Employee Engagement:

The Management Factor Keeping Employees Invested, Productive And Working For You

disengagement (n.) – the act of releasing from an attachment or connection

When it comes to your company's success, you're only as good as your employees. But when your employees are disengaged – just "doing time" on the job to collect a paycheck – they aren't driven to help your company achieve its objectives.

Because frankly, they just don't care.

Disengagement: More Than Apathy

Disengaged employees are more than just apathetic. They're dispirited, disconnected and discontented, and can easily derail organizational goals. According to Gallup research:

- disengaged employees' low productivity erodes a company's bottom line;

- their negative attitudes detrimentally affect morale organization-wide;

- within the U.S. workforce alone, employee disengagement costs an estimated $300 billion.

So how do you prevent tuned-out employees from undermining your company's success?

By keeping your workforce engaged.

Engaged Employees

When employees are engaged, they're happy, productive, motivated, loyal and committed to your company's success. Simply put, *they care.*

But while the concept sounds simple, keeping employees actively engaged is no small task. This e-book is designed to help by:

- reviewing the common managerial pitfalls that lead to disengagement, and

- detailing steps you can take to re-engage your staff.

Managerial Mistakes that Lead to Disengagement

So how do employees wind up so disconnected and indifferent? While it's tempting to point fingers at the offending workers, research has shown that managers' workforce alienating behaviors are often the culprit. Among the most common missteps are:
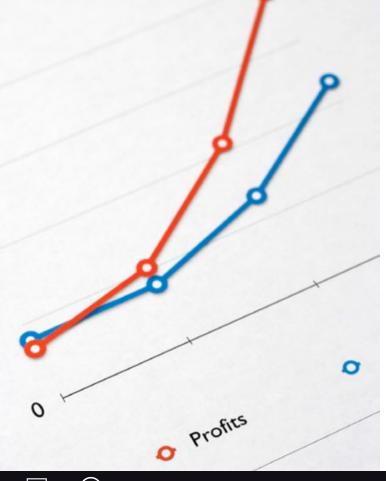
- *Needing to win at all costs.* You know the type – the boss who has to establish his authority in every discussion and win every argument. For some managers, the same drive that fuels achievement can also alienate employees and erode business relationships. If this need to "win" comes at such a high price, is it really worth it?

- *Adding too much "value."* Smart, experienced managers often want to "tweak" employees' suggestions to improve them. But while the manager's "tweak" may increase the value of a subordinate's idea by 5%, it probably will decrease the employee's loyalty by 50% – because now the idea is the manager's, not the employee's. Again, as a manager, you need to discern when the net value of your actions is positive – and when it's not.

- *"Let me explain why that won't work."* The manager who regularly uses this response may *think* he demonstrates superiority by shooting down an employee's perceptions. But over time, this "wet blanket" position systematically destroys employee motivation, leading to avoidance and disengagement.

- *"Do as I say, not as I do."* Often managers themselves don't make engagement a priority. If they won't spend the time, neither will their employees. True commitment to company success does not stem solely from specific programs or practices. It comes from managers' underlying values and behaviors. "Engaged" is something managers are, which then drives what they do. Their actions consequently set the stage for employee engagement.

- ***Rewarding poor performers.*** Managers are often tempted to give everyone an annual raise, regardless of performance. But in a misplaced attempt to acknowledge everyone's contributions, managers who reward poor performance run the risk of disengaging their best talent.

- ***Not listening.*** While not as overtly rude as sarcasm, yelling or other abusive behavior, not listening still conveys both personal and professional disrespect. When a manager habitually ignores his subordinates, he fosters a listless, disinterested, "Yeah, whatever…" work environment – and may not hear about real problems until they blow up.

- ***Overlooking questionable behavior.*** At one time or another, most people have told an off-color joke or forwarded an e-mail that could be construed as offensive in the workplace. Unfortunately, even seemingly innocuous actions such as these contribute to a "hostile environment" – one of the defining traits for harassment. When a manager overlooks this type of behavior at work, he sets the stage for alienation (or even worse) down the road.

- ***Failing to express gratitude.*** Not saying "Thank you" or expressing appreciation is a big destroyer of motivation. Because, obviously, nobody wants to be taken for granted. So if a manager conveys the attitude that he doesn't care about employee contributions, he should not expect employees to care about contributing to the company's success.

The Value of Engaged Employees

Fully engaged employees are invaluable, because they truly care about helping your organization succeed. Compared to their apathetic counterparts, they are:

- more productive and profitable

- more customer-focused

- more deeply committed to helping achieve company objectives

- safer on the job

- and more likely to withstand temptations to leave your company.

In fact, in a recent Gallup poll of more than 125 organizations, engaged companies were proven to have 2.6 times the earnings per share (EPS) growth rate compared to organizations with lower engagement in their same industry.

But how do you create engaged employees?

Creating Engaged Employees

Start by taking a look at your own behavior. As a manager, what you do (and how you do it) has a direct impact on whether or not your employees will feel loyal toward both you and your company. Use these suggestions to foster an engaged work environment, and create inspired, dedicated employees who will help your company thrive:

- *Make yourself accountable.* First and foremost, you must take personal responsibility for increasing employee engagement. Start by meeting with other key managers to identify problem areas and outline strategies for improving morale. Once you've created your game plan, include a process to review progress and ensure accountability.

- *Demonstrate integrity in your actions and beliefs.* Make the commitment to be an honest and trustworthy manager, especially in difficult situations where it would be easier to blame someone else or deny involvement. If you make a mistake and take responsibility for it, you'll gain employees' respect, trust and loyalty.

- *Show willingness to protect your employees.* When an employee makes a mistake or shows error in judgment, help him save face. Find a way to remedy the situation in a way that's not demeaning, but rather helps the employee learn what the problem was and how to correct it in the future.

- **Focus on developing talent.** Use a variety of experiences – special projects, work teams, action learning and position changes – to grow the capabilities of your employees. This type of continuous talent development is incredibly engaging, because it demonstrates through action that you value employees and want to help them achieve a higher level of success.

- **Make employees feel included.** Show employees how their contributions impact the company as a whole. Because the more an employee believes his work makes a difference, and understands how his role fits into the "big picture," the more engaged he will be.

- **Use constructive feedback and positive reinforcement.** Listen and act on the ideas your employees bring to you. Support their creativity and build morale by encouraging their input – and if an employee's suggestion can't be used, try to provide constructive feedback that encourages them to develop better suggestions.

- **Express your appreciation.** Decades of research show that feeling appreciated is one of the greatest sources of employee motivation. So leverage recognition and awards as ways to increase engagement. To further increase impact, ask an employee what kind of gift they would like to receive for special recognition.

Take a few minutes every day to let employees know what they're doing right – in taking a smart risk, finding a solution to a tough problem, or even turning a negative situation around – and your employees will return the favor with increased commitment and higher productivity.

Final Thoughts

- Increasing employee engagement can have far-reaching benefits for your organization. It can improve your company's financial performance, increase retention rates and enhance corporate culture.

- Engagement starts with management. Employees will not be committed to company success unless their bosses are. So set the example. Use the suggestions outlined earlier and adopt a management style that fosters employee engagement.

- Not surprisingly, many of the activities that foster engagement revolve around listening and responding to employees' issues. When you, as a manager, tune-in to employees' needs, concerns and ideas, you send the message that you care. Over time, that caring and attention will be returned in the form of engaged employees who are truly committed to your company's success.