

BUILDING AN ENGAGED & ACCOUNTABLE WORKPLACE

How to lead today's employees for better results.

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A recent survey by Gallup Intl. finds that only 29% of employees are engaged with their work. 54% report they are not engaged and 17% indicate they are actively disengaged. HR Data Solutions found recently that a staggering 50% of employees said they had thought of resigning in the past six months. It is estimated that lost productivity from lack of engagement and accountability cost between \$287 and \$370 billion annually. Similar results can be found in the U.K. Leaders often exacerbate this problem by creating systems to control behavior. It is the wrong thing to do. What is needed instead is a new way of leading. This workbook examines employee engagement and accountability from a systems, employee and leadership perspective. It also invites the reader to examine aspects of their firm to determine what is contributing to employee engagement and commitment and what is not.

What's the number one concern among most entrepreneurs who are leading a growing firm or major department? If you answered "managing people" you are absolutely right. Particularly as a unit passes the 15+ employee threshold, helping employees stay committed, involved and accountable for results becomes increasing more difficult. That's the point at which the solo-entrepreneur must relinquish some control over the business and delegate to other people.

At this growth stage, the solo-entrepreneur must decide the level of control to delegate. Some will try to over-engineer the process and create rigid systems and procedures in an effort to maintain control. Others will prefer to facilitate the process and become less hands-on. Which one are you?

To get a handle on the answer, stop and ask yourself a few questions:

- Do employees here have low morale?
- Are revenue and profits declining or flat-lined?
- Do employees deny personal accountability and point fingers instead?
- Is there a lack of staff engagement?
- Is there a high level of turnover, compared to industry norms?
- Do employees constantly gossip?

If you find yourself with more yes answers than no answers, chances are you are exerting too much control with the result that you are not tapping into the full knowledge and creativity of your people.

Employee engagement, by definition, is a voluntary commitment by the employee to produce the value desired by the employer with no surprises. It is a state of mind; an outward expression of inner responsibility felt by the employee to be committed and accountable which is driven by intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivators. Too much control by management makes the likelihood of intrinsic motivation unlikely.

The Elements of Employee Engagement

Employee engagement is created through a marriage of external systems and individual responsibility. The leader's job has two elements:

- Develop a work environment that encourages employee engagement and accountability; and
- Hire individuals who want to be accountable (approximately 85% of people do) and enable them to reach their full potential.

While this formula sounds simple and even simplistic, it is by no means easy to execute; similar to the Road to Hana in Maui, Hawaii, it is beset with many twists and turns and you often find yourself wondering whether the exercise is really worth it. To understand why, let's examine what employees say they want.

Research tells us that employees want the following things:

- **CLEAR DIRECTION:** People like to know what their job is and how they fit into the big picture. They want to know how they will be measured and they want some assurance that measurement will be fairly applied. They want access to the information, resources and internal contacts they will need to execute the work properly. Typically, these directions come from the immediate supervisor who must rely on the firm to have these elements in place. Sadly, fewer than 25% of firms actually engage in annual firm wide planning; fewer still cascade goals to departments and individuals.
- **AUTONOMY:** When challenges arise, the employee wants some level of autonomy in determining what to do. That presumes a level of trust in the employee as well as clarity about the purpose of the job and information relevant to the work. Personal autonomy leads to both a sense of authority and a sense of job security.
- **A SENSE OF COMPETENCE:** Meeting each challenge provides the employee with a sense of competence which is bolstered by new knowledge gained during the challenge. Positive feedback and skill recognition can enhance the sense of competence as well as the knowledge that the employee has lived up to high standards.
- **MEANINGFUL WORK:** This is work that is perceived to be important in some way and offers a challenge. It is typically work that is non-repetitive or non-cyclical, is part of an exciting vision and represents relevant and whole tasks – not pieces and parts of the work.
- **A SENSE OF PURPOSE:** Finally, the work has got to create a sense of progress toward something with a larger purpose. It must be work that can be clearly measured so progress can be illustrated and celebrations can result – the sense that “we made it.” Often, the supervisor can help the employee make this all important connection between the work and its overall contribution to the big picture. It is the difference between a mason saying “I am laying bricks” to “I am building a Church”.

If each of these elements is present you will get commitment, engagement and accountability. There is no formula for creating employee engagement though we do know the general elements that must be in place. These include a mix of management processes and intrinsic motivators plus the willingness of the employee to become committed.

Employee engagement and accountability are created through a consistent management process with six key drivers. These include:

1. Conscious leadership
2. Clear direction;
3. Aligned systems and processes;
4. Effective onboarding;
5. Engaging employees as individuals;
6. Creating a culture of execution

1. Conscious Leadership

At the heart of the system is leadership. Because the role of the leader is critical, we will examine this facet first. Research during the past twenty years has yielded more than a thousand definitions of leadership. Within these definitions, eight major themes emerge which together summarize the essence of leadership. An effective leader:

- Develops clear vision and values linked to operations.
- Sets clear goals and priorities
- Gets the right people in place.
- Builds trusting relationships.
- Insists on realism.
- Follows through.
- Expands people's capabilities.
- Gives credit where it is due.

True leaders not only have the ability to create a clear and compelling vision that describes the future of their organizations; they also have the ability to translate that vision into reality by motivating and gaining the support of others. In other words, true leadership is about *vision and about relationships*. Leaders must understand which intrinsic motivators lead to high performance and how to apply them.

Fundamentally, many people in leadership roles get it wrong when they try to manage and control worker activities. For accountability to happen, employees need to own their own jobs. They need to be given true responsibility with management acting as a resource and not acting like a policeman. The more we try to control things, the less accountability we get.

Do fewer controls mean a laissez faire approach? Of course not. Clear goals and measures, follow-up and an execution mentality are also important. The change is putting measurement and execution in their proper perspective, as tools, and not as ways to punish people.

2. Establishing clear direction

The next step in building accountability is to get focused on your core vision and values, and your strategy for getting there. Vision simply describes what you want to have, what you want to be and what you want to be doing at some point in the future, usually one to five years out.

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