



The HRwisdom Employee Engagement Guide





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An engaged employee is one who is full of enthusiasm, fully present and feels that he or she is capable of doing a great job. A high level of engagement is associated with increased productivity, lower turnover rate and other positive organisational outcomes.

Unsurprisingly, organisations desire employee engagement and it has become a topic that attracts much attention from organisations, academics and the general public. To help you to be more informed about this hot topic, HRwisdom compiled this guide in which professionals in the HR fields share their insights about employee engagement.

The guide doesn't serve to be an encyclopedia on the topic. Rather, it is a collection of opinions on the topic which aims to stimulate discussion and reflection.

It is our hope that this guide will be a great resource for your career or just a good read that keeps you up to date in the field of human resources management.

Weng Chio Fan
Editor of the HRwisdom Employee Engagement Guide

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The Human Foundations of Employee Engagement

By Brad Palmer

Humans are humans. The basics are clear. Leaders that provide purpose, clarity, recognition and trust, gain the advantage of aligned and engaged teams.

Purpose: How are we going to change the world together?

Clarity: What are we trying to build? Who is doing what? Who can help me?

Recognition: Where do my contributions fit in? Are they noticed? Are we making progress as a team?

Trust: Are people sincere? Am I being treated fairly? Do we share common values?

Employees that feel a distinct part of an extended team that is working together to accomplish great things dig in. They contribute a lot. They help each other. They're engaged.

Organizations with high engagement are 78 percent more productive and 40 percent more profitable than companies with low levels of engagement. (Tower Perrin Global Workforce Study – 2007)

Purpose, clarity, recognition and trust embody your organization's culture. They are what turn your organization from a collection of robots following flawed processes to a team of humans accomplishing things together. Articulate and energize your culture and amazing things will happen.

And without a strong culture, it becomes difficult to adapt and change. As Carly Fiorina, ex CEO of HP observed, "... more than 70% of large-scale change efforts fail, and of these failures 70% are due to culture related issues."

Tools can help here. An intranet (digital workplace platform) that is designed to truly enable employees by bringing the culture to life, providing clarity, and sharing successes in real time can really embody the organization, creating a strong sense of people accomplishing things together across teams and locations.

But fundamentally driving engagement needs to be driven by the leadership team. A digital platform can help package and share the news, but what really matters is an extended leadership team that believes and lives the culture – communicating a clear vision, capturing stories of people pursuing that vision, and recognizing small contributions along the way. Every day.

About the author: Brad Palmer is co-creator and co-founder of Jostle Corporation (www.jostle.me), a People Engagement® platform that helps organizations around the globe enable their employees and drive their culture, in simple and engaging ways. Brad has over 30 years of experience with private, public, and government sectors spanning a wide range of cultures, industries, and business models.



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Mindreading 101: the 10 Questions You Need to Ask Your Team Every Week

By David Hassell

I am not a mind reader, but I've tried playing one at work. I think we all have. I used to imagine that I could peer into the silent void of a discussion with an employee and their thoughts and feelings would magically pop in my head. It never happened.

We are in the feedback business. Through running my company, 15Five, on our own product, I have found that regularly asking questions is an agile and lightweight way of keeping up with what's really going on. Answers become conversations about what is most essential and meaningful for the team and the company, and those conversations transform into action.

The first place to start is by asking the right questions. Here are some of the best I've found:

1. What's going well in your role? Any wins (big or small) this week?

This is a great place to start. Employees get to celebrate and even brag a little about all the positive stuff that happened that week by simply answering that question. This includes the small things that often get overlooked because they aren't related to top priorities. As a bonus, you will glean what employees consider triumphs relative to the goals of the organization.

2. What challenges are you facing? Where are you stuck?

The quickest way to overcome challenges and get unstuck is to say, "I'm stuck!" When we can identify where we're stuck and then bring someone else's attention to the challenge at hand, we are in a position to receive the coaching and guidance that helps us think about the issue in a fresh new way. Often just writing about where we're stuck begins the process of getting clear on how to resolve it ourselves.

3. What is the business doing, or can be doing, to make you more successful?

Employee success is a dynamic and always evolving process. Sometimes what your team needs is more training or a one on one meeting. Other times they require help with learning a specific skill set. This question gives permission to ask for the things that will move the needle forward and build more engaged and happy teams.

4. How are you feeling? What's the morale around you?

Asking an employee how they feel is critical. It increases drive and happiness because their individual and collective experiences feel validated and heard. Answering this question can not only bring self-awareness but also provide valuable qualitative insight for others. When a team member knows what's going on with others, the entire team is more cohesive. This creates more effective and satisfying teamwork.

The answers to this question can also allow you to properly time certain initiatives and changes within the company. Are they on the edge of burnout or feeling happy and energized?

Are they stressed by the new product launch? Perhaps you should postpone hack day until things settle so that they have space to access their most creative ideas.

5. On a scale of 1-10, how happy are you? Why?

The research of positive psychology is clear: happiness is a precursor to success and accomplishment, not the other way around. When your team is happy, they not only come up with better solutions, but their satisfaction also helps to build a culture of high performance and low turnover. This question simultaneously sends the message that your employee matters beyond mere performance and work-related issues. By quantifying happiness, you can get a quick snapshot of this metric team-wide.

6. What's the best thing that happened to you this week, either at work or outside of it?

There are strategic reasons to ask this question since learning about team members as whole people can help you develop a more committed and engaged team. Feeling that others know them and understand their personal desires and goals helps to maintain team cohesion and employee retention. This is also an opportunity to discover a common ground with which to enrich in-person communication.

7. Provide one idea to improve the product or service provided by your company

The best source of innovation is often found by people who already work for you. Since suggestion boxes have gone the way of the fax machine, this opens the door for team members to throw out ideas for improvement, no matter how big or how small. Imagine that the next AirBnB is humming in one of your employees' heads. You have now presented the opportunity to hear all about it. This not only elicits what could be valuable responses, but also makes the respondent feel connected and appreciated.

8. If you owned the company, what's one thing you would do differently?

If you hired well, then you have leaders and future executives among your ranks. Ask this question once a month to encourage leadership from everyone in the company. Placing them in the driver's seat can really open up some potent ideas on helping the company succeed. This question also offers a sense of empowerment and ownership of the company.

9. What were some great contributions made by other team members?

This opens up the door for praise and can grow cohesion. You can also develop an internal conversation regarding the top traits to look for in a new hire. It is better to ask this question to elicit specific and positive information. Asking for general comments on the performance of other employees may be insightful and entertaining, but will probably open a competitive can of worms.

10. Provide feedback on how I can be a better leader.

This one will probably be the toughest on your team, but the responses will also be incredibly worthwhile. You will learn what your employees perceive are core leadership values, and determine if they are in sync with the values of management and the company as a whole. The insights offered here will also aid you to promote internally. You will separate the chaff

from the wheat, as it takes a courageous and skillful employee to tell their manager where they have room to grow.

I still hope that one day my superpower clairvoyance will kick in. Until that day comes, I'll stick with getting straightforward answers by asking the right questions.

About the author: *David Hassell is the founder and CEO of 15Five, the leading web-based employee feedback and alignment solution that is transforming the way employees and managers communicate. Named "The Most Connected Man You Don't Know in Silicon Valley" by Forbes Magazine, David has also been featured in The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Inc., Entrepreneur, Wired, Fast Company, and Financial Post. You can learn more about 15Five and David Hassell at www.15five.com.*



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Employee Engagement: Rub the Magic Lamp

By Emma Driscoll

A popular article in the Australian Financial Review (“Special touches add snap, crackle and pop”) described what some of the biggest organisations were doing in order to make sure they don’t lose their key people. The companies included, Microsoft, Kellogg’s, Mars and Adidas to name a few.

In the process of engaging their people; these companies are also making a serious impact in an upwards direction to the bottom line. The crux of the article was all about giving evidence to support the argument that giving employees some of what they truly VALUE as individuals actually increases productivity, rather than decreasing it.

We are all a certain way in our personal lives. The way we work out (or don’t); what we like to eat; when we like to take breaks; how we communicate; when we are most energetic etc. I could go on and on here but the point is that we don’t suddenly switch these behaviours off, have a lobotomy and then step into our workplaces as different people who all happen to exhibit the same values, desires and behavioural traits; only to switch back at 5.30pm.

Well do we? Hardly; If I am different to Joe Bloggs in my personal life, then I will be just as different to him at work; and yet: we are managed the same way, rewarded in the same structure and have the same hours; despite the fact that he is a late afternoon person and I am done by 3.00pm as am firing on all cylinders at 7.00am. Clearly, this is a hypothetical situation as firstly; I’m yet to meet anyone called Joe Bloggs and the only person who rewards me; is me! I know exactly what I want and when I want it so I’m set...

However, if you manage teams of people, knowing what gets your individual people moving and how you can give them something in the workplace and management structure that will make their hearts soar and their pulse rates shift up a few gears with excitement, is like being handed Aladdin’s magic lamp!

We are all individuals and have our own set of values. Therefore, our people need to be managed and rewarded based on **what will work for them and this will in turn increase levels of productivity and lower turnover rates**. When companies can fully appreciate what this means and how they can go about instilling individual desires and needs into their workplaces, individual productivity rates can and do skyrocket.

People do not leave organisations for increases in salary unless they are poorly paid in the first place. They leave because they have no sense of belonging to something bigger than their immediate job role. If the job role is a step on the way to something else or not really where they want to be; you will lose them without a career path and a workplace which inspires and shows them that they do in fact matter.

Clear roles, achievable and interesting career development plans which show the importance of an individual’s contribution and a transparency to company direction is essential. A set of values which are VALUED by everyone, meaning they have had input into what they actually

are; is the first step. The values must be able to be demonstrated and actually promoted, not just talked about.

Exciting times are here and there is a real opportunity for **companies to retain and develop their teams**, making the most of all the wonderful attributes we all have in our varied and dynamic ways! We can all have some fun and make money at the same time.

About the author: *Emma Driscoll is the founder of [Coaching Combinations](#) which provides HR Consulting services to companies, specifically in the area of Employee Engagement. She has a background in Recruitment and Human Resource functions as well as training and assessment/coaching and facilitation. The combination of this experience coupled with qualifications across HR and an interest in Quantum Physics, Quantum Mechanics and Neuro Biology provides an effective set of skills designed to lower turnover and increase employee productivity.*



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Who Owns Employee Engagement?

By Don MacPherson

The path to employee engagement is a simple one. The organization creates a framework that enables employee engagement to be possible. That framework begins by communicating a set of organizational values so they are known and understood throughout the organization. Managers and senior leaders are responsible for driving engagement by recognizing employees, developing them, and filling them with belief in the future of their organization. Ultimately, however, each individual employee chooses whether or not to bring their best to work on a day to day basis. That is the frustrating part of the employee engagement equation.

Many organizations have the proper cultural framework in place and a skilled set of managers and senior leaders who are focused on engaging employees, yet these organizations are not able to fully engage the vast majority of their employees. Most employees consciously or subconsciously choose to bring less than their best.

According to Modern Survey's research, only 13% of the U.S. workforce is fully engaged and another 22% are moderately engaged. That leaves 65% of U.S. employees either under engaged or disengaged. Even among organizations that Modern Survey deems "Extraordinary," 40% of their employees are under engaged or disengaged. It's better, but there is still a great deal of performance potential left untapped.

Ask any human resource professional if they expect employees to bring their best to work every day. Most will say "yes." Then ask if their organization sets an expectation among new hire candidates that, if hired, they are required to bring their best to work. As many as 98% of HR professionals will sheepishly respond "no" to that question.

Much attention has been given to the idea of employees being responsible for their own engagement. This is a strong shift from the manager or leadership owning engagement. At the moment, it's a flawed concept. The reason is that the vast majority of employees don't even know what the concept of engagement is. In the fall 2012 study of U.S. Workforce Engagement, Modern Survey found that only 42% of all employees understand the concept of employee engagement. It's a massive challenge for people to own their own engagement when they don't understand the concept. The more depressing statistic is that only 55% of managers of employees responded that they understood the concept of engagement.

Yes, organizations need to create and maintain the framework for making engagement possible. However, if our organizations are to aspire to fully engage the majority of their employees, a huge educational initiative needs to occur. Every manager needs to understand what engagement is, why it is important, what the drivers are and how to have conversations with employees about it. If employers are to hold the individual employee accountable for their own engagement, the educational initiative needs to extend down to each and every employee. It would be unfair to attempt to hold people accountable for something nearly 60% of them don't understand.

This is the great opportunity for HR professionals. American organizations spend over half their budgets on employees and employee related expenses. There is no other part of our organizations where there is a greater gap between current performance and performance potential. By educating every employee about the concept of engagement and equipping managers with the tools to engage employees, HR professionals can help their organizations close this gap and make a greater impression on performance than any other part of the company.

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All for One and One for All Engagement

By Brad Federman

According to a recent Hewitt study, only 16 percent of those companies using engagement surveys see positive results. That means 84 percent, a striking majority, are wasting time, resources and money in their efforts. Engagement cannot be about a snapshot in time shown in survey results. Engagement is larger than a manager. Engagement is about your culture — a shared culture that is built and represented by everyone.

Most studies agree that the engagement level of employees has dropped over the last 5 to 10 years. Think about how much money has been spent on engagement initiatives such as engagement surveys, survey action planning and leadership training that did not produce lasting results. Think about the lost productivity, revenues and profits that result from unmotivated employees.

Many companies have found the results of their employee engagement efforts level off in a fairly short time or, worse, they lose ground. In fact, the very efforts many companies initiate seem to cause more damage than good. Why? Because they approach engagement as a managerial responsibility when in reality, to be most effective, it must be a shared responsibility of all employees. Engagement is not a project or event; it is about your culture.

When you create a culture of engaged, satisfied employees, you can increase loyalty and really bring out the best in each individual. Just as low morale touches every part of your business's productivity, engaged employees will be your ticket to driving revenue growth, going after increased profits and improving customer service.

How Do We Make Engagement Everyone's Responsibility?

Stop making engagement solely the manager's responsibility.

When a company places the responsibility for engagement mainly on the shoulders of direct supervisors they unwittingly create the demise of their efforts over time. What do quality efforts, customer service efforts, and branding strategies all have in common? They involve the entire company. Each person in each department affects all three of those efforts. The same holds true for engagement. All too often companies send a message (unintentionally but powerfully all the same) that the individual associate has no control, influence, or even effect on their own engagement or the engagement of others. When we develop values for our organizations we ask each individual to uphold those values. It is time we make the same commitment to engagement. Everyone has to have ownership and responsibility for their own level of engagement.

Success is not found in an HR program.

Employee engagement, if handled appropriately, has an enormous impact on the business. CEOs, presidents, and C-Level executives get involved in the brand, the numbers and the deals, but unfortunately, not enough of these executives get as deeply involved with their people. And they usually leave the employee engagement effort to the good folks in HR. It is sad to see some leaders so out of touch they must resort to going undercover on a television show

to get to know their people and their own company. Many executives are too isolated and forget the reason the business they help run is successful—their people. If you think that's not the case, go to the headquarters of many large companies and see where the executive team is located. Often they have separate floors, private entrances, their own washrooms, separate eating facilities and some even have separate buildings. For many executives, meeting employees and customers is a carefully orchestrated event. Sadly, many executives do not understand that employee engagement is a business issue first and it starts at the top.

Focus on the whole person.

Employees and managers are not psychiatrists, but we need to understand that our employees suffer from stress, burnout, fear, problems outside of work, office politics and many other challenges. How these challenges are dealt with strengthens, or hinders, our ability to create relationships that have impact and can make the difference between success and failure. We need to become concerned with why associates become irritable, impatient, lack time for reflection or strategic thinking, or send text and email messages while having conversations. We can only engage if we are present, and we are only present when we focus on the whole person.

Promote self efficacy.

Self efficacy is the belief that you are capable of performing and attaining certain goals. It is the confidence that you have the capacity to produce certain results or a desired effect. What if our employees felt they had the influence, competence, and ability to achieve their work goals, realize their talents and passions, develop their career, and live a more productive and happy life? If their employer helped them cultivate just a few of those items, do you think they would be more productive? Would they stay with their employer longer?

Part of our focus at work should be learning about our colleagues' talents and passions, building each other up, and creating bridges of support in our organizational community. This is even truer today with the availability of social networking and collaborative applications. Fostering confidence and the ability to see the opportunities we have, even during times of turmoil, is what sets us apart individually and collectively.

Making engagement everyone's responsibility does not happen in the classroom, on a certain day, in a survey or in a boardroom. Making engagement everyone's responsibility happens everywhere and all of the time. For employee engagement initiatives to be effective and long lasting they must be woven into the strategy of a company, part of the living culture, discussed in the hallways, and in team meetings, rallies, and huddles. They must be part of the customer strategy and woven into how relationships are built with customers.

Our challenge is to be in the group that realizes significant results from engagement efforts—in the 16 percent, not the 84 percent. One of the prime ways to do that is to make engagement everyone's responsibility.

"Everyone has his own specific vocation or mission in life; everyone must carry out a concrete assignment that demands fulfilment. Therein he cannot be replaced, nor can his life be repeated, thus, everyone's task is unique as his specific opportunity to implement it," said Viktor E. Frankl, author of *Man's Search for Meaning*.

If everyone's task is unique then everyone must play a role in their own engagement.

About the author: Brad Federman is the Chief Operating Officer of the F&H Solutions Group, a consulting firm of experienced professionals providing creative human resources and management services solutions in an ever-changing business world.



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Rules of Engagement: Communication and Line of Sight

By Derek Irvine

Recognize This! – We need to know that what we do every day is making a valuable difference.

This post was inspired by an article in Talent Management magazine on the importance of effective communication to employee engagement, as it is now one of the top 5 drivers of engagement. Yet, only 42% of employees say their organizations communicate effectively (down from 52% two years ago).

But this line is what really caught my attention: “Employees really need to see the line of sight between what they’re doing day by day and how that impacts what the organization is doing and how that’s serving the organization’s customers and markets. Employees really need to feel like they’re in the game, rather than just a cog in the wheel.”

That line of sight is critical. Employees are clearly saying, “Tell me what I do is important. Tell me I make a difference around here. Tell me – specifically – how I’m doing that.” This sense of providing a valuable contribution is what engages employees. A sense of “What I do around here really matters.” That’s the role of strategic, social recognition – empowering anyone in the organization to tell their colleagues and peers how their contributions are making a difference.

Or, as TribeHR puts it in a recent blog post: “Employees who contribute are valuable. But employees who feel compelled to contribute, and believe that they make a significant difference in corporate outcomes, are priceless.”

Are your employees priceless? Are you?

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Employee Engagement: It's Getting Workers to Think Like Owners

By David Sneed

What, exactly, is “employee engagement?” After checking the Internet, I learned that “engaged employees” are those staff members who feel good about the company they work for. And “engaging” them reminds ‘em to like their job without a bump in pay.

I think I get it. We just renamed “happy workers” because fresh phrasing is fun. The real issue hasn’t changed with the new name though, has it?

Caring Like the Owner Does

What we’re really after are workers who care as much about the business as the owner does.

And why do we want that?

Because these engaged employees are more productive; they’re better with the customers; and, they increase the bottom line. Well, I’m not sure we’ll ever get someone as completely engaged as the owner is, but maybe we can get close.

Look first at some traits the owner has:

- They go the extra mile;
- They’re efficient;
- They care what customers think;
- They know that time is money.

Here’s how you engage employees

Those are the traits we want our employees to have, too. So here’s the question that all my HR heroes out there want answered: How do you engage employees?

Here’s how: by being human, and, by teaching them what the owner knows.

Being human, that’s the leadership part. A leader makes our work life bearable and interesting. If your company’s missing that part, look up for the answer, not down.

I really want to talk about the other part, about teaching employees what the owner knows.

If you ask me, a lot of gurus and training programs just don’t get this part. Until Jim Bob the line worker knows WHY a good work ethic is important, and understands WHY it’s in his own best interest, there’s little point in a Monday morning all-staff morale meeting.

Following Through and Rewarding Workers

You see, people tend to do what makes their life easier, or somehow better.

If they think helping a customer only affords the boss a new Mercedes, they don't see the point. But when they learn that — and you have to be prepared for this — helping the company succeed is rewarded (financially or otherwise), they'll see the light.

But we also have to follow through on our end and reward the employees who DO help the company succeed. Maybe that's the part that's missing. That's a different article for sure.

So why don't we teach what we really want them to learn – a good work ethic?

Instead, we teach specific skills: customer service and teamwork. That's like teaching the 7th grade girls' basketball team how to post-up in the box. They don't even understand the point of the game yet, so why bother teaching them a rebounding technique? It won't matter.

Once they do understand the game and realize that getting the ball is essential for winning, the rebounding will come naturally.

A Reason for Them to Feel Ownership

If you show your employees that success at work comes from feeling ownership in their company, customer service/time management/hard work will naturally follow. They already know how to do these things; what they need is a reason to do them.

That reason will create the employee engagement we seek.

That reason is learning what their boss knows about success.

Teach those traits that the big boss has and reward your staff for caring about the company — not necessarily financially, but by caring about them back.

Now, THAT'S employee engagement.

About the author: David Sneed is the owner of Colorado-based [Alpine Fence Company](#) and author of *Everyone Has A Boss – A Two Hour Guide to Being the Most Valuable Employee at Any Company*. As a Marine, father, husband, entrepreneur, author, and teacher, David has learned how to help others succeed. He teaches the personal benefits of a strong work ethic to entry-level employees. Contact him at David@EveryoneHasABoss.com.



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Employee Engagement: Let Your Staff Have Their Say

By Weng Chio Fan

You can see how engaged your staff are simply by looking at how they approach their work. Engaged employees are more productive, persistent, take initiative, have low turnover, absence rate and are characterised by feelings of energy and absorption in their work.

No doubt, every organisation wants engaged employees. The good news is there are many strategies organisations may use to enhance the engagement level. One such strategy is by providing your staff the opportunity to voice their opinions.

The Importance of Voice

Voice is important for several reasons. First, the right to voice our opinion is a crucial part of our work life. When voice is allowed, employees feel that they are treated with politeness, dignity and respect. Hence, whether they are given the chance to voice tells them what their standing is within the organisation. Research has shown that how fair an organisation appears is influenced by whether its employees are given the opportunity to voice their opinions. Second, voice is the foundation of successful organisational change. Voice empowers employees to act. When given the power to be heard and to influence outcomes, employees feel that they are involved in the change process. As a result, they are willing to take actions to facilitate change.

In contrast, the cost of a lack of voice in organisations can be high. Denying employees' right to voice their opinion can generate feelings of humiliation, anger, resentment which if ignored can affect every interaction, undermine creativity and productivity.

Therefore, in general, employees tend to be more engaged when given the opportunity to voice their opinion.

Voice with Action

However, organisations need to be careful about how they handle the voice from their staff. Although employees prefer voice than no voice, it doesn't mean that organisations merely listen to the employees' opinion and ignore it. The very essence of voice implies action from organisations. The power of voice on engagement comes from employees' beliefs that their voice can influence outcomes. When voicing their thoughts and concerns, they expect to see changes. So the deaf-ear syndrome can discourage voice, leading to cynicism, rebellion or even employee disengagement.

Do You Listen and Act?

Having our say is the cornerstone of democracy and a basic need of human being. The lesson is that you need to treat your staff with respect and offering the chance for them to speak up is a great way to show it. So, maybe it is the time for you to reflect if you have provided the

channels for your staff to speak up. If you do, do you take their opinions seriously or is it just a show?

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An Idiot's Guide to Employee Engagement

By Edward Lawler

Surveys measuring employee engagement have become increasingly common. Most major corporations now regularly survey their workforces. There is no doubt that their surveys can yield useful information about employee attitudes and behaviour. In many cases, however, the data are misinterpreted, misunderstood, and result in wasted time and money.

Most engagement surveys ask questions concerning a number of distinctly different attitudes that employees hold. Some of these attitudes affect turnover, some affect work performance, and still others have little or no impact on employee behaviour.

Many individuals who interpret the data have limited knowledge about what the causes and consequences are of employee motivation, satisfaction, commitment, and involvement. As a result, they don't correctly interpret the data collected in engagement surveys.

This doesn't have to be. We have decades of research on employee attitudes that clearly establishes the relationship among employee attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. Let me quickly review this research by starting with two common beliefs that are incorrect and then discussing three research findings that should be kept in mind when employee engagement data are interpreted.

Fallacy #1: Money Does Not Motivate – It is Only a “Hygiene” Factor.

For decades, the discussion of whether or not money motivates behavior and how it motivates behavior has been prominent in the organizational behavior literature as well as in the mass media. Writers have gained book sales and visibility by saying that it does not motivate performance (note the popularity of the recent book, *Drive*), and that it is only a “hygiene” or dissatisfier factor. The simple fact of the matter is that for many people, it does motivate performance. Study after study has shown that when significant amounts of money are clearly tied to specific behaviors, those behaviors are more likely to occur.

Fallacy #2: a Happy Worker is a Productive Worker.

Starting about the middle of the 20th century and proceeding for several decades, organizational psychologists conducted many studies that correlated job satisfaction with performance. The results consistently showed low or no correlation between the two. In some cases, there was low correlation only because performing well made employees more satisfied, not because employees worked harder because they were satisfied. This is a particularly important point when engagement data are interpreted. As we will see next, there are reasons to worry about employee job satisfaction, but not because of the impact of increasing satisfaction on performance!

Truth #1: People Differ in What They Value.

There are large differences in what people value. In order to understand how to motivate somebody, it is critical to know what an individual values. There are a number of indicators of what a person values. Perhaps the best one is watching the choices individuals make when

they have the opportunity to choose a reward, say receive a raise, a promotion, or a day off. It is also possible to get a reasonable understanding of what they value by looking at their characteristics. Yes, age is a predictor, as is gender, but overall they are relatively poor predictors.

Often the best way to find out what people value is to ask them. Usually, they are pretty good reporters of what they value. However, sometimes they don't have a high level of self-awareness, or they may feel that it is necessary to give a politically correct response. This brings me back to the original point that watching the choices they make is oftentimes the best indicator.

One last point: it is critical to avoid stereotyping and assuming that people of the same race, age, and gender are similar in what they value. Even within what appears to be relatively homogeneous groups, there are often enormous differences in what individual's value.

Truth #2: Expectations Lead to Motivation.

Motivation is best understood, influenced, and predicted by understanding the expectations that people have. Simply stated, people engage in behaviors that they expect will lead to rewards they value. Thus, it is critical to know individuals' expectations of what their behaviors will lead to.

There are a variety of outcomes that may be tied to work behaviors. High performance may lead to more money, feelings of accomplishment, high job security, and a host of other positive outcomes that can cause people to perform at a high level. The key from an organizational point of view is to understand what people see as the consequences of different kinds behaviors and to create a good alignment between what the organization needs and what individuals expect to be rewarded for.

Often, simply setting goals for individuals can make a major impact on their motivation. If individuals accept the goals and see the behavior as worthwhile, they will be highly motivated to pursue these goals.

Truth #3: Satisfaction Leads to Membership, Not Performance.

Satisfaction is a good predictor of absenteeism and turnover. Earlier, the point was made that happy workers are not necessarily productive workers. On the other hand, they are likely to be individuals who will stay with an organization. Essentially, when employees say they are satisfied with their job, they are indicating that there is no reason for them to look elsewhere for an alternative situation. They are not necessarily saying that they are motivated to be productive, but they may be saying that they will be loyal to the company and speak well of it to others. This is different from them being motivated to perform well. Indeed, happy workers tend to RIP (retire in position) unless they are somehow motivated to perform at a high level.

Looking at the results of employee engagement surveys and developing action plans based on them requires looking at the items on the survey in terms of what they measure. Do they measure satisfaction? Do they measure motivation? Once this is done, and only once it is done, does it make sense to think about action items such as making work more interesting, providing more job security, or rewarding performance with bonus plans?

Yes, engagement scores are indicators of how good or bad a work situation is. In most cases, it is better to have higher rather than lower engagement scores, but in order to take action directed towards improving organizational performance, the items need to be looked at separately and used to make data-based changes that will drive employee retention, performance, and commitment.

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Making Engagement Happen – What HR Needs to Do Now

By Jane Sparrow

Joe has been with his company for six years. He works hard, has recently gained a promotion, and is popular with his peers and management alike. He enjoys his job and rarely has time off sick. But he isn't highly engaged. He is a 'Saver'.

'Savers' V 'Investors'

Look around your organisation and you will spot many more 'Savers'. They are usually hard working, diligent employees who are committed to the company. Thanks to corporate communication programmes and initiatives, they often have a clear understanding of the business and know what is expected of them. It's a good place to start but I don't believe this is where long-term, meaningful engagement actually happens.

Employees like Joe are the bedrock of many companies but whilst every organisation needs 'Savers', they alone are not enough to create the performance levels that a business needs to excel and deliver exceptional results. If companies are serious about increasing engagement for performance, HR needs to up its stakes and create a strong community of 'Investors'.

'Investors' are employees who are willing to invest more of themselves in an organisation. Just like 'Savers', they are clear about the aims of the organisation and are committed to its success. But, crucially, they also feel a sense of genuine attachment to their employer because of a deep sense of value from their relationship with them. Waitrose have it in a true sense, as their latest advertising expresses; people that work in their stores are owners of the business. However, there are plenty of other examples where 'Investors' don't actually have share certificates.

What I'm talking about are people that see a deeper connection between their own personal values and purpose with that of the business. In day-to-day terms, they are the employees who are more willing to be an advocate for the brand and will demonstrate this, for example, by offering better customer service.

So how can HR create a culture of 'Investors'?

HR often owns the employee communication remit and that activity goes a long way to creating 'Savers'. However, true engagement and the creation of 'Investors' requires managers and leaders to be masters at engaging. They need HR to give them the processes and infrastructure but also the development, confidence, coaching and counsel.

For example, a strong performance management system that doesn't get tangled up in process and complexity is crucial. It's also important to ensure that any performance measurement really does have the performance of people at its heart. The message will be loud and clear: we measure people performance because the performance of our employees is the most significant measure of our business success.

To create ‘investors’, HR has a responsibility to ensure the right level of development for every line manager – not just senior leaders. It’s line managers who are the game changers on a daily basis so they need proper investment. That development needs to help them be proficient in the five roles of Manager as Culture Builder. Where managers are strong in each, they will unlock tremendous potential in their people and high performance will follow for their teams, the business and the entire organisation. Senior leaders, too, need to be supercharged across all the roles – great role models that unlock the potential of their direct reports.

Five Key Roles to Create More Investors

Here’s a quick overview of the five roles needed to be a great engager:

1. **The Prophet** – this role is all about passion, vision and inspiration. Prophets paint a visual picture of the future in a highly emotive way that others can get hold of and want to be part of. The vision should pack an emotional punch, resonating with all employees and leaving them with no doubt about exactly what the values and vision of its leaders are. HR professionals can work with their employee communication colleagues to help coach leaders to be great Prophets through their personal communication. They can also help managers to see the importance to keeping that vision alive day-to-day.
2. **The Storyteller** – this person uses an emotional and logical mix to bring the story to life about how we will achieve the vision and live our purpose. People need to know from the Storyteller what it looks like, what it feels like, what the journey will be like, what destinations we will pass and, crucially, what does it mean for me as an individual and as a team? Consider how you tell the story about your people strategy or changes in the way you work with your businesses and how you could strengthen it to lead by example.
3. **The Strategist** – this person has a plan to engage every person in his team or under his or her influence. He or she knows who the talent is and has a retention and development plan for each of them. The Strategist is the logical, rational part of being a manager that takes *intention* about engagement and makes it a *reality*. This is where HR can really play a role. This is one of the lowest preferences for most managers so HR can help them to see the value of planning and making engagement work.
4. **The Coach** – as a coach, a manager understands what makes the individual’s heart beat. He or she works with that knowledge and helps them grow and deliver more value. This is a deep and meaningful part of being an engaging manager and, as such, is exceptionally rewarding. Let’s remember that, at its core, engagement comes from treating people as individuals and a coach has an amazing opportunity to ensure people feel their own needs are being met and valued. For a culture of ‘Investors’, it is essential. HR can have a huge impact by coaching managers to have better coaching-style conversations with their people. They can also invest in training to boost skills.
5. **The Pilot** – the goal of the Pilot is to be the respected role model, the ‘parental’ adult with one hand on the tiller. The Pilot is the measured, calm component of being a

manager. Solid and trusting, he or she can mindfully balance the need to be authoritative and when to be facilitative.

My research shows that the Strategist is one of the lowest preferences for managers across the globe. The Coach is also a low preference for many. This means that not only can HR have an impact by role modelling the five roles; they can also look for more managers with skills of Strategist and Coach during the recruitment process. Influence on engagement can also come from considering these preferences in organisational design and development programmes. So, to create a culture of 'Investors' – not just 'Savers' – start by asking which are you?

About the author: Jane Sparrow is author of *The Culture Builders; Leadership Strategies for Employee Performance*. She regularly works with organisations to help evolve culture and strengthen employee engagement to deliver increased performance. Her website, www.theculturebuilders.com is packed full of advice, downloads and tips about engagement. It also features a profiling tool that will help you see which of the five roles is your preference.



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Engaging? 6 Reasons Annual Performance Reviews Don't Work

By Jacob Shriar

Annual performance reviews are a waste of time.

Everyone hates them. Managers cite performance reviews as the second most hated task (after firing someone), and most studies show that employees don't like them.

They're always too formal, and that process makes the employee uncomfortable, and less open to criticism.

There are several problems with annual performance reviews, but to me the most obvious one is that it's annual, meaning it only happens once a year.

That's way too long of a feedback loop. People need constant feedback, and the way we work today is much more agile and fast, we can't wait an entire year to either get or give feedback.

Annual performance reviews remind me of exams in school. Exams are one of the reasons that I hate the school system so much, I find the grading so flawed.

Imagine so much emphasis being put on one hour of your time.

Imagine if you're an incredibly bright student, but you happen to wake up feeling sick on exam day, and you don't do as well as you could have.

Sometimes, depending on which exam it is, it can have a drastic effect on your life.

Seriously, you should get rid of your performance reviews, even Adobe got rid of theirs.

Let's go through some of the problems together, and then I'll talk about some possible solutions to fix this.

1. Annual Performance Reviews Aren't Based On Data

Too often, a performance review is something that a manager has to recall by memory, without looking at any actual data to back up what they're saying.

Also, too often the performance they're reviewing isn't actual performance, they'll judge you on things like attendance, which honestly has no real impact on your performance.

This is a really flawed process, because it relies on opinion, and it's usually one person's opinion.

2. Annual Performance Reviews Are Often Tied to Salary

This makes the whole process very sensitive.

If an employee's raise or salary for the following year is somehow tied to the performance review, the manager might feel bad giving the employee a negative review.

Similarly, if an employee gets a bad review, and knows that it is tied to their salary, they might get defensive and start arguing with their manager about the comments made.

3. Annual Performance Reviews Are Too Structured

This kind of goes back to what I was saying at the beginning about exams in school.

They're so formal, and there's so much pressure surrounding the performance review, that everyone gets anxious.

The employee is freaking out weeks, or even months in advance, and sometimes managers will try and avoid tough decisions or tough criticisms, so the review ends up being flawed.

4. Managers Often Wait to Deal with Feedback

A lot of the time, managers might wait to give feedback to an employee that needs it.

Instead of tackling an issue head on, right in that moment, they'll choose to deal with it once the performance review comes up.

This can have a really negative effect on team morale and company culture, because during that waiting time, the poor performer is demoralizing the rest of the team.

5. Annual Performance Reviews Often Suffer from Rater Bias

Rater Bias is a huge problem with performance reviews, let me explain how it works.

Managers hire employees that they like, and are similar to them.

When it's time for these managers to give reviews, their opinion is biased, and they usually end up giving a high review, regardless of if they deserve it or not.

Similarly, managers that review employees that are different than them will be biased to give a lower review.

6. Annual Performance Reviews Are Often One-Sided

Most of the time, the annual performance review is one-sided in the sense that it's the manager who is telling the employee how they did and what they should do better, when it would be great if the employee could tell the manager what they've been doing wrong, or what the company could improve on.

It's possible that employees are allowed to give feedback, but because of the anxiety, choose not to.

How to Improve Annual Performance Reviews

There is good news though. This process can be improved, and there are ways to get better feedback from your team.

You want to make this a continuous process, and try your best to avoid any biases that might come up.

One easy way to do this, is to crowdsource your performance review.

Use the power of the crowd to make smarter decisions. You can also use tools to have this done and updated in real-time.

If an employee helps me with a task, I can give him praise right away which will count towards his performance review.

Shopify does something very interesting, in terms of performance reviews and determining who gets a bonus and how much they get.

Shopify built an internal tool called Unicorn where employees give each other praise, and determine bonuses based on peer recognition.

There was an article written in FastCompany that explains how it all works.

Here's a quote from the FastCompany article:

"Accomplishments were then tied to performance reviews. The UNICORN system is now capable of tracking every aspect of a typical performance review. Managers (or wizards) can communicate with their direct reports (apprentices) prior to the meeting, fill in goals (or quests) and incorporate other information that will be used in a more formal review."

Here are 2 tools I would recommend looking into:

- PeopleGoal
- SpiderGap

You can also look into using an employee engagement platform such as Officevibe to improve annual performance reviews.

For example, when people are contributing to the overall company culture by doing team building activities at work to engage their team, they're contributing to the overall success of the company.

I've proven before that engaged employees will lead to more money, so it's important to take this into account.

Don't use strict KPI's when measuring employee performance, it's much more holistic than that.

Do You Think Annual Performance Reviews Work?

I think the fact that they aren't continuous, and prone to biases make them flawed. I think there are smarter ways of reviewing someone's overall contribution to a company.

What do you think? Let me know via www.officevibe.com

About the author: Jacob Shriar is the Growth Manager at Officevibe. When he's not reinventing the world over a glass of scotch, he likes to find new skills to learn.



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How to Make Sure Your New Employees Are Engaged from the Start

By Elizabeth Moyle

As organisations seek to maximise the productivity and efficiency of their employees in a competitive labour market, they need to carefully manage all stages of the employment life cycle in order to maintain peak engagement and maximise longer-term retention. And this starts with a well-planned orientation and on-boarding process.

In the same way your company invests time and effort in nurturing relationships with new clients, your organization similarly needs to cultivate relationships with new employees.

A comprehensive, well-structured and implemented Employee Orientation and On-boarding Strategy will not only enable the employee get up to speed much more quickly, it will also help new recruits begin their employment in an engaged manner and can set the tone for the employee's entire career with the organization.

Some Employee Engagement Tactics for Orientation and On-boarding include:

- Regular and personalised communication during pre-orientation period will help to build the new recruit's excitement at commencing and develop early connectivity;
- A welcoming first day: make sure the receptionist and key staff are expecting the new employee and make them feel welcome; ensure there is a clear desk, chair and all essential equipment is provided;
- A comprehensive employee orientation which covers essential generic company information will help develop familiarity with of key personnel, organisational structure, processes, culture, amenities etc;
- A meeting with the CEO or MD and executive leadership team sends a strong message about your company's commitment to openness and collaboration and enables new employees to gain a more informed perspective about the company and how they fit into the big picture;
- Team-specific orientation and on-boarding with opportunities for experiential based learning (which helps to frame performance expectations) and establishment of interpersonal relationships with key co-workers;
- Provide a clear and relevant job description and ensure all new employees are clear about the expectations of their new role;
- Start with the basics: focus on the why, when and how of the position, before expecting them to handle assignments or large projects;
- A company or department welcome (say a morning tea) will help to make the new hire feel comfortable, welcome and secure;
- Assign a mentor or buddy to show the new person around. Maintain the mentoring relationship for the 3 month on-boarding period;

- ➊ Seek feedback on orientation and on-boarding process to find out if the process met the new recruit's needs.

An engagement focused on-boarding process can be significant in influencing the early commitment, enthusiasm and integration of new employees and play a vital role in the longer-term retention of your workforce.

About the author: *Elizabeth Moyle is the director at Peak Engagement and specialises in employee engagement, performance, development and retention. She is committed to empowering individuals to manage and develop their own careers to achieve a fulfilling work life, where they are highly engaged and performing at their best. In particular, she works with organisations to build their leadership capability around engagement, to ensure organisational systems and processes support engagement, and to identify HR strategies that will make a sustainable difference to the longer-term engagement, retention, performance and productivity of their workforce.*



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Want Engagement Now? Start Recognizing Small Things

By Brad Palmer

Employee engagement is an urgent matter. Recognition offers a quick fix.

Before inflicting major change initiatives, why not simply recognize and reinforce examples of where you want to head? Recognition provides an easy to implement and low-cost way to engage employees and shift your culture towards new values.

The trick is to turn recognition from a program initiative into a leadership initiative. Simply coach your leadership team to deliver specific recognition in real time. Often.

Spontaneous recognition of small but specific things is very powerful. Rather than vaguely patting someone on the back for working hard this month, observe something specific they are doing right now that examples your value and culture. Being specific is what makes it genuine and meaningful. Bonus points if you can tie in how it aligns with where your company is heading.

Leaders often get hung up with concerns over recognizing individuals over teams, forcing them into less frequent and less specific pattern of recognition. Recognizing smaller things more frequently solves this, as you spot various team members making specific contributions in their own way. Bonus points if you can tie these specific recognitions into the overall quest of the team.

Interestingly, it is often leaders that are the most hesitant to invest in recognition. As we have rolled the Jostle Shout-Out (a simple mechanism to recognize people and teams) into organizations almost always peer-to-peer recognition breaks out well in advance of leadership participation. Coaching your leadership team through this can be a quick win.

Recognition fills a basic human need, making it easy to stimulate. It is contagious and can quickly become an important part of your organization's culture. Leading by example is key to making it happen. Leadership teams that take the time to recognize small contributions daily, and tie them to the values and direction of the company, can quickly create a culture of recognition deep in their organization, providing a powerful way to shift your culture and reinforce important values.

About the author: Brad Palmer is co-creator and co-founder of Jostle Corporation (www.jostle.me), a People Engagement® platform that helps organizations around the globe enable their employees and drive their culture, in simple and engaging ways. Brad has over 30 years of experience with private, public, and government sectors spanning a wide range of cultures, industries, and business models.



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How to Really Praise Employees

By Margaret Heffernan

Don't just say, 'Nice work!' Psychologist Carole Dweck emphasizes the need to compliment the specific effort employees put in.

All employees want feedback and good bosses know that giving it appropriately is one of the single most effective ways to improve performance.

But as I consult to different businesses, I'm often struck by how very bland and routine much of the feedback is. I'm talking about: "Good job!" "Nice work!" "You're the greatest!"

These comments are positive, but they aren't feedback. Why? Because they don't tell employees what they did right--only that they did do something that met with approval. It gives them no clue as to what particular talent or habit you're trying to reinforce.

The work of psychologist Carol Dweck is germane here. What she's found is that, when children are praised in abstract--"You're so smart" or "You're so creative"--rather than concretely about how they improved their performance--"You put in an enormous amount of work, and it paid off"--the feedback is diminished. How come? Because the child takes from the teacher or parent the idea that she is innately smart or creative, and that she doesn't need to work at it--so she doesn't.

On the other hand, very specific feedback--especially about something an individual can control--can work wonders. "You are so reliable," "I love the fact that you are always on time," or "Your research is so meticulous" tells the recipient exactly what proved so valuable. And it inspires more of the same. Nobody praised for punctuality decides they don't need to be on time any more; if anything, it makes them more determined than ever not to let you down.

I can't help but be struck by the volumes of mindless praise I hear regularly in the workplace. I know it's well intended but it isn't effective.

Put a little extra thought in. Identify the action that delivered the result--and you make everyone better.

About the author: Margaret Heffernan is an entrepreneur and author. She has been chief executive of InfoMation Corporation, ZineZone Corporation, and iCAST Corporation. In 2011, she published her third book, [Willful Blindness](#).



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The Main Workforce Management Mistake Made During a Slowdown

By Ben Geoghegan

When times get tough, there's one big workforce management mistake that tends to get made by many businesses . . .

Employee engagement falls off the radar.

It depends on who you talk to, of course, but most HR-minded folk would agree that there is a fairly strong business case in favour of increasing employee engagement.

After all, here's what the hugely influential Gallup organisation had to say about employee engagement as part of their ongoing assessment in which they interviewed more than 3 million employees since 1997:

"Engaged employees are clearly more valuable to your company than disenchanted ones. Great managers and leaders know this instinctively, and The Gallup Organization's latest research into employee engagement levels among the U.S. workforce confirms it. In fact, according to Gallup's calculations, actively disengaged employees – the least productive – cost the American economy up to \$350 billion per year in lost productivity."

At an individual employee level, Gallup calculated that each disengaged employee costs businesses approximately \$3,400 for every \$10,000 paid in salary.

In contrast, Gallup suggested that engaged employees were far more productive and profitable due to their very strong customer focus and heightened sense of self-accountability. These types of employees were also noted as being stayers – their average tenure within organisations is longer and so they continue to contribute to economic growth over the long term.

In an economic downturn, this sort of real data and positive reviews would reasonably be expected to lead all organisations to eke out maximum business performance by further encouraging employee engagement efforts.

However, we continue to see industry surveys and reports that show that many employees are either dissatisfied or actively disengaged in their work.

In Australia, a recent large-scale workforce survey conducted by InSync found that just over half of all people voluntarily leaving their employers were doing so due to disengagement.

The most likely reason for a company's loss of focus in this vital area is the simple need for survival.

In tough economic times, many organisations will focus all their energy on purely operational matters.

Some short-sighted companies see an economic downturn as an opportunity to get rid of the ‘dead wood’ but such an approach is rarely done with longer term consequences in mind. Jack Welch became known for his tough approach to performance management and firing but he was careful to combine this with a very strong focus on employee engagement for those who remained.

Organisations that lose sight of the needs and expectations of their workforce at any time place the future in jeopardy.

This is especially true in hard times.

Indeed, our friends over in the UK recognised this fact with a report commissioned by the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills arguing that: “wider delivery of employee engagement could have a positive impact on UK competitiveness and performance both during the downturn and in powering through to recovery.”

A time of recession or low grow is exactly the right time to be maximising the performance and discretionary efforts of the workforce.

Any person who thinks that an economic downturn is no time for achieving businesses management excellence should keep in mind the findings from the well-known Kauffman Foundation study of a few years ago. The study revealed that just under half of Inc. Magazine’s Fastest Growing Companies and 57% of the Fortune 500 companies had been founded during a recession or bear market. This included many companies that value and encourage discretionary effort and staff motivation such as Sears, General Electric, 3M, Ford, Boeing, State Farm Insurance, and Delta Air Lines.

Tough trading conditions are no excuse to drop the ball by not seeking maximum levels of staff motivation. In fact, they offer proactive businesses a competitive advantage.

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Want to Engage High-Potential Employees? Don't Take Them for Granted

By Michelle M. Smith

Employees aren't human capital assets or resources — they are unique and talented individuals entitled to respect and the pursuit of purpose in their lives.

They congregate in organizations to perform meaningful work in a community with others of like mind to achieve their own goals and to make a difference in the world or in other peoples' lives. And, they like to feel good about and enjoy the time they spend working in those organizations.

As enlightened leaders, we owe this to all our employees, as well as creating a work environment that nurtures their personal and professional development while they attend to achieving the goals of the organization.

A Positive Influence? Present and Attentive Leaders

This isn't a passive exercise though — if we truly want to bring out the best in the people working with us and for us, we must pay attention to them, their efforts, and the results of their labor.

Enjoyment and engagement in work also depend on how much meaning employees can attribute to their efforts. Leaders who want to help their workers become more engaged and productive should impart some meaning in the work — not just through a mission or vision statement — but by allowing employees to feel a sense of completion and ensuring that a job well done is always acknowledged.

Leaders who are present and attentive are a huge positive influence on employee satisfaction and productivity.

While every employee deserves this attentiveness from their leaders, the best and brightest in our workforce often demand it.

High-potential and skilled knowledge workers want to contribute based on their strengths; be given autonomy over how they do their work, and be convinced rather than controlled. This attitude may not fit well with command-and-control organizational hierarchies, but it's an essential mind-shift for leaders who are serious about attracting and retaining the best talent.

6 Tips to Better Engage High-Potentials

Unfortunately, many employees — and especially the rising stars — have become increasingly disengaged in their work and are actively seeking new employment opportunities, according to a study by the Corporate Leadership Council (CLC).

The study found that 25 percent of employer-identified, high-potential employees plan to leave their current companies within the year. However, the CLC identified six tips leaders can use to identify, re-engage, and more effectively manage high-potential employees:

1. **Stimulate.** Emerging leaders need stimulating work, recognition, and the chance to grow. If not, they can quickly become disengaged.
2. **Test.** Explicitly test candidates for ability, engagement, and aspiration to make sure they're able to handle the tougher roles as their careers progress.
3. **Manage.** Having line managers oversee high-potential employees only limits their access to opportunities and encourages hoarding of talent. Instead, manage these high-potential employees at the corporate level.
4. **Challenge.** High-potential employees need to be in positions where new capabilities can — or must — be acquired.
5. **Recognize.** High-potential employees will be more engaged if they are recognized frequently, so offer them differentiated compensation and recognition.
6. **Engage.** Incorporate high-potential employees into strategic planning. Share future strategies with them and emphasize their role in making them come to fruition.

Although the CLC study focused on high-potential employees, their recommendations are sage advice when dealing with any employee. The bottom line is, don't take your employees for granted. While engagement may be hard to sustain, it's infinitely easier when you nurture, recognize, stretch, and develop your team.

This was originally published on the [OC Tanner blog](#).

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Engaging Middle Managers

By Weng Chio Fan

Employee engagement has been a topic that attracts much attention from organisations and scholars. No one would deny the positive effects that engaged employees bring to organisations, such as increased productivity, satisfaction, commitment and lower intention to quit. While the main focus has been on the front line employee, the engagement of middle manager appears to be a secondary priority.

Why Middle Management Engagement?

We must notice that middle managers are in the key position that helps organisation to achieve its objectives. They facilitate communication between top management and the front line staff. Often, it is through their effective communication that change can be implemented successfully.

Importantly, engagement is contagious. Engaged middle managers often pass on their positive emotions to their subordinates which increases their engagement. In addition, staff who perceive their managers to be putting extra effort and enjoying their work are more likely to imitate their behaviours. Clearly, how engaged your middle managers are will have a huge impact on the engagement of staff and the performance of the organisation.

Practical Ways to Engage Your Middle Managers

Research has shown that there are activities and resources that enhance engagement in middle managers.

Job resources: job resources appear to be a key ingredient that boosts middle manager engagement. Studies have shown that managers who possess a wide range of job resources such as social support, performance feedback, autonomy, learning opportunity, reward and recognition have a higher level of engagement. Interestingly, the resources-engagement relationship seems to be self-reinforcing. That is, engaged middle managers have access to more job resources which, in turn, increases their engagement.

Transformational leadership: transformational leaders encourage and facilitate growth in others. When managers become transformational leaders, they change from the one in charge to the one who helps others to be in charge. Transformational leadership has been found to increase staff engagement. For instance, these leaders formulate a clear vision, develop specific goals for their staff and support them to achieve the goals. These behaviours have been found to enhance staff engagement. This process may also engage the middle managers themselves. It is because engaged staff are more likely to be responsive to their leaders' actions, thereby reinforcing the managers' confidence in their own leadership. The positive feedback from their staff may therefore enhance their engagement. The good news is that transformational leadership behaviours can be learned. Research has found that managers exert more transformational leadership behaviours after training, with the result that employees were then found to be more engaged and exerting greater effort.

Middle managers are at the critical point in the organisation. Neglecting their engagement is certainly not a wise move. The tips here, when execute appropriately, will help turn your managers into engaged leaders which in turn will bring you a more engaged workforce.

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Engaging New Hires

By Weng Chio Fan

The level of engagement employees have is found to be associated with organisational outcomes such as productivity and turnover rate. However, for most organisations, only a small proportion of employees are found to be fully engaged. In other words, there is an engagement gap in many organisations where productivity can be improved if the gap is filled.

To enhance engagement of your employees, the best way is to ensure they are engaged from the very beginning. Surprisingly, most resources have been devoted to improve engagement in employees as general, engaging the new recruit appears to be a topic that has been neglected. It is the goal of this short article to explore ways to boost engagement among the new hires.

The Three Factors for Engagement

The prominent business scholar, William Kahn, identified three factors that determine engagement: meaningfulness, safety and availability.

1. **Meaningfulness:** employees find their jobs meaningful when they feel useful, valuable and not taken for granted in their workplace.
2. **Safety:** employees feel safe in their jobs when they are able to present themselves (e.g. express opinions, resolve a problem using their own ways) without fear of negative consequences.
3. **Availability:** it refers to their beliefs that there are enough resources (physical, psychological and emotional) for them to accomplish their tasks.

So, we can say one is more engaged than another if he finds his job meaningful, feels safe in his job and knows that he has the resources and supports he needs to finish his tasks.

Challenges for New Hires

While the three factors apply to all employees, new staff are often low on the three factors because joining a new organisation is a time that people experience insecurity and uncertainty.

Traditionally, organisations employ orientation programs to help new employees to adjust to their new workplace. However, these programs may not be very useful if improving engagement of new staff is the ultimate goal. It is because the main focus of these programs is to provide new staff with a huge amount of information in regards to the organisation and the job. They provide very limited help for new staff to find meaning, safety and availability in their new jobs.

Four Practical Strategies

To engage the new staff, organisations may consider recruiting socialisation programs which focus on the following four domains.

1. **Task characteristics:** research has shown that employees who were offered information about task characteristics (e.g. task significance, autonomy and performance feedback) were found to be more engaged. In relation to the three determinants of engagement, information about task significance helps employees to find out why their job is meaningful. Moreover, offering employees with autonomy would lead them to feel that the organisation is flexible with job approach and hence makes them feel safe about trying out new approaches in their job. On the other hand, constructive performance feedback can act as a form of resource which employees may use to improve their performance.
2. **Interaction with insiders:** quality interaction with peers, supervisors and senior co-workers of the organisation has been found to be a valuable component that helps new staff to adjust to the new environment. Rewarding work interaction with clients and co-workers allows employees to see their work as meaningful. With trusting and supporting interaction, employees feel safer about their workplace. Importantly, social interaction is a crucial resource which helps new staff to feel that they have got the resources they need to get things done (availability).

In practice, organisations may increase interaction via job rotation, mentoring program and special occasions that are deliberately designed to get new staff to socialise with insiders of the organisation.

3. **Leadership support:** support from management definitely plays a key role in promoting engagement. It usually takes the form of supervisory coaching and supervisory support. Leadership support can also communicate to new employees through performance feedback and the level of autonomy they receive. Giving new staff a certain level of autonomy allows them to try out new things and to learn from mistake without the fear of negative consequences. This also helps them to feel safe about their job. Like mentioned above, leaders can offer constructive feedback which is an important form of organisational resources which increases employees' sense of availability.
4. **Coping skill training:** it is common for new recruits to feel anxious about their jobs. Hence, it is helpful to offer them with training program which teach them specific stress management skills and orientation program which provides information about what is expected of them and what it takes to perform one's work task. These programs are valuable resource that helps them to cope with future job demand and stress.

What Do They Need?

Traditional orientation program often purely focus on providing new staff with a wide range of information. This may be helpful if your goal is simply to make the new employees feel comfortable about their new positions. Yet, to fully engage new employees, leaders need to

ask “what resources do the new employees need so that they can find meaning and safety and feel that they are capable in their work?” A comprehensive socialisation program which contains the four components discussed above should help in engaging new employees.

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I Will Huff and I'll Puff! The Challenge of Re-Engagement!

By Brad Federman

Re-Engagement: Coming Back from a Difficult Time and Culture in an Organization

We have said that engagement begins with the individual, grows among team members, and shapes the future of the organization. However, this is not always a smooth progression. What happens when there is a loss of engagement? The loss may be due to a difficult relationship or event, or the more far-reaching impact of a culture shift in the entire organization.

How do we re-build when there is not only a lack of trust, but a loss of trust? Can the promises that once worked create a sense of confidence among employees who are “once bitten, twice shy”?

There is good news and bad news about re-engagement. To offer the bad news first, regaining trust has special challenges. The process must begin with an understanding of what went wrong, and the dedications to make the necessary changes to be sure it won’t happen again. As in the story of the “three little pigs,” the right materials must be found to make sure the house isn’t *“blown down” each time a storm of controversy arrives at the door.*

The process of identifying the problems and their impact must be sensitive to the fact that different people may have been affected in different ways by the events that created the loss of engagement. Those affected by the problems and those responsible for them must find a way to identify solutions which everyone can accept, in spite of their differences.

It is only as plans to move forward and implement the solutions materialize, that there is the opportunity to re-establish a spirit of engagement. The good news is that as this happens, there is the opportunity to reap the rewards of what has been learned to create a stronger and more “storm proof” environment for the future. Individuals will be able to apply what they have learned about themselves, their team members, and the organization, as they seek to make a greater contribution. Heroes can emerge in this process who had not assumed this role before. Employees can assume a greater commitment to not only create a spirit of engagement, but to recognize its fragility, and their role in building the engagement culture “brick by brick” each day. In this way, employees can see how their contribution is needed more than ever to keep their work environment safe and sound.

As with individuals, fluctuations in engagement in an organization are inevitable. They create difficulties, but also opportunities for insight and growth. They point to weaknesses, and highlight areas of strength. The important thing is to approach them with more engagement and openness, not less, and to build engagement strength through increased resistance. In this way, employees will not to be left with no structure to support them, like the pigs in the woods!

In building your culture of engagement, it is important to discuss in advance what you will do when the wolf comes to the door. What are the values and outcomes you will protect at all cost? How are individuals in your engaged culture empowered to identify and communicate concerns before they increase in size? What resources are dedicated to reviewing the issues of concern and determining what action, if any, should be taken? How will this process be monitored? What result is anticipated, and how will this contribute to the success of the organization and its engagement culture?

Dr. Edward Morler, an organizational psychologist who works with leadership teams, refers to “integration” or “disintegration” in describing individual personality characteristics. His point is that as individuals assume a more “win-win” mentality, they adopt the best characteristics of other personality types. On the other hand, if they are less committed to what is best for others, they may adopt some of the less desirable characteristics of other personality types.

The challenges faced by an organization suffering a loss of engagement present the opportunity for the to move to a more “win-win” environment, adopting new positive characteristics along the way.. It is a process that requires patience and commitment, but is well worth the effort.

What challenges to engagement does your organization face? How are they addressed? In what ways can they help you to become better, and stronger in your commitment to engagement, than before?

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The Difference Between Satisfied, Engaged, Aligned, and Highly Engaged Employees

By Derek Irvine

Don't settle for employee satisfaction. Push for highly aligned and engaged employees who are themselves pushing your company forward.

Let's get one thing clear – we do not want satisfied employees. "Satisfied" implies sated, content. Do we want employees to be content with the current state? No. We want employees to always be pushing the boundaries and striving for the next level.

That's why I get annoyed when people use the words "satisfied" and "engaged" interchangeably when talking about employees. Engaged employees are very different from satisfied employees. Indeed, Timothy Clark outlines these differences extensively in his book *The Employee Engagement Mindset*. In TLNT recently he highlighted in particular 5 ways engaged employees are different (quoting):

1. **Highly engaged employees take primary responsibility for their own engagement.**
2. **Highly engaged employees feel the least entitled.**
3. **Highly engaged employees engage customers.**
4. **Highly engaged employees remain highly engaged almost anywhere.**
5. **Highly engaged employees apply six behavioral drivers.** Individuals who take personal and primary responsibility for their own engagement consistently apply six behavioral drivers: connecting, shaping, learning, stretching, achieving, and contributing.

In other words, highly engaged employee sustain their own engagement. I would argue "satisfied" employees are constantly looking for others to fulfill their requirements for satisfaction.

Engagement Vs. Alignment

I would add one additional hallmark of highly engaged employees to Mr. Clark's list: **Highly engaged employees align their efforts with the company mission, vision and values.**

To me, a hallmark of truly engaged employees is their ability and willingness to give additional discretionary effort on projects or objectives that are meaningful and important to the organization. It's that last point that is a critical link.

George Labovitz and Victor Rosansky, authors of *Rapid Realignment*, see alignment and engagement as two different things entirely, as they explained in this guest post about their book on Dan McCarthy's Great Leadership blog:

"Engaged and aligned are two different things, and they don't always travel together. Research by the Corporate Executive Board has found that 40 percent of "engaged" employees do not align their behavior with organizational goals. Overall, it concludes that only one in 10 employees is both engaged and aligned with strategy. Clearly, many managers are failing to connect people with the strategies they are emotionally prepared to support with their daily work. This represents a huge lost opportunity."

How do connect employees with organizational strategies (many of which shifted thanks to the recession)? You help them understand what those strategies look like in each employee's daily work.

In other words, you make enterprise-wide strategy goals real at the local job level. And you do that by frequent, timely and specific reinforcement of employees who align their efforts with strategic objectives. Social recognition is the most powerful way to accomplish this, as you not only reinforce that message for a particular employee, but you also empower others to see that message and add their own messages of congratulations and understanding of how those contributions made a difference.

Are your employees satisfied, engaged, aligned, or highly engaged *and* aligned?

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Employee Engagement: the More, the Better?

By Weng Chio Fan

Organisations desire engaged workers. These workers are enthusiastic about their job, they are attached to the organisation, they take pride in their work and their work is an important part of themselves. Consequently, they work harder, take initiative, put in the extra effort and energy and go the extra mile to get things done. Intuitively speaking, we can then infer that high employee engagement leads to better performance.

Does it mean that a constantly high level of employee engagement always benefit organisations?

The popularity of engagement comes from the implicit assumption that our behaviours are controlled by our conscious thoughts. Since active engagement implies conscious efforts from the employees, we expect an engaged employee to have outstanding work behaviours. While this is true for some work behaviours (for example, learning new skills and knowledge), we need to notice that most of our day to day behaviours are driven by our unconscious thoughts. It means that people don't always behave based on their conscious thoughts, rather, their behaviours are driven by their automatic reactions towards the environment.

Being "automatic" doesn't mean that we behave irrationally. Our conscious mind has very limited capacity. At any point of time only a certain number of information can be processed by the conscious mind. Unlike the unconscious mind which has access to a wide range of knowledge structures (needs, goals, predispositions and desires), only a small fraction of the structure is brought to awareness at a particular time. This implies that high engagement may not be beneficial for creative work. It is because creativity requires a person to rely on his existing knowledge, skill and experience and a high engagement level may hinder his ability to fully access the information.

Consistent with this idea, research showed that people tend to make better decisions when they relied on their gut feeling than listing and analysing all choices. It suggests that at some points, too much engagement and weighing of pros and cons may not be beneficial for decision making and one can be better off by relying on his gut feeling.

Of course, it doesn't mean that we should ignore all information and rely on our gut to make decisions. Yet, it suggests that a highly sustained level of conscious engagement doesn't always lead to superior work performance. Rather, alternating levels of engagement may be more adaptive.

Ignorance of Negative Emotions

Another issue is that since employee engagement is characterised by positive emotions. It implies negative emotion is of no value and should be overcome. However, we must notice that negative emotions often occur because there are real problems and these reactions direct our attention to the problem. While no one likes to experience negative emotions, nor should they be promoted in organisations, they are nevertheless useful and important signals.

that inform us something is not right. A blind pursue of engagement will simply lead us to ignore the adaptive function of negative emotions.

Other Costs

Engagement doesn't come without cost. Engagement requires conscious effort and energy from the employees. Energy is a limited resource and pushing for higher and higher level of engagement suggests that employees would have less time and energy for their lives outside of work like time for family or personal development which may not be the best for the wellbeing of the employees. Even if they can sustain the high level of engagement, job will become such an important part of their identity that job loss will seem unbearable.

Too Engaged?

From what we have seen, a constantly high level of engagement doesn't always lead to the best performance and a blind pursue of engagement comes with a cost. While I don't deny the positive organisational outcomes that comes with employee engagement, this short article provides another perspective that challenges the common "more=better" mentality about engagement. It is possible that an employee becomes too engaged. Alternatively, allowing engagement to fluctuate over time may be a more realistic and beneficial view about engagement.

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