



Two Perspectives on Employee Engagement

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As with many business buzzwords and general management philosophies, the term *employee engagement* solves (or causes) many problems. To lessen the ambiguity, at least a little, here is my definition of the term, “the degree to which employees respect their organization, want to stay in their organization, have passion for results, and put in higher discretionary effort.”

Studies of employee engagement regularly find that most employees are not fully engaged. Most are only somewhat engaged and many are disengaged. The cost of disengagement to companies is substantial. Estimates range from the hundreds of billions of dollars to the trillions. In the course of coaching and consulting, I frequently find employee engagement not much higher than 50 percent. In other words, many employees only give about half of what they could be giving. When you think about it, that is tragic. Organizations are only half as productive as they could be!

The reasons for low employee engagement are numerous. To name a few, reasons include controlling managers, unsatisfying work, insufficient recognition, lack of resources, conflict with colleagues, limited opportunities for advancement, and unclear responsibilities. To make it simple, you can put most of the reasons under the category of *poor leadership*.

Clearly employees play a part in their level of engagement too, but most of the root issues are within management’s control. It is an organization’s management that largely determines how well an employee is suited to their role, receives recognition for their efforts, has the right resources, and engages in meaningful work.

Here are two perspectives to help both employees and managers improve engagement:

If you are an employee, find the meaning in your work. Your organization is successful because it provides a valuable product or service. Either believe in what you and your organization do, or find work at another organization you can believe in. You spend too much of your life working to not enjoy your work and fully embrace it.

If you are in management, treat your people like the most important asset they are. Be clear about your expectations. Give people praise and recognition when they meet your expectations. Be considerate and respectful. Being a leader is an honor, not a justification to exercise your authority. There are times when people need to be managed, but more often they need to be led. Be a leader who people want to work for and give their best for.

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