

# Grow

Growing your business out of recession



## Engage employees for success

I ONCE had the privilege of teaching a highly motivated and enthusiastic postgraduate student called Sarah, who went on to be appointed as HR Manager at a large engineering firm.

Buzzing with ideas, she told me about all the great initiatives she was planning. But when I saw her again just six months later, she was directing her energies to finding a new job.

It turned out that the promises of interesting work with plenty of support from the senior management team, and the chance to put into practice all the ideas from her course, had not been delivered. Instead, she found herself doing routine administrative work.

What had gone wrong? Although Sarah's employers could see the benefit of recruiting motivated and talented staff like Sarah, they had forgotten about the need to keep her engaged.

The topic of employee engagement has managed to achieve the seemingly impossible, and unite the former Labour and current coalition governments around one core belief; that belief is that the key to sustained organisational success is a highly engaged, committed and enthusiastic workforce.

The two governments have invested in reviews led by David MacLeod and Nita Clarke into engagement across the UK, the first of which reported its findings to the Dept for Business, Innovation and Skills in 2009.

That review set out the business case for engagement, and showed how high levels of engagement are linked with a host of positive outcomes including higher levels

Kent is launching the first ever university-accredited course on employee engagement. **PROFESSOR KATIE TRUSS**, head of Kent Business School at Medway, explains why this issue is so important.

**'As human beings we are naturally driven to find intrinsic meaning in what we do'**

of profitability and innovation, reduced turnover and absenteeism, as well as the wellbeing of the workforce.

The second review is taking place now, and has the ambitious remit of creating a nationwide movement to bring employee engagement to all workplaces across the UK.

The University of Kent is involved with this initiative, and is hosting the first meeting of a new employee engagement practitioner network for the South-East on December 5, at our Medway campus, when David MacLeod and Nita Clarke will be sharing their views on engagement with employers from the region.

If engagement is so important, what can employers do to ensure their employees are engaged?

I have been researching and writing about employee engagement for the past six years in

a wide range of sectors, and employers will be pleased to know that they can make a significant difference to levels of engagement without the need to spend large sums of money on complex programmes.

Our research has shown that employees have to be able to answer five basic questions with a 'yes' before they feel engaged. First, 'Am I in the right job?' Like Sarah, employees whose skills and expertise are not being utilised will finish up being frustrated and demotivated.

Second, 'Am I treated with respect?' Our research has shown that employees who are bullied, harassed or ignored at work, or witness colleagues being treated in this way, are significantly less engaged.

Third, 'Do I get a say?' The majority of employees are very interested in their work and, if you ask them, can come up with some great improvements – the only problem is that a surprising number of employers do not even think to ask.

The fourth question is, 'Do I make a difference?'

As human beings, we are naturally driven to find intrinsic meaning in what we do, and employers need to articulate clearly for their staff what con-



Professor Katie Truss, head of Kent Business School at Medway

### Factfile

Katie Truss is Professor of Management and Head of Kent Business School at Medway. Previously, she worked at Kingston Business School where she was Professor of Human Resource Management, Head of Department, Leadership, HRM and Organisation, and founder and Director of the Centre for Research in Employment, Skills and Society.

Her areas of research specialism are employee engagement, strategic human resource management, change management, knowledge-intensive firms and gender and employment. She is regularly invited to speak at conferences and workshops around the world on employee engagement and strategic HRM.

tribution they are making. This is true of any job, at any level.

Finally, 'Do I know where we're going?' Employees need to see a clear line of sight between what they do on a day-to-day basis and the long-term goals of the organisation.

Senior managers at organisations as diverse as manufacturer

Nampak Plastics and financial services firm LV have turned around their businesses by paying attention to these fundamental issues, weaving together a holistic programme of mutually supporting initiatives.

Employee engagement is of such importance in today's economic climate that the Uni-

versity of Kent is launching the first ever university-accredited course focusing on this topic in the UK, the Postgraduate Certificate in Employee Engagement, which is run on a modular basis for busy employee engagement professionals.

More information at [www.kent.ac.uk](http://www.kent.ac.uk)

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Introducing a new one year part-time postgraduate qualification for practicing engagement specialists, based at Kent Business School, Medway, starting Sep 2012

A unique new postgraduate programme bringing together the theory and practice of employee engagement to enhance business performance for the first time in a University accredited specialist qualification.

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