

Your Employees' Level of Engagement

By Aubrey Daniels October 4, 2011

It has been proven time and again that there is only one way to create engagement, and that is by and through positive reinforcement. As with most things in business, pure engagement is a leadership issue. It cannot be mandated; it must be done willingly. Leadership must be focused on creating a workplace where every employee advances the organizational mission every day.

According to Scarlett Surveys International, "Employee Engagement is a measurable degree of an employee's positive or negative emotional attachment to their job, colleagues and organization which profoundly influences their willingness to learn and perform at work." I have defined it more simply: Employee engagement is doing that which needs to be done above and beyond that which is required in the job. In other words, it is completely voluntary. I call it discretionary effort.

I was recently asked if it was possible to motivate someone who said she was only working because she had to help supplement her household income. She said her children were the focus of her life and resented the fact that work took her away from them. Her supervisor asked if it was possible to change her attitude toward her work. "Of course," I replied.

To do that, the supervisor should be alert to recognize any and every work accomplishment. She has left a highly reinforcing home environment with her children, so it is natural that she would enter the workplace reluctantly and somewhat resentfully. However, I am sure she is not so one-dimensional that her only re-inforcer is getting money so that she can eventually quit. As important as money is at present, it is unlikely to cause her to have a sense of fulfillment for the time she spends at work. She has many re-inforcers that can be delivered by her supervisor and her co-workers that will increase her engagement. She most certainly likes to be recognized for her work accomplishments; to be thanked for her efforts and contributions to the work of others. She no doubt likes to be asked about the children, their activities and accomplishments. Time spent focusing on work accomplishments will reduce the amount of time she has to talk about how she hates the workplace and how she misses her children, as this behavior

is incompatible with engagement. Yes, it is quite possible that she can become fully engaged at work. However, it will be difficult for the supervisor and co-workers to help her achieve that status if they are not fully engaged. That points to the fact that engagement is a leadership issue.

It is not uncommon in today's business environment, to find organizations where someone is in charge of engagement as though you could assign it or delegate it. You cannot create a culture of engagement through an organizational chart. Where you see this, you know senior leadership doesn't understand what is required to create an environment where all employees are motivated to do their best every day. They should instead focus on building positive reinforcement into the workplace, from the top down. Employees who are reinforced, reinforce others more often. When it starts at the top, it multiplies as it flows to the front line. Therefore, if it doesn't occur at the top, it limits what will occur in the rest of the organization. All leaders want an engaged workplace, and many think they have one when they don't. So how do you know where your employees stand on engagement? Here are five sure-tell ways of knowing.

1. They willingly lend a hand to co-workers, even when they aren't asked.
2. They aren't *clock watchers*; they often show up early or even stay late.
3. They openly offer ideas and solutions for improvements.
4. They acknowledge the accomplishments of others and are pleased with their success.
5. They quickly volunteer to lead or assist in implementing initiatives outside their immediate work area.

While these five indicators are not all that one might come up with, they do constitute a reliable checklist against which organizations can evaluate their attempts to create an engaged workplace. It is important, since those who do are those who will win.