



The Real World

Are You Engaging?

Are you engaging? I know that is an unusual question to begin a business column. But in this case I am not referring to purely your personal style. I am referring to how well you engage everyone who works in your organization.

Employee engagement doesn't have to be relegated to some soft-headed, everybody-feel-good-and-sing-Kumbaya moments. It can deliver pragmatic outcomes that most execs would die for.

Ben Zander, conductor of Boston Philharmonic Orchestra, speaks about the word symphony, which is derived from Greek *συμφωνία*, meaning agreement or concord of sound. He refers to it as sounding together. Think about it. This means there is no more of the normal BS and distraction associated with "them and us" or "we and they" or "my area and your area." It is just "us."

Sounding together is a very powerful notion because without it, regardless of the talent of the players involved, the result is cacophony.

Scary statistics

This lack of sounding together may result in American businesses only operating at one-third of their true capacity due to employee disengagement occurring within the workplace.

Gallup and Harris polls involving more than 10,000 employees across various industries indicate some potentially frightening findings. When reviewing the following points, consider the impact and implications on your organization's top- and bottom-line financial performance, your ability to manage the business, your ability to achieve positive customer loyalty metrics and marketshare growth, and your ability to optimize the employee strengths in your organization:

- Only 15% of the employees could identify the company's most important goals.
- 51% were unsure of how they were expected to help the company achieve goals.
- Only 49% of all available work time is dedicated to companies' most important goals.
- 53% of American employees are unhappy with their jobs.
- Only 29% of employees indicated they are fully engaged in their work.
- 55% of employees described symptoms that point out they are disengaged from their work.
- 16% of those surveyed indicated they are actively disengaged from their work.

Look closely. Only 29% of employees are truly engaged! That is the group that believes in the company and wants to make things better. They clearly understand the business and how their work fits into the big picture. These employees are respectful of (and helpful to) team members and others, find opportunities to stay current in their field of expertise, and are willing to go the extra mile.

In contrast, disengaged employees are not risk takers nor committed to the company. They lack a sense of achievement in their work and advancement in their role is not important—they are just doing enough to keep their job.

Actively disengaged employees are unhappy at work and act out the unhappiness. They like to be part of the problem and find it almost impossible to become part of the solution. They spread discontent and consistently fall short of meeting performance expectations. Disengaged employees cause a significant loss in effectiveness and productivity. For example, if you have 1,000 employees with an average salary/benefits of \$35,000, that adds up to \$35

million per year. If your firm's number falls somewhere between 33% and 71% for those that are not delivering a full hour of work for a full hour of pay, you are squandering somewhere between \$10 million and \$20.5 million in wages every year. That number does not even take into consideration how the behavior of those employees may have negatively affected the servicing of internal and external customers.

Without a doubt, every organization wants high performers who are talented, understand the business model and goals, perform above expectations, and model behaviors that influence others. These performers maximize resources through creative insights—far greater than others—and produce high levels of results. Low-performing employees who are actively disengaged abuse systems, disrupt interactions, and often become an obstacle to organizational effectiveness.

I believe an engaged workplace culture can be created and sustained when you consciously attract, hire, support, and develop people who look forward to using their collective talents, attitudes, habits, skills, and knowledge to benefit your internal and external customers.

This involves everything from setting clear direction and living your espoused values to invigorating organizational capability and capacity because you have truly mobilized individual commitment. For it to be real, it must be something that is as natural a part of your operation as breathing is to a human being.

So let me ask you again, are you engaging?

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