



Employee Engagement: Running at 33% People Power

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The Statistics on Workforce Engagement Are Shocking.

According to research, only 29 percent of employees are motivated and energized. What, then, is happening to the other two-thirds of the people working in organizations?

This is an even worse scenario than the old joke in which a manager is asked how many people work in his company and he responds, "About half of them."

Measuring Employee Engagement

Since 1997 the Gallup Organization has surveyed approximately 3 million employees in three hundred thousand work units within corporations. The analyses of survey results show that those companies with high scores experience lower costs, higher sales growth, better productivity and better customer loyalty.

The *Gallup Management Journal's* semi-annual Employee Engagement Index puts the current percentage of truly "engaged" employees at *29 percent*. A majority of workers, *54 percent*, fall into the "not engaged" category, while *17 percent* are "actively disengaged."

Here is how the Gallup Organization further defines these three types of employees:

1. **(29%) Engaged** employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.
2. **(54%) Not-engaged** employees are essentially "checked out." They're sleepwalking through their workday, putting in time—but not energy or passion—for their work.
3. **(17%) Actively disengaged** employees aren't just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.

Why Are All These People Losing Their Enthusiasm and Commitment?

Almost everyone joins an organization with engagement. What is it that extinguishes that initial engagement after the first few years of working in an organization? Here are some of the causes:

- Little or no feedback or guidance from their manager
- Lack of opportunity to discuss problems
- Lack of opportunity to provide ideas and input
- Lack of resources to solve problems or to do a job well
- Little or no reward or recognition
- Little opportunity to develop one's potential
- Interpersonal conflicts left unresolved
- Little joy or humor except for office gossip and cynicism

Handling “Not-engaged” Employees

Efforts to raise levels of engagement are critical for those in the *not-engaged* range. Not engaged employees concentrate on tasks rather than the actual goal they are supposed to accomplish. They want to be told what to do just so they can do it and say they have finished. Employees who are not engaged tend to feel their contributions are being overlooked, and their potential is not being tapped. They don't give extra effort to do what is needed to meet commitments. They often feel this way because they don't have productive relationships.

Productive Relationships

The way to get people to become a part of an organization is through productive relationships with their manager and with their coworkers. Gallup's research indicates that employees don't leave companies; they leave managers. The impact the manager has in today's workplace can be either very valuable or very costly to the organization and the people who work there.

Great managers realize that the only way they can manage is through relationships. The old approach to managing challenges with an employee is to try to “convince” the employee to see a problem in the manager's way and then act as the manager would act.

This approach almost never works. Great managers use a caring approach instead. They realize that the level of trust between a manager and employee will determine how that employee deals with problems. So great managers stay close to every individual on their teams, and they manage through those relationships.

At some point in every employee's career, a serious problem will arise. Great managers use these moments to build relationship. They believe that they can use these critical challenges with employees to help clarify their focus, their impact, or their possibilities. The caring relationship with each employee enables great managers to use those moments to provide constructive direction to that employee.

Expectations, Clarification and Measurement

Managers must also provide *expectations, clarification, and measurement*. Usually companies hire people to do three things:

1. Achieve the business outcomes of their roles
2. Contribute to creating a productive workplace
3. Drive customer engagement

A good place to start is with conversations about *expectations* regarding the responsibilities of the person in a given role. Get the individual to view his or her role from a broader perspective instead of from a narrow task-oriented point of view. Encourage the employee to see how his or her work contributes to the organizational future. Ask, "What are the outcomes you are supposed to achieve? What were you hired to do? How do you contribute to making this a great place to work? Are you creating engaged customers?" The objective is to refocus employees away from steps and toward outcomes.

Next, managers help employees *clarify* how they can achieve outcomes. This does not mean micromanaging by telling the person how to do their tasks. Great managers provide their team members the freedom to act. They define the right outcomes, then step aside and let each employee find her own way toward meeting those expectations. They encourage and support initiative and risk taking. . They set boundaries with a vision, work group norms and ground rules.

This doesn't mean that the manager is aloof or absent. Effective managers are actively engaged with their work units. They help the people who work with them to design and own their own goals, targets and milestones. Everyone needs support and help with focus in order to keep the goals aligned with business results. Great managers provide coaching. Sometimes they can help employees change their roles to better fit their talents. A person who is not adept at written reports and details can collaborate with someone who is. This requires self-awareness of strengths and weaknesses on the part of both the manager and employee and a willingness to be flexible and find solutions.

Measurement is crucial to an employee's feeling of success, as long as the measurement focuses on outcomes, not steps. The prerequisite for good measurement is a set of performance standards that target excellence. These standards also need to encourage performance improvement from each person over time. And finally for measurement to impact performance there need to be rewards that are allocated on the basis of performance. Good measurement aligns with outcomes and matches the expectations for the role.

What About the Engaged Employees?

Engaged workers produce more, make more money for the company, and create emotional engagement and loyal customers. They contribute to good working environments where people are productive, ethical and accountable. They stay with the organization longer and are more committed to quality and growth than are the other two groups of not-engaged and actively disengaged workers.

- ✓ Employees must have a strong relationship with their manager
- ✓ They must have clear communication from their manager
- ✓ They need a clear path set for concentrating on what they do best
- ✓ They need strong relationships with their coworkers
- ✓ They must feel a strong commitment with their coworkers so that they take risks and stretch for excellence

Engaged employees tend to get the least amount of focus and attention from managers, in part because they're doing what they are needed to do. They set goals, meet and exceed expectations and charge enthusiastically toward the next tough task.

Great managers don't leave these excellent employees alone. They spend most of their time with the most productive and talented people because they have the most potential.

The challenge for managers comes when the first signs of disengaging appear from an engaged worker. The symptoms need to be addressed immediately or else the disconnection is most likely to continue. The key to interrupting this disengagement process is to have meaningful conversations. These conversations can strengthen the person's commitment by building the relationship with the manager and coworkers.



What Employees Want a Manager to Do

For great managers, the path toward engaging employees and keeping them engaged begins with asking them *what they want* and *what is important* in order to be effective in their roles. Here is a summary of what workers responding to the Gallup survey say they want from their managers:

Focus me	Equip me
Know me	Help me see my value
Care about me	Help me grow
Hear me	Help me see my importance
Help me feel proud	Help me build mutual trust
Help me review my contributions	Challenge me

A Final Note

Relationships, expectations, clarification and measurement are the keys to helping employees move into and stay in the engaged range, and to keeping them involved and committed. Commitment is required before people are willing to stretch beyond their normal limits and give their best. Next month we'll look more specifically at the key workplace or climate variables that influence employee motivation. And we'll examine the impact of a manager's style on these climate variables.

Whenever you would like to explore how you can more effectively engage your employees and achieve the results you've always wanted as a leader, please give me a call at 650-856-1752 or email me at cronkite@dirigoconsulting.com.