE 10: BUILDING ENGAGEMENT

All stakeholders eventually want all three. But at some point, you need to be able to work out which one is the most important for any given stakeholder because if you miss their preference, then you're going to struggle to really engage with them.

- [CC]: Fantastic. Thank you so much, John. And if you want to read the transcript of this episode, maybe you want to send it to someone who you think would benefit from it, please go to JHW.com.au/podcast.

You'll find links to all of our podcast episodes there as well as to all the transcripts and other resources that we have as well. Thank you so much, John.

- [JW]: My pleasure.

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