



THE HIDDEN VALUE

Why Spirituality in an Organization is Strategically Valuable

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Active employee engagement in an organization is a key component to driving organizational performance and achieving success. Many employees struggle daily with staying connected to their work and an organization's goals. Some have given up and are at best dead weight and at worst organizational terrorists focused on anything but achieving success for the organization. Connecting employees to something greater than themselves and even the overall organization can play a big part in keeping employees actively engaged in their work and the organization's success. Spirituality can ground an employee and provide this connection to their work and role in the overall organization. It can drive individual performance and collective organizational success. Spirituality in an organization is immensely valuable to an organization in providing meaning and purpose to work and should not be overlooked or trivialized to a day of the week.

THE DISENGAGED EMPLOYEE

Gallup has been actively tracking the "disengaged middle" for a number of years and has found that about 50% of employees are not engaged in their jobs or emotionally disconnected from their workplace and are, therefore, more likely to be less productive. This same index tracks those that are actively engaged at about 30%. And most alarming it finds that about 20% of workers are actively "disengaged" and detrimental to the productivity of an organization (Gallup

2011). Additionally, this study has identified a strong connection between overall performance and an employee's engagement. To put this in perspective, out of a ten-person crew charged with rowing a boat across a lake, three persons are rowing in the direction of desired travel, five persons are just sitting there and adding weight to the boat, and two persons are rowing in the opposite direction. No wonder it is often felt that nothing ever gets done at work!

With 70% of employees disengaged to some degree or another, performance not only suffers, but the "engaged" employees may begin to lose heart and connection with the vision of the organization. If this happens, performance suffers even more and the organization will eventually fail.

HAVING THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE ON WORK

Tim Keller in his book, *Every Good Endeavor*, recounts the story of J.R.R. Tolkien struggling to complete his life's work and masterpiece – *The Lord of the Rings*. World War II had begun and Tolkien struggled with the darkness brought by this new war and his ever-increasing age. He was frustrated that he may not finish his work or that he would produce an insufficient product. He, like many organizations, was struggling with internal morale issues and external, marketplace situations that he could not control. Organizations faced with both internal and external problems often cause employees who may have been engaged and productive to lose heart and move to the disengaged middle or worse. Tolkien had run out of "mental energy and invention." Once an engaged "employee" with his work, he was now becoming trapped within his own dying organization. His performance towards completing his work was terrible.

But Tolkien did not completely give up because he had something greater that grounded him to his work and a friend, named C.S. Lewis, which refocused him on a purpose. He awoke to a vision and wrote a story entitled "Leaf by Niggle." It was about painter named Niggle charged with painting a tree. However, Niggle, try as he may, could only produce a leaf or two and never the whole tree. Even his name – Niggle – means "to work in a fiddling or ineffective way...to spend time unnecessarily on petty details." Niggle thought he was a failure for not completing the painting of a tree. Not until Niggle died and got to heaven did he see how beautiful his work

had been and how his painted few leafs hung beautifully for all to see on a magnificent tree. Tolkien was Niggle and, as he wrote about himself, he recognized his own shortcomings towards work. He overcame his temporary lapse of vision and became engaged again to complete his life's masterpiece.

Most employees do not take a job at an organization to not be engaged. However, problems develop that grind on employees and impact their performance. If you think about it, everyone is a Niggle. We all envision accomplishing more than what we do and when we do not produce the results we want we become frustrated and disengaged and our performance suffers. When combined with other Niggles, we hurt the overall performance of our organization and we fail as individuals and our organization fails.

So what grounded Tolkien and motivated him to successfully complete his work and similarly what can ground our employees to be engaged in our organization's work?

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN AN ORGANIZATION

Simply put, it is hard to motivate and keep an employee engaged who labors in vain. An employee that cannot see the fruit of their labor or understand their contribution to an organization is almost impossible to motivate and keep connected. Performance will suffer. We need to focus employees on their work by keeping their eyes fixed on the Lord. Giving an employee an eternal perspective will allow them to find meaning in what God has called them to do. An eternal and spiritual perspective ends the labor of vain and ignites invention, energy, and execution like no other performance improvement tool can. Read the following scripture in isolation.

“So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome

labor under the sun. For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill and, then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it..." Ecclesiastes 2:17-21a (NIV)

Two things are apparent: he hates life and he hates his work especially work under the sun! This is definitely a disengaged worker with no eternal perspective and definitely lacking a spiritual connection. An organization filled with this type of employee whom lacks a spiritual connection is destined for failure.

Now read the following scripture.

"Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." 1 Corinthians 15:58 (NIV)

A clear spiritual connection to the Lord provides meaning and purpose to the employee so that they no longer view their work in vain. No longer is the focus work by itself (which is meaningless), but the focus is on a spiritual connection to the Lord.

As leaders, we are challenged to motivate and to keep our employees engaged in their work. We are to cast a vision that will challenge our employees and keep them engaged in their daily tasks while focused on the Lord that will collectively benefit the organization. By incorporating spirituality into our organizational plan, we unlock the hidden value that will drive performance within our organization. If our competition is the norm with a 70% employee disengagement and we are operating significantly below with most of our employees engaged, then we will be first to the market, with better products and services, and with a clearer path to success.

This is not some abstract idea or business fad that will provide a spark, but a sustained performance improvement. Unlocking the spiritual connection for our employees will drive performance now and tomorrow. It will enable our organization to continually transform itself within the marketplace to sustain growth and performance.

Unleashing spirituality in our organization is nothing short of a strategic advantage in combating employee disengagement and increasing organizational performance. It will connect our employees and empower our organization to produce its own masterpieces.

REFERENCES

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