

## The Power of Employee Engagement

You've probably heard the old joke in which a CEO is asked how many people work in his company and he responds, "About half of them." Not so funny when you look at the following statistics and begin to realize how much time, energy and resources are wasted.

The statistics on workforce engagement are shocking. According to the Gallup Management Journal's semi-annual Employee Engagement Index:

- ***29% of employees are actively engaged in their jobs***
- ***54% are not-engaged***
- ***17% are actively disengaged***

### Why Is Employee Engagement Important?

Engaged workers produce more, make more money for the company, and create emotional engagement and loyal customers. They contribute to good working environments where people are productive, ethical and accountable. They stay with the organization longer and are more committed to quality and growth than are the other two groups of not-engaged and actively disengaged workers. How do they do so?

- ***Employees have a strong relationship with their manager***
- ***They have clear communication from their manager***
- ***They have a clear path set for focusing on what they do best***
- ***They have strong relationships with their coworkers***
- ***They feel a strong commitment enabling them to take risks and stretch for excellence***

Engaged employees tend to get the least amount of focus and attention from managers in part because they're doing what they are needed to do. They set goals, meet and exceed expectations and charge enthusiastically toward the next tough task. The challenge for managers comes when the first signs of disengaging appear from an engaged worker.

The symptoms need to be addressed immediately or else the disconnection is likely to continue. Most of the time this disengagement process can be interrupted by having meaningful conversations that strengthen commitment through relationship.

Great managers don't leave these excellent employees alone. They spend most of their time with the most productive and talented people because they have the most potential.

## How to Keep an Employee Engaged

To grow and sustain employee engagement managers must regularly provide expectations, clarification, and measurement. Usually companies hire people to do three things:

- 1. Achieve the business outcomes of their roles**
- 2. Contribute to creating a productive workplace**
- 3. Drive customer engagement**

A good place to start is with conversations about expectations for every person in a given role. Get the individual to view his or her role from a broader perspective instead of from a narrow task-oriented point of view. Encourage the employee to see how his or her work contributes to the organizational future. Ask, "What are the outcomes you are supposed to achieve? What were you hired to do? How do you contribute to making this a great place to work? Are you creating engaged customers?" The objective is to focus employees on outcomes as well as the steps it takes to get there.

Next, managers can help employees clarify how they can achieve outcomes. Sometimes they can help employees change their roles to better fit their talents. A person who is not adept at written reports and details can collaborate with someone who is. This requires self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses on the part of both the manager and employee and a willingness to be flexible and find solutions. Measurement is crucial to an employee's feeling of success, as long as the measurement focuses on outcomes, not steps. Good measurement includes regular feedback, aligns with outcomes and matches the expectations for the role.

Expectations, clarification and measurement are the keys to helping employees stay in the engaged range, and keeping them involved and committed. Engaged employees need strong relationships and clear communications from their managers. They also need to be stimulated and challenged in their areas of talent and strengths to help them to continue to grow. Effective managers and leaders help the people who work with them to design and own their own goals, targets and milestones. Everyone needs support and help with focus in order to keep the goals aligned with business results. Great managers provide coaching to facilitate progress and build talents into strengths.

## Handling "Not-Engaged" Employees

Efforts to raise levels of engagement are worthwhile for those in the not-engaged range. Not-engaged employees tend to concentrate on tasks rather than the goals and outcomes they are expected to accomplish. They want to be told what to do just so they can do it and say they have finished. They focus on accomplishing a task vs. achieving an outcome. Managers who only provide tasks to an employee reinforce not-engaged behaviors and actually move 180 degrees away from engaging the heart, mind, and soul of that person.

Employees who are not-engaged tend to feel their contributions are being overlooked, and their potential is not being tapped. They often feel this way because they don't have productive relationships with their managers or with their coworkers.

The way to get people to become a part of an organization is through relationships. Employees who feel disconnected emotionally from their coworkers and supervisor do not feel committed to their work. They hang back and do the minimum because they don't believe anyone cares.

These employees "lower the bar" for themselves by doing the least amount of work necessary. Managers need to demonstrate a sense of really caring about employees and what's important to them. Managers can help employees refocus on the demands of their roles and on the skills, knowledge, and talents they bring to their jobs. The manager who takes the time to have a dialogue about an employee's strengths and how these can make a difference forges essential ties and connections that lead to employee commitment.

## Managing "Actively Disengaged" Employees

Too often people have to work with others who have become disenchanting and actively disengaged. Actively disengaged employees aren't just unhappy. They act out their discontent and sow seeds of negativity at every opportunity. They undermine the work of others. They are not just indifferent to company goals and mission; they express mistrust and outright animosity. As workers increasingly rely on each other to generate products and services, the problems and tensions that are fostered by actively disengaged workers can cause great damage to an organization's functioning.

The Gallup Organization estimates that there are 22 million actively disengaged employees that cost the American economy up to \$350 billion per year in lost productivity, including absence, illness and other problems that result when workers are unhappy at work. A good manager will identify those who are disengaged and explore the reasons behind the disconnect to determine if coaching or other interventions are appropriate. In some cases, people will respond favorably to opportunities to reconnect and rekindle their interest and enthusiasm for their jobs. Most people search for ways to make their lives and work meaningful and only disengage when they feel hopeless. Those who are actively disengaged may thrive on the negativity and refuse to become part of any solution, preferring to perpetuate problems. If they repeatedly refuse opportunities to engage again, terminating their employment should be seriously considered in order to avoid further damage to staff morale and organizational progress.

### LEADERSHIP ACTIONS: What Employees Want From a Manager

For great managers, the path toward engaging employees and keeping them engaged begins with asking them what they want and what is important in order to be effective in their roles. Here is a summary of what workers responding to the a Gallup survey said they what they want from their managers;

- Focus me
- Know me
- Care about me
- Hear me
- Help me feel proud
- Help me review my contributions
- Equip me
- Help me see my value
- Help me grow
- Help me see my importance
- Help me build mutual trust
- Challenge me

### How do you keep your employees engaged?

- Provide feedback and guidance
- Make real time to discuss problems
- Seek ideas and input from everyone
- Provide the resources to solve problems
- Give real recognition and/or reward
- Provide opportunities for development
- Keep the pressure to perform realistic
- Provide opportunities for social interaction
- Train people how to resolve interpersonal conflicts
- Promote joy and appropriate humor within the office
- Be flexible; help people to actively balance work and home responsibilities

"Great organizations achieve sustainable growth and profits because they do what other organizations don't: **they maximize the innate, individual talents of their employees to connect with customers.** They know that tapping the resources of humans is the only remaining area where significant improvements can--and do--lead to an unlimited source of competitive advantages." Curt Coffman, Gabriel Gonzalez-Molina, in Follow this Path 2002.