



## How Homewood Suites Builds Employee Engagement A Day at a Time

Our client, Homewood Suites, started working with Performancepoint approximately 4 years ago. Their situation was to create more engaged properties and the main result they were after was to Outrageously Please Their Guests. Performancepoint worked closely with Frank Saitta, Senior Director of Brand Performance at Homewood and developed The Engagement Leader's Toolkit and The Engagement Toolkit. Homewood Suites combined these two tools into one, customized it and called it the Service Suitcase – you'll see Frank refer to the Suitcase below.

The purpose of these tools is to “do” employee engagement the right way by building it into your culture one day at a time, one step at a time, one conversation at a time. There are a lot of activities companies get involved with to work toward an engaged culture – company surveys, pulse surveys, leadership training, better communications, town hall meetings and more. All of these activities can be helpful – we see the usefulness of all of them and work with companies on all of them. But they may not be ‘doing’ employee engagement the best way if they don't move you toward a more engaged culture.

And why would you want a more engaged culture? Two reasons:

**Performance, Productivity, Profits:** Our organizations tend to look like a bell curve, with only a small fraction of employees (usually 15% or less that are highly engaged) clearly connected to their work and the strategy of the organization. Think about this for a moment. Would you settle for these types of numbers in any other area of your business? Would you be willing to have only 15 percent of your IT systems, copy machines, printers, airplanes, hotel rooms, fleet trucks or facilities functioning at full capacity? The answer is obviously “no.” When you lose capacity in any other part of our business, you invest or reinvest—and we should do the same with our people.

Many senior leaders have figured this out – we talk to many more that are starting to figure it out. It doesn't make good business sense to have less than all your employees pulling for the good of the company – and doing everything they can to help. However, they're also figuring out that it takes an ongoing, focused effort because people are not IT systems, or hotel rooms, or airplanes. We have learned over the past 15 years that employee engagement is both an art and a science. Scientifically we have learned a great deal about what engages employees and how to measure such engagement. However, improving employee engagement in a company is as much art as science and many employers still struggle in making progress on this front.

**Stability and Retention:** The second reason senior leaders are paying attention is they're realizing that employees are the lifeblood of the company – especially as more and more companies become more service oriented and, in this environment of downsizing, rely heavily on all employees. All companies say their employees are their most valuable asset. More and more are beginning to realize they can't just say it anymore - that it really is true and those that work on it every day see higher levels of engagement, productivity, revenue and retention. Employers with high levels of engagement tend to make more money than their competitors and their key performers tend to stay with the company longer. Stability and retention – important aspects to business health for any senior leader.

But ‘doing’ employee engagement isn't as easy as repairing a copy machine. Each employee within an organization puts forth discretionary effort; they come to work with a choice of how much effort they are willing to give their company. An engaged employee is fully involved in, and enthusiastic about, his or her work. These employees care about the future of the organization



and feel a strong emotional bond to the business. Homewood Suites saw the connection of engaged employees to better business results and here's a little of what they did about it:

*Discovering that highly engaged teams demonstrated higher performance at franchisees prompted Frank Saitta, senior director of brand performance support at Homewood Suites by Hilton in Memphis, Tenn., to pay more attention to employee engagement.*

*On regular visits to the 290 franchised hotels throughout North America, he gathered best practices and helped develop a "service suitcase" that was rolled out to all the hotels to improve engagement. The suitcase provides general managers with tools on leadership, communications and training.*

**Empowerment is the key driver of engagement at Homewood Suites.** *The company offers a 100 percent money-back guarantee if a guest isn't satisfied. Any employee—from housekeeper to manager—can make good on that guarantee; they don't have to seek approval or argue. And, the guest doesn't have to go through a chain of command to have a complaint resolved.*

**"The return we get on every dollar refunded is 20 to 1," Saitta says, based on repeat business and referrals from those refunded guests. The return on having engaged employees "is much higher."**

- *For this to work effectively, though, Saitta says Homewood trains employees on how to gauge a guest's experience by initiating conversations, actively listening and reading body language. Because Homewood has extended-stay hotels, housekeepers have more interaction with guests than managers do, so it is important that every employee is empowered to handle problems quickly. This type of training and authority is not typically granted to hospitality employees below the managerial level—and Saitta suspects it makes a difference.*

*Homewood ranks and publishes hotel performance on scorecards. Results from use of the service suitcase have been impressive: "We had a Texas hotel move from the bottom third of the scorecard to the top 30 after using the suitcase for six months," Saitta says. From 2007-09, guest loyalty scores increased from 68.6 percent to 70.4 percent, satisfaction with service inched up 2 percentage points to 78.2 percent, and "return intent" scores grew from 75.3 percent to 77.7 percent. Source: SHRM(<http://bit.ly/djVVZh>)*

**These increases, Saitta says, translate into dollars on the bottom line. He correlates them directly to employee engagement.**

Homewood Suites made the connection between employee engagement and business results by building engagement a day at a time, a conversation at a time, by using simple exercises, manager participation, team participation and ongoing reinforcement. They didn't do a survey, or a townhall, or offsite training. They didn't set up an employee portal. All of those activities are good but many employees can't attend them – especially training – so how do you get the 'message' to them?

The Engagement Leader's Toolkit and The Engagement Toolkit were built to fit into the daily, weekly and monthly activities at a Homewood Suites property (hotel). The process for management using the Engagement Leader's Toolkit fits right into their regular meetings, takes a leader minutes to prepare for and 15-25 minutes to complete with his/her staff. The Department



Managers at the Homewood property then use the Engagement Toolkit to work with their team (housekeeping, for example) to understand and build employee engagement into their daily work.

They don't need time away from work, or extensive training, or an expensive survey. They don't need an AV or projection system to have the meeting. They don't need an hour for the meeting. Minutes of meeting prep, 10 to 15 minutes to run the meeting with your team and you've started the process. Discuss, reinforce, repeat. Next week, or next month, take the next topic in the toolkit and work on it. The exercises build on each other and continually reinforce employee engagement, business initiatives and core organizational competencies.

That's how Homewood built employee engagement a day at a time, a conversation at a time. Simple, easy, very cost effective, and very powerful. It's a perfect way to build employee engagement on an ongoing basis and tie it to your business goals over time. It's a perfect way for employees in distributed work situations – restaurants, sales teams, work teams, banks, retailers, and hotels to build employee engagement quickly, easily and show results for the effort.

Just ask Frank Saitta – he's sure happy with the results – and so is Homewood Suites.

**Is this your situation:**

- You want to move forward with employee engagement but are not sure how.
- The engagement activities you 'do' now are not producing the results you want.
- You're having a hard time getting senior leadership on board with moving employee engagement forward – they just don't see the value.
- You'd like to build a culture of more engaged employees.
- Leadership training is good but it doesn't always stick and doesn't produce any measurable business results.
- You'd like to do more but budgets are tight and there's not much opportunity for time away from work in training.
- You have a distributed workforce and the Toolkits would be perfect for them.
- You need to increase customer loyalty scores
- You need to move past the survey process
- You are concerned with burning out your managers

If any of these situations apply to you and you're ready to take action and make something happen - call us.

If the Engagement Leader's Toolkit and The Engagement Toolkit look like they meet your needs – call us. It's time to have you realizing the kind of results Frank Saitta is getting.

Keith Allen, SPHR  
Managing Director, Performancepoint

direct: 312.546.9747  
cell: 847-543-0840  
email: [kallen@performancepointllc.com](mailto:kallen@performancepointllc.com)  
fax: 877.998.3288  
website: [www.performancepointllc.com](http://www.performancepointllc.com)  
blog: [www.theengagementfactor.wordpress.com](http://www.theengagementfactor.wordpress.com)  
linkedin: <http://www.linkedin.com/in/wkeithallen>