
Engagement

High Engagement = High Performance



1. Introduction

Upon turning the big five zero recently I decided to treat myself with a massage. As the therapist was doing her work on me I asked: “What is the worst thing about your job?” She sheepishly responded “When men ask for sexual massages.” I thought, “well that’s good and my partner will certainly appreciate that.” I then said “What do you love about your job?” She affirmatively stated “the money.”

A company I consulted to had issues with their workshop staff. They were managed by a supervisor who worked in his slippers; came and went as he wanted - often disappearing for days on end without notice; demonstrated disregard for job timeframes; quality was dismal. I could go on. The other tradesman and assistants followed suit.

Another industrial company I worked with was led by an assertive leader who valued his people, supported them immensely and raised the performance bar high. Upon interviewing each of the management team, all spoke highly of the owner and were keen to continue in their quest for increased company performance while being willing work on their own personal development.

The Massage Therapist – Non Engaged

The Slipper Wearing Foreman – Actively Disengaged

The Industrial Management Team – Engaged

a. What The Stats Say

The much touted workplace engagement study from Gallup Research published in 2013 revealed the following statistics for Australia:

- Only 24 percent of all workers are engaged in their jobs (second to the US whose engagement levels are 29%)
- 60 percent of workers are not engaged
- 16 percent of employees are actively disengaged
- *Engagement levels in leadership positions was rated at 19% compared to employees at 24%*

b. Terms Defined

Engaged: These individuals choose to give their best, being emotionally committed to the vision, values and goals of the organisation. They make positive contributions.

Non Engaged: Low motivation with average performance in their work. They do just enough to get by.

Actively Disengaged: Communicate through words, attitude or body language that they are unhappy in their work, demonstrating a disregard for management and other workers. These individuals are most likely to stir up dissension and negativity amongst co-workers.

2. Benefits and Indicators

a. Indicators Of Engaged Individuals

- Enthusiastic and energetic
- Performance watchers not clock watchers
- Go above and beyond what is expected of them
- Creative and Innovative
- Seek to excel in all that they do
- Willing to try new things and prepared to fail occasionally
- *Choose* to love their work
- Accept personal responsibility including:
 - Taking sick days only when they need to
 - Transparency
 - Own up to their mistakes
- Demonstrate loyalty
- Willing to learn and grow both personally and in their job

b. Indicators Of Non Engaged Individuals

These are what I would call flat liners.

- Little enthusiasm with no additional contribution
- Clock watchers
- Put up with their job
- Lack the desire to be better in their work.

They simply do their job, collect their pay and go home.

c. Indicators Of The Actively Disengaged

In addition to being the opposite of the engaged types, these individuals wilfully express the following traits and actions:

- Obstinacy
- Disregard for management and directives
- Love themselves more than their jobs and colleagues
- Often promote themselves as powerful when in fact they are not
- Purposefully create dissension and negativity

d. Benefits Of Highly Engaged Workplaces

- Greater innovation in the market place
- Higher levels of staff satisfaction with increased productivity
- Enhanced quality and workmanship / less errors
- Higher sales and resulting profitability
- Lower attrition rates leading to lower recruitment costs
- High customer satisfaction and resulting customer loyalty

Other studies completed on this subject reflect:

- Companies with low engagement scores earn an operating income 32.7 percent lower than companies with more engaged employees
- Engaged companies outperform competitors by as much as 28% overall
- Engaged companies grow profits as much as three times faster than their competitors
- Highly engaged employees are 87 percent less likely to leave the organization
- Two times higher customer loyalty
- Two times higher productivity

3. How To Increase Engagement Levels

a. Life Engagement

When thinking about how to help the non engaged or disengaged reach high levels of engagement I like to look at them (and ourselves for that matter) as individuals and *if in fact they are engaged in life itself.*

- What are their interests outside of work?
- What do they do when they are not at work?
- What is the quality of their loving relationships?
- What do they talk about most? Their family, travel, spirituality, community service, wealth, hobbies etc? This gives an insight into what their primary values are.

Being fully engaged in the work place starts with life engagement and many people, even in their thirties and forties have already died. They've given up learning, growing, loving and are content to meander through life till they pass through to the next world. As Ashley Montagu wisely said, *'Die young as late as possible.'*

Case Study

An account manager I consulted to was demonstrating non engaged behaviour. He rarely hit his sales budget and wandered through his days rather aimlessly. The business owner and I used two motivators to move him out of complacency.

1. Ascertaining in discussions with him that his highest values were his family, we were able to link his work performance to benefiting his children's schooling, taking his family on an overseas trip, making him feel great about being a great provider etc. He saw that the better he performed at work the better provider he would be (self image) and the better off his family would be.

2. The business owner told him quite matter of factly, "If you don't improve you'll be looking for another job."

The combination of these – extrinsic and intrinsic motivators shifted him to an engaged status with a 50% increase in sales performance.

i. Having a Dream

People with a dream, a cause, a purpose, perform better than those who feel they are in a holding pattern until they die.

Think back to when you were a child. What were the things you dreamed about? As we've grown up the dreams we once entertained tend to get knocked out of us. Who do you think you are? You're hopeless at doing that? You won't amount to anything? Combined with repeated failures in life, redundancies, financial and relational difficulties – it all ends up being too hard. We all have the opportunity to create a great life and sometimes we give up, stop trying and die young. The key is going back to your dreams or...to start dreaming again.

- What do you want to do?
- Who do you want to be?
- What do you want to be remembered for?
- Where do you want to go?
- What new skills do you want to learn?

ii. Passion Skills Alignment

Understanding ourselves in the context of the talent and skills we possess helps us find the type of work where we are more likely to be fully engaged in our careers. Many settle for second best. A very gifted communicator and influencer ends up settling for a data entry role. A strategic thinker and planner accepts a sales job. Both normally highly engaged individuals drift into non engagement. Combining passion and purpose along with our talents and skills into an aligned career is where full engagement is most likely to happen.

iii. Choosing Our Happiness

Many consider that they are powerless when it comes to choices. But the fact of the matter is we have control over our choices. We might take a job that we don't particularly like in order to pay the bills in the short term but to settle there for the rest of our days is a choice. We can choose to live the life we feel we were destined for or settle for something less – choice is ours. Where we are today is where we have chosen to be. If we want to be in a different place then it's up to us to make it happen.

Career engagement is about life engagement. Get excited about living a full life and you will ensure that the years you work will also be lived fully. Personally speaking I want to be:

- Known by my children as the one who threw their mother fully dressed into the pool
- Known as the man who, in board shorts and thongs, grabbed his unsuspecting girl on a summers afternoon and danced the rumba with her in the bar of a five star hotel
- Known for laughing. For being the childlike 50 year old whose mother still asks "will you ever grow up?"
- Known for driving around a roundabout multiple times with my kids yelling and their mother threatening to throw up
- To outlast all the twenty year olds on the dance floor and call it a night at 3am after six hours of dancing

What do you want to be known for?

b. Work Engagement

i. It All Starts With Leadership

A number of years ago, a woman at a country hotel asked if I was gay. I promptly told her that no, I was not gay and that I had a wife and four children. Upon mentioning it to my client she said, “Ray, it’s because of the clothes you wear.” I said “But I am wearing clothes that they wear in the country.” (I was very much acculturated by city living.) She then said “but your boots are always clean.” I only had to be told once. Since then no one has questioned me about my sexuality (fortunately) and I’ve adapted to the country culture.

Workplaces are like that. People are quick to fit in, adapting accordingly. Left to its own devices the workplace culture quickly heads into mediocrity or worse. The leader of the industrial firm I initially mentioned made no provision for sloppy engagement practices. You were engaged and if anything less you were either on the path to full engagement or the path out the door. He was the one who set the tone for excellence. The manufacturer on the other hand allowed people to act in a non and disengaged fashion and paid the price for it – eventually closing up shop. Engagement tone is set by leadership and given that the Gallup study identified that only 17% of leaders were actually engaged it seems an awfully long way to the top.

Here are some thoughts on creating a culture where engagement can thrive.

- Make the environment a fun and enjoyable place to be
- Recognise and reward staff achievement
- Set the performance bar high and work *with* your people for the achievement of such
- Create an advancement path providing training opportunities, stretch targets, small project responsibility – assisting them to be all that they can be
- Listen to your employees asking for their improvement suggestions and actioning as appropriate
- Take an active interest in your people seeking to understand their internal drivers and motivators and working with them accordingly
- Express how much you value their contribution
- Conduct performance reviews on a regular basis. I would suggest quarterly. These need to be mutually involved discussions and even held over lunch for key people
- If you incentivise, try to tailor it to the individuals internal motivators or to team performance
- Get consistency in team meetings sharing your vision, company values and goals
- Lead with transparency, openness and honesty
- Eat together. This is both one of my observations in my consulting work and also one of the factors in the Australian Workplace Awards. Those who engage in social activities particularly around food tend to demonstrate higher engagement than those who don’t.
- Provide other benefits beside financial considerations. These might be the opportunity to work from home a couple of days a week, moving toward performance based work practices as opposed to purely time based, flexible hours etc.

ii. For Employees and Management

- We choose the attitude we bring to our work. We might want to change our work but even in the present we get to choose what we bring to our work. Someone once said *“I know of no greater attribute of man than to choose his attitude in any and in every situation.”*
- Seek to outperform yourself even in the mundane tasks of the day
- See yourself as self employed, as the CEO of your own corporation. Treat your work like your own business and that you are a valuable commodity. When you see yourself this way, it gives power back to you, you make empowering choices thus becoming more valuable to your employer.
- Give your absolute best. A CEO was once asked how many people worked in his company. He responded “about half of them.” Don’t let this be you. Arrive a little earlier, stay a little later. Find out what management’s expectations are and then meet and exceed them. When you become valuable you are more likely to rise to the top, gain increased responsibility, be asked for your input, be more likely to receive wage increases and be one of the last to be laid off in the event of a downturn.
- Establish weekly goals for yourself, both in work and at home.

In closing I’d like to tell you about a man called Adrian. He was a big fellow of 6’5” who had a dream of one day owning a cattle station and relentlessly pursued his dream. An interview completed by an investment magazine reported him as saying “I know that anything I believe in is achievable and the situation we’re in today is due to our accumulated decisions and not external circumstances.” He was a man who took engagement seriously in both his personal and business worlds. His life tragically was taken in a car accident at age thirty eight and the following is an excerpt from his eulogy.

“He was just big. Everything about him was big. The houses he lived in, the cars he drove, the amount of rum he could drink. It was all big. He has a roundabout in the front his house the size of a city roundabout. His business was big. His plans were big. His dreams and goals big.

His love for his family...BIG

His love for people ... BIG

His love of life and living it to the max...BIG

The way he died...BIG

The hole he leavings in our lives...BIG

Our gratitude to God for giving us the gift of knowing this man call Adrian...BIG.”

This big man was my little brother. A man who impressed me in everything he applied his focus and efforts to. He lived a big and full life and one for whom anything less than full engagement just wasn’t an option.

Contact Information

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About Ray Hodge

Ray Hodge speaks and consults to businesses and organizations, a notable event being the Department of the Australian Prime Minister and Cabinet. His emphasis is on improving critical efficiencies to dramatically increase key results. He has coached and provided consulting services to leaders and teams for over 25 years.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch with Ray if he can be of service