

Low Engagement?

Invest more in your people.



by Christopher Rice

EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT reflects each individual's unique relationship with his or her work.

We studied more than 7,500 survey responses and conducted interviews with 40 HR and line managers to find that fewer than one in three workers are fully engaged. Moreover, in North America 19 percent are completely disengaged, and another 13 percent are disillusioned, at risk for disengaged.

We see a strong correlation between engagement and retention. We find that 85 percent of engaged employees plan to stay with their company, compared to 27 percent of disengaged employees. Engaged employees appear to stay for what they give (they like the work that they do), while disengaged employees stay for what they get (favorable job conditions, advancement, growth, or job security). That's not a winning business relationship.

The best organizations make engagement an ongoing priority, taking a multi-faceted approach to address problem areas and improve engagement. Their best practices include:

Maximize managers. Ensure that managers are engaged and understand how to help their team members picture what full engagement looks like. Hold them accountable for the coaching and development of their people. Weed out bad managers.

Align, align, align. Make sure people see the big picture and how they can contribute to the organization's success. Start at the top by aligning the executive team, then communicate clearly and tirelessly. Your performance management system can help.

Redefine career. Provide employees with a compelling picture of what "career" means in your organization. Help them clarify what they want, provide them with tools and support, focus on development and opportunities to leverage unique skills through projects, not necessarily promotions. Employees want assurance of a future.

Pay attention to culture. Work with management to build a values-driven culture and invest in managers to sup-

port and sustain it. Ensure that systems and processes work in favor of—not in contradiction to—the aspired culture.

Survey less, act more. Develop a measurement strategy that provides actionable insights. Avoid the analysis-paralysis trap and hold all leaders accountable for increasing engagement.

Engage Your Team

Leaders are vital in employee engagement. Like a catalyst that enables two chemicals in a beaker to combine what would not otherwise mix, you can smooth the way for mutually beneficial connections between individual employees (on their personal paths for great "work") and your organization (with ambitious strategies that need execution). To succeed, you need to:

Reflect and recharge. How engaged are you? You can't help your team if



you're miserable or out of control. If you're not engaged, think about why you took your job. Reconnect with that passion. If you are engaged, how can you stay there—and "infect" others?

Hire engage-able team members. Select people who can succeed in your environment. Do candidates have the right skills, interests, and experience? Cultural fit? Instead of training square pegs to fit a round hole, hire round pegs.

Earn trust daily. Trust provides the foundation for your effectiveness as a leader. To build it, you need to reveal who you are as a person. When your employees look at you, do they know what's beneath the surface?

Stress employee ownership. You can't create an engaged team if your members don't have visions of personal success. Remind them that they are ultimately responsible for their satisfaction and career. Be available to provide guidance and remove barriers.

Remind people of your destination.

If you're not clear on your strategy, demand answers. Help your team understand the direction you're moving toward and their role in it. Help them prioritize the myriad tasks they face each day to deliver desired results.

See feedback as a gift. People want and deserve information that can help them achieve their goals. Let them know what they do well so they can keep doing those things with confidence. Suggest course corrections to help them be efficient and enjoy their work more.

Talk more and listen even more. Too often communication is one-way. Conversation is about dialogue. It drives clarity. It is the most effective vehicle for providing performance feedback and generating new ideas for increasing business results and personal job satisfaction. It helps prevent misunderstandings and builds trust.

Match projects, passion, and proficiency. Every person comes into work with different values, talents, and goals, which they seek to satisfy on the job. They don't necessarily want a lofty title or a higher salary. If you can help them connect what's important to them with what's important to the organization, you can make a positive impact on their job satisfaction, commitment, and contribution.

Get to know team members. You don't need to be their friend. You do need to know what makes them tick. Who shows signs of being disconnected or burning out? What motivates your most engaged employees? Pay attention. Ask questions. What's preventing people from attaining maximum satisfaction and contribution in their jobs?

Tailor your coaching strategies. Invest in moderately engaged team members, providing feedback, resources, and chances to excel. Redirect the efforts of those who appear disconnected. Help new hires ramp up their productivity and enthusiasm by clarifying priorities and what they need to do to succeed. Help those who are burning out to clarify what success looks like to them. Size up your disengaged, coaching some out. Spell out expectations with the rest; take stock of their interests and talents, and enable them to do work that matters to them.

Don't take your engaged employees for granted. Full engagement is hard to sustain. Nurture them, recognize them, stretch them, and develop them. **LE**

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ACTION: Lead better to engage more.