

# Engaging the Employees' Hearts and Minds at Work

by Juan Riboldi



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## Key Point

Engagement is the voluntary dedication to doing one's best work. When people apply their hearts and minds to what they do, they become fully engaged.

Highly engaged organizations create the conditions where the best people can consistently excel. By enlisting the employees in creating the conditions for full engagement, they learn to take responsibility for their own morale at work.

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Organizations large and small are lining behind initiatives aimed at improving employee engagement. The raise of engagement surveys and workshops attest of the vigor behind this concept. Yet, managers, consultants and academics alike, often pose the simple, straight forward question: *"What exactly is Employee Engagement?"*

While the concept of "employee engagement" is relatively new in the business world, the idea behind it is not. For decades, attempts to define the employee's discretionary effort at work have been described with words such as productivity, job satisfaction, employee morale, initiative and empowerment. Engagement is a contemporary, comprehensive measure for doing one's best at work.

High engagement happens when the needs and wants of both the enterprise and the employees are satisfied. In order to be engaged, an employee must be satisfied, motivated, and effective. While each of these factors is important on its own, it is only when all three are present simultaneously that true engagement occurs.

## SATISFIED

Take, for example, the assembly line employee who is satisfied with her job. Her job means steady employment. She feels satisfied with her pay. She starts at 7:00 am and is done in time to pick up her seven-year-old form school. It meets her needs. She is not one of the best workers though. She does not try to exert herself, nor is she motivated by her work environment.

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#### EFFECTIVE

Her co-worker has recently been given the assignment to ensure the assembly line is producing at record capacity. She is very effective in this role and has been able to meet production targets. Yet her manager rarely recognizes her work. She is so dissatisfied with the lack of recognition that she is looking for a different job.

#### MOTIVATED

A third coworker has just been brought into the position by two friends. She is still learning the job, but thoroughly enjoys working with people she knows and is willing to keep the job during the summer months.

Engagement is the voluntary dedication to doing one's best work. When people apply their hearts and minds to what they do, they become fully engaged. Engagement springs from a genuine desire to treat others the way we want to be treated. We become fully engaged when we commit to a cause greater than ourselves.

***Why Employee Engagement matters?*** A growing body of research links employee engagement to increased productivity, higher quality, talent retention, customer loyalty, revenue growth and company earnings. Beyond the concrete financial returns of a highly engaged work force, there are also intangible values in terms of team

spirit, a sense of loyalty, and excitement in the work. The case for engaging people at work simply makes sense.

#### ***How can then an organization create the conditions for engaging people?***

Highly engaged organizations create the conditions where their best people can consistently excel. They don't try to be all things to all people. Instead, highly engaged organizations identify what motivates top performers in their culture. Then, they provide the conditions that attract and motivate the type of people they seek. By consistently engaging the right people, they achieve peak performance.

Engagement workshops help employees identify and reinforce the experiences that bring up their best performance. By enlisting the employees themselves in creating the conditions for full engagement, they learn to take responsibility for their own morale at work. Of course, the same goes for their leaders.

Creating a high performing culture is a matter of living up to one's values. Ultimately, engagement is everyone's job. Leaders can create the conditions for engagement by aligning training, rewards and recognition to the values. But demonstrating one's values by example is by far the most influential form of engagement.