

#Winning: Using Gamification to Engage Your People

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The next generation of tech addicted workers are on our doorstep. With shrinking attention spans and expanding appetites for instant gratification, it's becoming clear that the current approach to workplace engagement is simply not going to cut it.

"In this always-connected environment, it's not likely that we'll be able to persuade this younger generation to put down their phones long enough to complete essential HR processes," says Gabe Zichermann, expert and writer on the subject of

gamification.

Zichermann, who gave the keynote address at [HR Innovation & Tech Fest](#), says HR professionals are up against a monumental challenge in terms of managing people's attention. And the main culprit? A little neurotransmitter called [dopamine](#).

Dopamine and Behaviour

"The main reason it's hard to get people to focus on your HR processes is because people are very easily overexcited by unimportant stimuli and bored of important things they should be focusing on," says Zichermann. He momentarily transports us back to high school biology and gives us a crash course in neuroscience. "Dopamine is a neurotransmitter primarily responsible for all the great things that humans have achieved: it is that motivational chemical that makes you want to run faster, go higher, get to the moon and develop drugs for important diseases; dopamine fuels all of that," he explains.

"When you set yourself a challenge and then achieve that challenge, your brain secretes a little bit of dopamine: challenge, achievement, satisfaction. It's a highly pleasurable feeling and what happens as soon as that occurs is your brain says, "Please, ma'am, may I have another?" and you go right back into trying to make that cycle happen again and happen again," says Zichermann.

He points out that in our professional lives, we might experience this dopamine hit maybe once a year when we achieve a significant milestone or complete a project. But compare that to playing a video game like Candy Crush or scrolling through a Facebook feed, you're getting a hit of dopamine hundreds of times an hour. "So it's no wonder that when faced with the traditional business environment, young people raised on videogames simply view the real world as being too slow, too boring," he reasons.

Using Gamification to Win the War for Attention

Instead of condemning the highly addictive and engaging powers of gaming and social media, Zichermann advises HR professionals to embrace it and apply the principles of game design to the workplace. "HR professionals can use many of the same techniques that game

engineers use to get and keep people's attention, but you can do it in a way that is focused on your organisation's goals and objectives, rather than a pointless goal."

According to Zichermann, Gamification is the use of game concepts, behavioural economics and loyalty program schemes to help engage and change people's behaviour, it's keeping their attention and getting them to do the things that they need to do.

However, it's not enough to simply take a process and turn it into a game, warns Zichermann. "One of the biggest mistakes that organisations make when they try gamification is they take a bad process and turn it into a game. Here's a terrible process, but now with dragons and wizards! That is still boring and stupid, and people see through that very quickly." The idea is to use the concepts from gaming to engage and enhance an HR process.

3 Companies Using Gamification to Win at Recruitment

Here are three examples of organisations that Zichermann has worked with to apply the principles of gamification to their recruitment programs:

1. Google

- Use gamification to recruit mathematically-minded people by asking them to solve an equation
- No Google branding on billboard
- Simple concept but maximum engagement



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2. US Army

- US Army has a long history of using gamification for training. But all games were from a General's point of view.
- Found the average recruit didn't want to play as a leader but as a soldier
- Key consideration when including gamification: think about your own bias. What you find interesting/important may not be important to your employees



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3. Domino's Pizza

- Needed new recruits who were skilled before they came on the job
- Devised a game "Domino's Pizza Hero" which allowed people to create their own topping combinations and have their local Domino's make and deliver it
- The best players were offered a job at Domino's
- It worked because it was a) cheap and b) told the brand story in an authentic way
- At its peak Domino's Pizza Hero sold \$1 million worth of extra pizzas a week for the chain.



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Follow the Three Fs for an Engaging Employee Experience

What makes a gamified experience engaging? According to Zichermann there are three things that any HR process needs to have in order to create long-term engagement and adherence:

- Feedback is telling you how you're doing, your progress against a goal
- Friends are your social circle or your co-workers. Because people generally trust their friends and peers, anything they do as a social proof will drive user behaviour accordingly – whether that's by collaborating or just watching them succeed and have fun.
- Fun is a little harder to define...

There's lots of different ideas about what constitutes fun, but one of the most interesting concepts comes from [Nicole Lazzaro](#) in what are called the four keys to fun. Her research revealed that there were four different kinds of fun that people experienced in their lives in general:

- Hard fun is something like a mathematical problem as we saw in the Google example: hard to solve, difficult, challenging fun.
- Easy fun could be a game like Candy Crush or most of the games that the average person plays. Not very mentally taxing, they're more for relaxing enjoyment.
- Social fun is about interacting with other people.
- Purposeful fun is fun in the service of something else.

Zichermann advises considering the different kinds of fun when you're thinking about how to make workplace experience more enjoyable for your people.

Gamification for Good

“Our goal as process engineers, as process leaders, is not to get people addicted to our HR systems. Yes, we want to make employees engage in our HR processes with as much gusto as they approach a game of Candy Crush or Fortnite– but we should be doing this in an ethical fashion. You can use gamification techniques to get and keep people’s attention without turning them into zombies,” says Zichermann.

Hear more from HR innovators like Gabe Zichermann at [HR Innovation & Tech Fest](#).