

Make sure your business runs at full power

Success Management

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Do you have any zombies employed in your company? That may sound funny to you, but chances are you have seen something that resembles a zombie walking the halls somewhere. They are the people who are just going through the motions to complete a process and receive a paycheck.

I don't know if you have this problem in your organization, but the Employee Engagement Index, published in the The Gallup Management Journal, found that only 29 percent of employees are motivated and energized.

The research for the Employee Engagement Index began in 1997 and surveyed approximately 3 million employees in 300,000 work units.

So, what are the other 71 percent of employees doing? The engagement index categorized the employees into three groups:

29 percent - **Engaged** employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.

54 percent - **Not-engaged** employees are essentially "checked out." They're sleepwalking through their workday, putting in time - but not energy or passion - for their work.

17 percent - Actively disengaged employees aren't just unhappy at work; they're busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish.

Additionally, Gallup estimates that actively disengaged employees - the least productive category - cost the American economy up to \$350 billion per year in lost productivity.

So, what is causing all these people to lose their enthusiasm and commitment? Studies report that almost everyone is engaged when they join an organization.

The passion loss or becoming not-engaged typically happens after the first couple of years of working in an organization. Here are some possible causes:

- Little or no feedback from those in charge.
- Lack of opportunity to discuss problems.
- Lack of opportunity to provide ideas and input.
- Lack of resources to solve problems or to do a job.
- Little or no reward or recognition.
- Little opportunity to develop one's potential.
- Pressure to perform and achieve more with less.
- Lack of balance in work and home roles.

Most people will have moments of disengagement and negativity. But given an opportunity to become part of a solution, they generally respond and step up to the plate.

Those who are actively disengaged may thrive on negativity and refuse to become part of any solution, preferring to perpetuate problems. If they repeatedly refuse opportunities to re-engage, terminating their employment should be seriously considered in order to avoid further damage to staff morale and organizational progress.

Efforts to raise levels of engagement are worthwhile for those in the not-engaged range (54 percent). Not-engaged employees concentrate on tasks rather than the actual goal they are supposed to accomplish. They want to be told what to do just so they can do it and say they have finished. They focus on process, not results.

Managers who only provide tasks to an employee reinforce "not-engaged" behaviors and actually move 180 degrees away from engaging the heart, mind and soul of that person.

Employees who are not engaged tend to feel their contributions are being overlooked and their potential is not being tapped. They often feel this way because they don't have productive

relationships with their managers or with their co-workers.

Managers must provide expectations, clarification, and measurement. Usually companies hire people to do three things:

1. Achieve the business outcomes of their roles.
2. Contribute to creating a productive workplace.
3. Drive customer engagement.

A good place to start is with conversations about expectations for the person in a given role. Encourage the employee to see how his or her work contributes to the organizational future.

Ask, "What are the outcomes you are supposed to achieve? How do you contribute to making this a great place to work? Are you creating engaged customers?" The objective is to refocus employees away from steps and tasks and toward results and outcomes.

The analysis of survey results also show that those companies with high scores on the Employee Engagement Index experience lower turnover, higher sales growth, better productivity, better customer loyalty and other signs of superior performance.

While leaders of organizations focus intense efforts on building shareholder value, they generally cannot control the stock market. What they should be focused on is harnessing the potential of the two-thirds of their work force that is just going through the motions, putting in time at work without commitment.

In "Follow the Path," Curt Coffman and Gabriel Gonzalez-Molina wrote: "Great organizations achieve sustainable growth and profits because they do what other organizations don't: they maximize the innate, individual talents of their employees to connect with customers. They know that tapping the resources of humans is the only remaining area where significant improvements can and do lead to an unlimited source of competitive advantages."

Engaged employees care more about reducing rework, cutting costs and increasing customer satisfaction. In summary, engaged employees will help you achieve results that will drive success.

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