3100 The Four As of Employee Engagement

People Book · https://kb.jeffreysummers.com/docs/3100-the-four-as-of-employee-engagement/

You hire people to achieve outcomes — namely growth. You don't just hire them to create and manage inputs: take orders, push buttons, run food. If that's all you expect from the people on your cast, that's exactly what you'll get. And it will cost you everything.

There are three levels of staff. The engaged — people who treat company resources as their own, align their goals with yours, and consistently exceed what you ask of them. The compliant but disengaged — people who do the job and nothing more, never think outside the box, never go above and beyond, deliver average results and call it a career. And the disengaged — people who are simply part of your machinery, uncaring, following their programming, collecting a paycheck.

Most operators have far too many of the second and third. Not because they hired wrong — though that's often part of it — but because they never gave their people the conditions for engagement to take root.

Here is what engagement actually requires. Four things. All four. Miss one and the whole structure weakens.

Autonomy

Autonomy is the prerogative to make decisions that influence the outcome of their work. Not the illusion of input — real voice on the things that affect them. Scheduling. Rewards. Training. Coaching. Benefits. Who they work alongside. When cast members have genuine influence over the conditions of their work, they stop being passengers and start being owners of their own performance.

Authority

Autonomy without authority is a trap. You can't give someone responsibility for an outcome and then take away their ability to act. Authority means the cast member can act on a Guest request without asking permission. They can recover a complaint without escalating to a manager. They can make the call, in the moment, that turns a bad experience into a story worth telling. If your

people have to ask before they can do anything meaningful for a Guest, you haven't built a hospitality operation. You've built a permission structure.

Accountability

With autonomy and authority comes accountability — responsibility for results, full stop. Here's what that looks like in practice. In upscale full-service operations, require that a percentage of all reservations be made by Guests who requested that server by name. Each server is responsible for generating business from Guests based on the expectation that they created a level of engagement worth coming back for. That's accountability with teeth. It connects their behavior directly to a measurable outcome. It makes the relationship between how they treat Guests and the revenue that results impossible to ignore.

Adulation

Reward and celebrate in every way possible. Tell their story — with the challenges, not just the victories. Share their insights and ideas in front of the team. Celebrate growth and effort even outside the building, especially outside the building. When someone on your cast does something remarkable in their personal life, acknowledge it. When they push through something hard at work, name it publicly. Adulation isn't flattery. It's the signal that this person matters beyond their function.

If you don't provide all four of these in your culture, you will have compliant but disengaged staff who never go above and beyond and never think outside the box. They'll deliver average results and you'll spend your career wondering why the operation never quite performs at the level you know it could.

There's a version of this conversation I've had with hundreds of operators. I walk them through the Four A's and they nod along until we get to authority — real authority, not the pretend kind — and then they hesitate. "That sounds good, Jeffrey, but I don't trust my staff that much."

Then why did you hire them?