

## **Taking a Chapter from the Original Caring Profession: The American Farmer-Rancher**



*By Dr. Chance Eaton*

I was not the typical farm and ranch kid to say the least. While the next generation of farmers and ranchers were dreaming of the day they would take over their parents' role as agriculture managers, I was focused on the intra and interpersonal human dynamics, the nature-human interaction, and the existential frameworks of freedom, responsibility, meaning, and death. As a 5th generation farmer with a homesteading history back to the early 1900s, I just assumed that one day I would probably fall in the footsteps of my father and his father before him. So I attended finance and agri-business schooling, including an MBA, so that I could contribute to the family's long and rich heritage.

I was stuck between two worlds; one that was learning how to contribute to the next generation of farming and ranching, and one that was contemplating psychology and philosophy. This contradiction came to a head on my 26th birthday, when I decided to leave and explore myself and my world. I went on to travel the globe, study and work in the fields of psychology, education,

and organizational development. Today when I reflect back on my upbringing as a farmer and rancher, combined with my professional work experience in the field of organizational psychology, I am blessed to discover a convergence of my two worlds. That union is simply care.

The story of the farmer and rancher is one that cares about their history of how they came out west and settled on nothing but raw land and a dream. Their story is one that cares for their land as the original environmentalist that tends to the land so that it can be bountiful for current and future years crops and grazing. Their story is one that cares about building character; including honesty, responsibility, initiative, accountability, and integrity. Their story is one that cares about their future and building an infrastructure that will support future generations of farmers and ranchers.

As I reflect on my fortunate upbringing, what fascinates me is that this notion of care is also what makes all great companies great – they fundamentally care about what they do and how they do it. A great place to



see how care translates into today's company culture is by looking at the construct of work engagement. By definition, work engagement is defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli, Salanova, Gonzalez-Roma, & Baker, 2002, p. 74). Engagement is about bringing the best of yourself to the situation every day physically, emotionally, and mentally. For perspective, think of engagement as the polar opposite of burn-out. The burned out employee is one that is physically exhausted, cynical, and out of focus. When research firm Gallup surveying over 2,500 business units (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002), they found that employee engagement correlated at a statistically significant level to important organizations metrics, including productivity, profitability, employee retention, and customer satisfaction. Further, Gallup (2012) notes that over 70% of the country's employees are disengaged from work, and costing the U.S. economy an estimated \$450 billion to \$550 billion annually. Of the most engaged organizations, Gallup found that they generate the most innovative ideas, create the most of new customers, and have the most entrepreneurial energy. The engaged employee goes the extra mile due to their strong emotional connection to the organization.



When Gallup broke down their data into underlying factors, they found that common work behaviors including: (a) hiring for fit, (b) managing for expectations, (c) providing performance feedback, (d) holding team members accountable for performance, and (e) having the right resources to get the job done correctly. In summary, these behaviors demonstrate care for work performance and outcomes.

In my opinion, what is even more interesting is that their research also indicated that care at the human

level contributed to the important business metrics of profitability, productivity, customer satisfaction, safety, and retention. These factors included (a) providing recognition or praise for good work, (b) allowing and promoting for personal relationships to flourish in the work place, (c) listening and valuing the opinions of team members, (d) coaching and encouraging employee's development around strength areas, (e) feeling cared for as a person, and (f) feeling a sense of mission and purpose to their work.

Great companies are great because they care not only about what they do and how they do it; they care for and appreciate how the people contribute to their service, their future, and their cause. This sounds a lot like what I witnessed in the story of the farmer and rancher. Though they didn't rely on utilizing the latest in engagement research, they innately practiced these same behaviors of attitudes of caring for their business, caring for their purpose, and caring for their loved ones in this generation and the next. They learned this from their fathers and their fathers before them, not from the latest research on building productive and engaged team.

Care is what makes companies great. If you (a) don't care for what you do and how you do it, (b) you don't care for the people that give their blood, sweat, and tears to the cause, and (c) and don't demonstrate character in who you are and what you stand for, you are standing on weak foundations that won't last through the challenges that life brings us.

So the next time you are visiting your company culture, and working to understand what it takes for your business to thrive, take a chapter from the original caring professional, the American farmer and rancher.

*Dr. Chance Eaton has over a decade's worth of experience working in the field of Education & Organizational Development. Due to his unique educational and work experiences in finance, psychology, leadership & management, education, noetic sciences, and agriculture, Dr. Eaton provides his clients with relevant business solutions grounded in theory and research. To learn more about Dr. Eaton's services, please visit [www.HRSolutionsInternational.com](http://www.HRSolutionsInternational.com).*

