

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Working with Purpose

How HUL is harnessing 'Purpose' to engage and motivate employees

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The new buzzword in organisations is Purpose. At HR conferences the talk is around how millennials want meaningful work and prefer purpose to paychecks. Companies talk about how there is growing consumer demand for brands that have purpose at their core. In the US, Starbucks (though it stumbled recently over the Philadelphia discrimination incident), sustainable clothing company Patagonia, and Southwest Airlines have been cited as brands that grew because they paired purpose with positioning.

There is research to corroborate the importance of purpose. An EY Beacon Institute-Harvard Business School study has showed that 85 per cent of purpose-led companies show positive growth - compared to 42 per cent of non-purpose-led companies which show a drop in revenue.

In India, several companies are getting quite purposeful - many have appointed chief purpose officers and are getting small internal movements started.

Exactly a year ago, in June 2017, Hindustan Unilever began "purpose workshops" for its employees. So far, over 2,500 of its 18,000 employees have been a part of this exercise.

Way back in 2011, Unilever CEO Paul Polman spoke about the importance of purpose. "Winning alone is not enough, it's about winning with purpose," he said.

Unilever says it has a clear purpose: To make sustainable living commonplace. Cut through the jargon and the Unilever Sustainable Living Plan is basically about reducing the company's environment footprint, improving the health and well-being of its consumers and enhancing livelihoods. But of course, there is a growth agenda too.

"Research shows that brands with purpose grow faster, companies with purpose are valued more and people with purpose thrive," says BP 'Dinesh' Biddappa, executive director, human resources, Hindustan Unilever.

From data that the company has shared, the brands with purpose in the Unilever portfolio grew 46 per cent faster and delivered 70 per cent of its growth. (In its large portfolio, Unilever has 22 sustainable living brands.) But that is on the consumer side. How does that translate to retaining and winning talent?

Well, Unilever says it is the FMCG Graduate Employer of Choice in 44 of the 60 countries it recruits from. In India, HUL has been the top employer of choice in Nielsen's

Campus Track B-School survey for some years now. Says Biddappa, "The energy and passion this (purpose workshop) is generating for us is incredible, reinforcing our belief that if you want to thrive in a connected world, you have got to start with your own purpose." Edited excerpts from an interview with him:

Suddenly why is "purpose" trending at the workplace?

At Unilever, purpose has always been integral to what we do and how we do it. While this is not a new concept to Unilever, the sudden noise about 'purpose' and 'meaningful work,' is probably led by an increasing number of millennials joining the workforce.

So is it only millennials who seek "purpose"? Isn't it true for everyone?

Discovering your purpose doesn't come naturally to everyone. It's a journey that we encourage all employees of Unilever to undertake and help them find it and apply it in their lives.

How exactly do employees find their purpose? Also, as everybody has a different purpose, how do you identify each one's and align their job roles?

We have been conducting 'discover your purpose' workshops run by HR. This is a facilitated reflective journey by an individual with a small group of people where each employee is



A purposeful effort A workshop at HUL to help employees discover their purpose.

encouraged to look inward, share defining moments with the rest of the group, get feedback - all with the objective of being able to articulate his or her purpose.

Identifying your purpose is about discovering your inner compass and the driving force behind your actions. This allows employees to channelise their energies into what matters to them, and how they can make a difference to their job as well as in their career.

Participants (at the purpose sessions) are required to complete some online reading and encouraged to introspect on this subject, prior to the workshop, which is conducted in-person. The facilitators are our own employees who have completed the programme and are passionate about sharing what they have learnt.

Will all your 18,000 employees

undergo this workshop or only a certain level of management?

Having a purpose transcends work levels and departments. It drives energy and gives you - be it a white-collar employee or a factory worker - a sense of belonging and a sense of resolve to do the best. Therefore, we don't make this distinction. Our programme aims to cover all employees, in a reasonable time-frame.

Does HUL have a Chief Purpose Officer driving the function?

Everyone at HUL is a 'Chief Purpose Officer.' The starting point is our leaders discovering their purpose through the purpose workshop, and then ensuring that their teams also take the journey to discover their individual purposes.

While HR is the facilitator, this is led by everyone, and that's what makes it a 'movement.'