The Power of Employee Engagement

How to Ignite and Sustain Employee Engagement

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10 building blocks for employee engagement

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Surveys show a high percentage of people in the workforce are not engaged in their work. They are simply going through the motions for a paycheck.

Recently on his blog, Winnipeg consultant David Zinger has been detailing 10 steps to employee engagement, which he has shaped into what he calls the employee engagement pyramid, explaining the building blocks for success:

Achieve results

At the top of the pyramid is the main target: getting employees involved in formulating the results that the company should be seeking, and then having them be intent on achieving those agreed-to results. “Powerful results matter to managers, organizational leaders, employees, and customers,” Mr. Zinger notes.

Mark progress

The Progress Principle by Teresa Amabile and Steve Kramer, published last year, presented fascinating research that indicated the key to motivation and engagement for knowledge work is making progress each day. Managers therefore need to structure work so that progress is visible (and do their best to prevent setbacks).

Maximize performance

Managers need to figure out how to make top performance worthy of employees’ attention and provide feedback that is heard and heeded by those employees.

Foster recognition

Management needs to show employees that their accomplishments are appreciated. “Authentic recognition is so much more than an annual gala or occasional gift card for good behaviour,” Mr. Zinger says. “Recognition is social, strategic, and powerful.”

Build relationships

Work is social. Research by Harvard Business School professor emeritus John Kotter found that one of the factors that distinguished general managers with consistently outstanding performance records from their counterparts was their ability to develop and maintain a strong network of relationships.

Gallup’s famed questionnaire on engagement has several questions about the strength of relationships at work with colleagues and supervisors.

Enliven energy

Energy drives us and comes in many forms – physical, emotional, and mental. Mr. Zinger also cites the importance of spiritual energy: being caught up in a mission that is greater than ourselves.

Leverage strengths

Research consistently shows it’s important to bring out employees’ strengths to energize them, rather than harp on weaknesses.

Make meaning

If managers can make the work meaningful, it will engage, sustain and enrich people.

Master moments

Doug Conant, former chief executive officer of Campbell Soup Co., used what he called TouchPoints to transform the dismally engaged scores at his company, and to make the most of the times that managers interact with employees.

“Engagement resides in the moments,” Mr. Zinger observes. “Each of the many connections you make has the potential to become a high point or a low point in someone’s day.”

Enhance well-being

As a manager, you must eliminate the toxic aspects of your workplace. Employees must be allowed to find a sense of well-being at their workplace so that they leave each day enlivened, rather than depleted.

Special to The Globe and Mail
Introduction

The time has come to transform engagement work from surveys and business cases to concrete and specific actions to ignite and sustain engagement with results and relationships to achieve organizational and individual objectives.

The pyramid of employee engagement is an eclectic and evidence-based model outlining the tools and practices for robust employee engagement. When we are equipped with the practices and tools of the pyramid, employee engagement is never more than 10 blocks away!

This 50-page booklet provides an overview of the pyramid. It is organized into 17 sections:

1. Globe and Mail article
2. Introduction
3. The model
4. Broken engagement
5. The benefits of the pyramid
6. Overview of the 10 blocks
7. Achieve results
8. Maximize performance
9. Path progress
10. Build relationships
11. Foster recognition
12. Master moments
13. Build strengths
14. Make meaning
15. Enhance wellbeing
16. Enliven energy
17. About David Zinger

David Zinger is available for customized speeches, workshops, courses, and programs on the pyramid of engagement. To ignite and sustain engagement in your organization phone David Zinger (204) 254-2130, email him at zingerdj@gmail.com or visit his website, www.davidzinger.com.
The pyramid is a bold model for employee engagement. The blocks starting at the top and going down the pyramid from left to right are: achieve results, maximize performance, path progress, build relationships, foster recognition, master moments, leverage strengths, make meaning, enhance wellbeing, and enliven energy.
Broken engagement

There are at least twenty-three possible symptoms when we fail to build a pyramid of engagement within our organization.

1. There is a lack of clarity of results or even a lack of results
2. Too many results are attempted without enough capacity
3. Results are clear but lack any meaning or significance for employees
4. Performance is reduced to a management system rather than the daily lifeblood of work
5. There is a failure to hold engaging conversations when performance fails to meet expectations
6. The connections between performance and results are weak or nonexistent
7. There are too many people and structural barriers to progress
8. Setbacks trump progress and managers fail to maximize the benefits of progress to engage knowledge workers
9. Collaboration tends to result in setbacks and disengaging interactions  
10. Relationships are sacrificed in the name of results  
11. Relationships are viewed as mushy unimportant stuff or depersonalized as human capital  
12. Social media within the organization fails to align with engagement and employees’ participation in social media is an indication of disengagement  
13. Individuals and organizations suffer people-myopia, barely noticing each other, and failing to voice recognition for each other  
14. Moments for engagement are frittered away as small and insignificant rather than small and significant opportunities for engagement  
15. Large scale programs and initiatives are launched before pilot testing and feedback from small bets or small wins  
16. The ideal state of flow into work is squeezed out by anxiety and boredom  
17. Eighty per cent of attention is focused on weakness, problems, gaps, failures, and inadequacies  
18. Strengths are addressed as a short assessment tool that merely gives you a list of five strong personal characteristics  
19. There is no compelling why to work  
20. The return to individuals for work contribution is reduced to an hourly rate or salary  
21. The organization and individuals fail to create and find wellbeing within work  
22. Mental, emotional, and organizational energy is frittered away and work is an energy drain not an energy gain.  
23. The raw material of energy for engagement is under utilized
The benefits of the pyramid

There are a number of benefits in applying this unique model of employee engagement.

The model is simple. The model can be grasped within seconds and with 10 blocks and bold images it is quickly understood by many managers and other employees. The images and the pyramidal structure make it easy to visualize and easy to recall. Yet, embedded within this simplicity are 10 powerful keys to create, sustain, and enhance employee engagement.

The model is unique. Each element of the model has a bold image to represent the foundation of that block. There is a target for results, an arrow for progress, a compass for meaning, and a clock for moments. The 10 icons add a strong visual dimension to the model.

The structure is inspirational. The model was inspired by the work of the Egyptian pyramids and former U.C.L.A. winning basketball coach John Wooden’s pyramid of success. The pyramids in Egypt demonstrate that the structure will stand the test of time and remain for years. We all know the pyramids were not built in one day.

John Wooden’s pyramid outlined 15 building blocks for success and was the structure behind Wooden’s phenomenal coaching success with U.C.L.A.’s basketball program and the legacy of his work with players. The Wooden pyramid is still inspiring many players and coaches.

The pyramid of engagement model is flexible. The pyramid is open to individuals or organizations shifting the blocks around. For example someone may want to put relationships as the top of the pyramid and results at the heart of the pyramid. Someone else may have their own block they would like to switch with one of the blocks in the original pyramid. Although the model is solid, it is not static.

The pyramid offers the big picture of what can be done for engagement while offering the ability and structure to tackle one block at a time. Many people are overwhelmed by work and perceive engagement as yet another task. With this model you can focus on just one block at a time for a day, a week, a month, or even a year.

The model can be used by leaders, managers, and supervisors to foster engagement or heighten their own engagement. The pyramid was originally designed for managers to use as a tool to increase engagement with employees who report to them. It quickly became apparent that the model can be used by managers to enhance their own engagement or be offered to employees as a tool to take charge of their engagement. We can only engage others when we are engaged.
Many organizations are organized around a pyramid. The CEO or President is at the top and people are on levels below the CEO. We should stop putting people into pyramids (remember what they were used for in Egypt) rather this pyramid is based on elements and everyone can work towards results, performance, relationships, etc. We build the blocks of engagement together, not alone, and the apex of the pyramid is a place for all of us.

We can build a mini pyramid of 3 blocks for focused effort. It is easy to make mini pyramids out of the 10 blocks. I believe when we try to focus on more than 3 items at a time we end up getting confused and diffusing our efforts. For example, you could take the top 3 blocks and focus on results, performance, and progress. You can do an assessment of your strengths and weaknesses and build a mini pyramid to overcome weaknesses or build a mini pyramid to get the absolute most from your engagement strengths. Often as you work with one block you are having an impact on many other blocks of the model.

The blocks are based on research and evidence based practice. Just three examples are the research by Teresa Amabile on progress, setbacks and meaning; research by Jane Dutton on organizational energy; and research by Gallup on strength based approaches to work and wellbeing.
Overview of the 10 building blocks

Achieve Results

Engagement is more than a feeling, survey number, or YouTube happy dance. We engage in actions directed towards results. The first key to consider when increasing employee engagement is what results are you working to achieve and how can you involve all employees in achieving those results and perhaps even formulating those results? Powerful results matter to managers, organizations, employees, and customers.

Maximize Performance

Performance is anything worthy of your attention. How do you make key performances worthy of employee’s attention and how do you offer feedback that is actually heard and acted upon by employees? We are witnessing the early stages of a significant fusion of performance management and employee engagement that may address some of the gaps we have experienced in optimizing performance.
Path Progress

The most overlooked source of engagement and motivation is progress. Recent research by Teresa Amabile and Steve Kramer has demonstrated that progress is the single biggest key to motivation and engagement for knowledge workers. Learn how to structure work for progress and especially to guard against the demoralizing and disengaging impact of setbacks.

Build Relationships

We need to focus on the two “R’s” of engagement, results and relationships. How do our efforts achieve results while also building relationships? Our brains are wired for the social element of work and in this decade all managers are becoming hybrid versions of “social workers.” While staff have a locus of engagement on tasks, managers need to ensure they have a strong locus of engagement on people.
**Foster Recognition**

Without recognition our workplaces are void of humaness. Are you fully letting employees know that you see them, you are thinking of them and you recognize and appreciate them. Authentic recognition is so much more than an annual gala or occasional gift card for good behavior. Effective recognition is social, strategic, and powerful. Recognition is the “re-thinking” of engagement in our everyday interactions and recognition for progress creates a strong multiplier for motivation and engagement.

**Master Moments**

Engagement resides in the moment. Learn to master moments; from high quality interactions and 45-second engaging conversations to the power to transform interruptions into touch points. When we balance challenge and skills we enter the flow zone as we work within the moment. Working in the moment also reduces stress as Stephen Rechtschaffen, in *TimeShifting* stated: “there is no stress in the present moment.”
Leverage Strengths

Engagement is strong stuff. When you know your strengths, live your strengths, and leverage your strengths in the service of others you will have an increase in engagement. To bring out the strengths of others we must be aware of our own strengths. Powerful managers “spot” employees’ strengths and make strength training a daily endeavor.

Make Meaning

For work to sustain and enrich people it must be meaningful. Those who have a “why” to work can bear almost any how and a sense of meaningful work instills a strong and rich intrinsic motivation. Meaningful progress is one of the best events of a workday.
Enhance Well-being

We need to find wellbeing inside of work. There are things we can do outside of work but how we promote and enhance well-being within work is becoming increasingly important as mobile devices makes work portable and 24/7. We must eliminate toxic workplaces poisoned with a lack of respect or mutuality. We must create a profound wellbeing where people leave work enriched rather than depleted and deadened.

Enliven Energy

The raw material of engagement is energy. It takes energy to engage and authentic engagement contributes to our energy. Energy comes in a variety of forms: mental, emotional, physical, organizational, and spiritual. Spiritual energy is the energy invested in something greater than ourselves. When we examine work and managing people it is always something greater than us or there would be no need for managers. We must strive towards mastery of physical, mental, emotional and organizational energy.
1. Achieve Results

The symbol used for achieving results is a target to ensure we know where we are aiming our engagement efforts. Achieving results is important for the organization, team, manager, and employee. Engagement must be directed towards a specific end or it will lack focus, impact, and sustainability. Engagement will be perceived as a fluffy extra lacking in contribution to strategic objectives and wither because of a lack of impact or energy.

*Employee engagement is specific. We cannot sustain engagement all the time and everywhere. When we talk about engagement we need to ask: Who is engaged, with what, for how long, and for what purpose?*

*(From David Zinger's 10 Principles of Engagement)*

The definition of a result is a consequence, effect, or outcome of something. The something we are looking for here is engagement in work that produces results. In addition in this integrated view fusing engagement with work, employees will also contribute to the development of targets and results for the organization.

Are your results clearly stated? To ensure the organizational results are clear to employees ask a number of employees on the spot to state the results the organization is working to achieve. Can they state these results without hesitation or ignorance? If not, make sure what is clearly stated is fully communicated.

Peter Drucker focused extensively on results in his book, *Managing for Results*. He stated that results come from leveraging opportunities rather than focusing on problems. Resources must go to opportunities and to achieve economic results we must concentrate. As a manager ensure the resource of engagement is directed towards results not aimless activities.
When we know specifically what we are working to achieve we can reverse engineer from the results to the specific actions we need to fully engage with to achieve those results.

Create white space so that employees can have input into the crafting of results. Did employees have an opportunity to influence results? In full engagement, we have moved from results being given to employees to also being created by employees. Remember the following two keys lines as you develop the results that you are working to achieve.

*If you want everyone on the same page give them an opportunity to write on the page.*

*Never do anything about employees without employees, including determining results.*

Ensure that the results you are focusing on are what you and your reports really want. I encourage you to contemplate the “Spice Girl question.” This question is derived from the lyrics of one of their ear-worm like classics:

*I'll tell you what I want, what I really really want, So tell me what you want, what you really really want, I'll tell you what I want, what I really really want, So tell me what you want, what you really really want.*

Ensure your results are what you and everyone in the organization really wants.

Go for pull results rather than push results. Do you and other employees feel excitement and interest in the results the organization is trying to achieve? Do the results have meaning? When we find results engaging we are powerfully pulled into engagement rather than feeling pushed to engage.

Try teaming up for engaging results. Apply the **TEAM** acronym as a quick guide to your results statement: Are your results: **T**imed - **E**ngaging – **A**chievable - **M**eaningful? In regards to timed and specific, Don Berwick, the health care leader who was responsible for the 100,000 lives campaign in the United States was constantly reminding others:

*Some is not a number and soon is not a time.*

Employee engagement has shifted away from a general pervasive measure of connection to being localized to different areas or results. For example your report’s locus of engagement may be on a task while your locus of engagement is the people achieving those tasks. Our results could be financial, environmental, or wellbeing. A strong connection between engagement and specific results ensures that engagement...
is integrated into work and management rather than an additional demand. This gives a rifle-like specificity to engagement rather than a shotgun feel good satisfaction about work. At the highest level of engagement, we engage so fully with the target or results that the target and our engagement become one. This would be the ideal state of engagement and demonstrates a model of what is possible when we engage fully with results that are meaningful, focused, and enriching.

JD Meier has written an excellent guide on agility and results. His focus on results has more of a personal flavor of engaging in results yet I encourage you to take a look at his extensive and helpful book: Getting Results the Agile Way. Meier generously offers a free online wiki version of the book full of excellent tools, checklists, and methods. Enter “Getting Results the Agile Way” into your favorite search engine to find the free book.

Never forget to focus your engagement in results that matter.
2. Maximize Performance

According to Aon Hewitt’s report *Trends in Global Employee Engagement*, the largest drop in engagement this year is employees’ perception of how companies manage performance. Workers worldwide believe their employers have not provided the appropriate focus or level of management that would lead to increased productivity, nor have they connected individual performance to organizational goals.

Jamie Gruman and Alan Saks wrote an insightful article on performance management and employee engagement in the *Human Resource Management Review*. They stated that less than a third of employees believe that their company’s performance management process assists them in improving performance.

Kevin Sheridan, author of *Magnetic Employee Engagement*, declared that only 5% of performance appraisals and performance management conversations ever touch upon engagement.

Barbara Bowes, a consultant and writer in Winnipeg on HR issues, stated in a *Winnipeg Free Press* column that job performance appraisal systems need an overhaul:

> The result is that in many cases executives do not support performance appraisals and so the practice falls by the wayside. Human resource managers are dissatisfied because the performance systems are typically time consuming, bureaucratic, paper driven, top down and often have little reference to organizational goals. Not only that, operational managers are often chronically late in completing their appraisals. All in all, the performance management system is frequently the most poorly implemented of all human resource management systems.
What, then, should an effective performance management system look like? First of all, no matter the technical details of your performance system, the organizational philosophy must recognize that “on task behaviour” is not the only thing that should be counted. Organizations need to recognize that work has changed. It is more flexible, more dynamic, interchangeable, less precise, team oriented, more ambiguous, more complex and more stressful. These elements have been found to be just as important and need to be given consideration in a performance evaluation.

Engaged performance management must recognize and respond to the flexible, dynamic, ambiguous, complex and stressful elements of performance. Add to the challenge is the increasing level of mobile workers, reaching over 1 billion this year. We want to maximize employees’ performance and not tick them off with the use of structured inauthentic performance appraisals that sucks the energy out of both employees and their managers.

Here are five practices to create engaged performance.

Ensure work is worthy of an employee’s attention. One sport psychologist defined performance as anything worthy of your attention. Hopefully all work is worthy of a worker’s attention. We need to step back from the jobs, roles, and tasks and ensure that work is worthy of the attention it deserves. Here are a few questions to consider:

- Have I done my best to make work worthy of every employee’s attention?
- Does every employee know the value and meaning of their work?
- Do employees have some freedom in their attention and work that capitalizes on each employee’s intrinsic interest and motivation?

Co-create performance and work by job-crafting with employees. Job crafting fuses the needs of the organization with the strengths of the individual so that performance is beneficial to both. Knowledge workers need to have input into what their work is and how that work is achieved. Job crafting is an excellent step in that direction. Here is a short section from CV Harquail’s blog post How Job Crafting Can Get You Closer to Authentic Work.

Job crafting is the practice of (re-)shaping the job that you are expected to do so that you can enlarge the parts that are important to you. Through job crafting, an employee can take on new activities, new responsibilities, and new relationships, making the job so bigger (or smaller), more interesting, more useful, and overall more closely linked to their strengths and interests.

Fuse performance appraisal and engagement appraisal. Jamie Gruman and Alan Saks, in a rigorous academic piece on engagement and performance, advocate that
we move from management of performance to facilitation of performance. They recommend that we fuse performance management and employee engagement into a new approach that weaves the two more closely together to respond to the way work is done in this decade.

Increase the likelihood of engagement by focusing on mastery versus competency. It is astounding to see the lists of competencies required by many jobs and the lengthy guidebooks that outline those competencies. How can employees act on all those competencies or even remember the list of 39 competencies? We engage strongly with a sense of mastery versus competency and we need to parse long lists of competencies in favor of strong mastery with a limited number of vital performances that contribute to results.

Step up to performance variances or gaps with conversation. Step up to variance with safety and conversation. Learn to address variances in performance as soon as possible through conversations that demonstrate caring. Both *Crucial Conversations* and *Crucial Confrontations* offer good foundations to build the conversational skills to achieve results, address gaps, and build relationships.
3. Path Progress

Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer published *The Progress Principle* in 2012 demonstrating the primary role progress and avoidance of setbacks plays in motivation and engagement. Their research conclusion based on 12,000 daily diary entries from managers,

> of all the positive events that influence inner work life, the single most powerful is progress in meaningful work; of all the negative events, the single most powerful is the opposite of progress – setbacks in the work. We consider this to be a fundamental management principle: facilitating progress is the most effective way for managers to influence inner work life. Even when progress happens in small steps, a person’s sense of steady forward movement toward an important goal can make all the difference between a great day and a terrible one.

Progress is the ladder on the classic board game of snakes and ladders while setbacks are the snakes. It is important to realize that the effect of setbacks on emotions is stronger than the effect of progress. Small loses can eliminate small wins and negative managerial behavior trumps positive management. As we climb up the pyramid of engagement we must guard against setbacks even more than working towards making progress.

Path progress is in the second row to indicate how important this building block is for managers to increase employee engagement. It is paired with maximize performance as these practices work together to achieve results.

Here are seven steps to help path progress for robust employee engagement:
Accentuate the positive. Continually work towards small wins and breakthroughs. Ensure employees are working towards meaningful goals paired with sufficient autonomy to achieve success. Managers can ensure resources, time, and help are available on the path of progress. Managers can also nourish progress by fostering strong interpersonal connections focused on progress.

Eliminate the negative. Negative events have a disproportionate impact on engagement. Because negative events have a stronger impact than positive events it is important to prevent setbacks before they occur or minimize the damage setbacks can cause. As a manager, ask yourself these two questions then construct solid responses to squash setbacks:

- What can I do to prevent setbacks before they occur with my work group?
- What can I do to overcome setbacks once they have occurred?

Don’t neglect the progress that can be achieved when employees hack their work to overcome barriers and blocks to progress. Hacking work and workarounds are two powerful twins to achieve progress and minimize setbacks. Bill Jensen and Josh Klein wrote *Hacking Work* to outline how we can hack our work to achieve progress. Hacking work is getting what you need to do your best job by exploiting loopholes and using workarounds to make it easier to do great work. It is not always up to the manager to ensure progress, employees can seize control of how they perform work and create powerful benevolent hacks or workarounds to get the job done and heighten their own engagement.

Are employees ready, willing, and able to engage? Engagement without enabling is a fast track to frustration. Up to 20% of your engaged workforce may be frustrated because they are unable to fully act on their engagement. Mark Royal and Tom Agnew wrote *The Enemy of Engagement* offering a framework to end workplace frustration. They found that 30% of employees don’t get clear goals and feel they lack authority to do their jobs. About 50% of all employees are concerned with adequate staffing; don’t feel they have time for training, that other teams in the company do not offer high-quality support, and that their organization is not effectively structured. They offer numerous suggestions to lessen frustration by enabling employees with such methods as making training a priority, share people as well as resources, and beware of the “trap” of routines.

Study the principles and practices of games to transfer gaming principles to work. One of the reasons games are so engaging is that they are often designed so that we have a sense of achievement and we see our progress. Virtual games are programmed to ensure new player begin to experience progress almost immediately. How long does it take to have your newly hired employees experience progress? Are employees getting lots of feedback on their progress?
Are setbacks framed as challenges that compel your employee to try again? If you want to instill significant progress at work you must “get into the game.” In addition many games now bring multiple players together to foster powerful collaboration and teamwork. Does your workplace bring people together for powerful collaboration and teamwork?

Many of us are overwhelmed by the copious volume of work and shy away from new tasks because we have little or no capacity or we fear falling further behind on the tasks already on our plate. In today’s workplace, small is the new significant. As one manager recently said at a Tucson environmental conference, “we have gone from doing more with less to doing everything with nothing.”

Determine small and significant actions that move towards achieving results. Ensure those small actions are focused on significant tasks…they should be important not just urgent.

Don’t neglect the celebration of progress. You should have celebration markers along the way. The celebration can range from a quiet yet mindful internal sense of satisfaction to a high five or more formal recognition. One powerful model for instant recognition of progress was Usain Bolt who slowed down in the last 20% of his 100 meter race at the Beijing Olympics and still achieved an Olympic record time of 9.69. Physicists calculated that Bolt could have finished in 9.55±0.04 seconds had he not slowed to celebrate before crossing the finishing line. Perhaps they miss the point --- progress is not always about ultimate record breaking achievement — we have much to gain by celebrating achievement even if it costs us a tenth of a second!

Resources:

1. Bill Jensen and Josh Klein, Hacking Work: Breaking Stupid Rules for Smart Results
2. Russell Bishop, Workarounds that Work: How to conquer Anything That Stands in Your Way at Work
3. Peter Sims, Little Bets: How Breakthrough Ideas Emerge From Small Discoveries
4. Mark Royal and Tom Agnew, The Enemy of Engagement: Put an End to Workplace Frustration and Get the Most from Your Employees.
5. Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer, The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement, and Creativity at Work
3. Build Relationships

Obviously relationships and relationship building are a foundation of employee engagement. Linda Hill in a *Harvard Business Review* article on *Building Effective One-on-One Relationships* cited research by John Kotter that found “that one of the factors that distinguished those general managers with consistently outstanding performance records from their counterparts was their ability to develop and maintain a strong network of relationships.” Work is a relationship and engagement experience. One third of Gallup’s quintessential Q12 survey asks directly about relationships to uncover engagement at work while most of the other items are also influenced indirectly by relationship.

Four of the twelve statements employees are asked to respond to are:

1. I have a best friend at work.
2. In the last seven days I have received recognition.
3. My supervisor or someone at work cares about me as a person.
4. There is someone at work who encourages my development. In the last six months someone has talked to me about my progress.

People are people; don’t depersonalize them with terms such as assets or human capital. From a distance we can view employees as assets and human capital but engagement and relationship requires closeness. Employees are human and we inadvertently dehumanize employees when we refer to employees as assets or capital. Remember, as a manager you are an employee too. One classic definition of management was getting work done through people but in an engaged workplace work is done with people. We don’t have relationships with assets or capital we have relationships with other humans. An employee’s locus of engagement is frequently a task while a manager’s locus of engagement is the working relationship with the employee.
A relationship is s a connection between two individuals. Interpersonal relationships usually involve some level of interdependence. People in a relationship influence each other. Because of this interdependence, most things that change or impact one member of the relationship will have some level of impact on the other member. Exercising a strong backbone as a manager will have an impact on other employees. This backbone is comprised of (BACK): bids, authenticity, caring, and knowledge.

Too often the human element of engagement is dismissed as a fluffy soft skill afterthought. Soft skills sound mushy and unimportant while hard skills sound like the foundation of management. We offer fortitude, gumption, and moxie to relationship building in employee engagement by adding backbone to a manager’s work. Our literal backbone is our central source of support and stability for our body and it is part of a network that connects the other networks together.

**B is for Bids.** John Gottman in *The Relationship Cure* outlined a very powerful practice to build better relationships in all elements of our life including work. He examined the smallest of exchanges between people that communicated a request for connection followed by one of three responses. A bid is the fundamental unit of emotional communication. It can be a question, a gesture, a look or any expression that says, “I want to be connected to you.” A bid is followed by a positive or negative response to the other person’s bid or request for emotional connection. The response can be turning towards (a positive response to a bid); turning against (a negative response); and turning away (ignoring another’s bid). Offering bids and responding positively to bids can help us master moments and transform micromanagement from a creepy control mechanism to a fluid and authentic relationship builder that infuses and energizes our work and the work of the people we manage.

**A is for Authenticity.** Being authentic is key to trust, respect, and genuine relationships. Authentic managers demonstrate integrity, with a profound sense of purpose and willingness to live by their core values. Bill George, author of *True North: Discover Your Authentic Leadership* believed that authentic managers genuinely desire to serve others through their management. They are interested in empowering the people they manage to make a difference; more than they are interested in power, money or prestige for themselves. They are guided equally by the heart and the mind – practicing heart-based guidance grounded in passion and compassion, as well as thoughtful management. People follow authentic managers because they are consistent, reliable and strong. When they are pushed to go beyond their beliefs and values, authentic managers will not compromise. If we want to foster full engagement we must be real or “get real.”

**C is for Caring.** Without caring for others and what they are trying to achieve and experience our management and relationship building is shallow and insignificant.
Caring is valuing the people who report to you and focusing more on their needs than your own. Caring is not a fluffy emotion but a number of powerful behaviors demonstrated by managers. Caring can include “care-frontation” where we hold others accountable for their performance and don’t shy away from having conversations about bad behavior or variances in performance expectations.

An excellent source to read on how caring is infused in conversation to create safety while building relationships and achieving results is *Crucial Conversations* by Kerry Patterson, Joseph Grenny, Ron McMillan, and Al Switzler.

Michael Kroth and Carolyn Keeler in a thoughtful article entitled, *Caring as a Managerial Strategy* in the *Human Resource Development Review* outlined a number of actions by managers that demonstrate caring:

- Invites employees
- Is receptive and fully available to the employee
- Is emotionally accessible
- Pays attention
- Shows interest in the employee
- Accepts the employee
- Remains open to ideas, possibilities (is open minded)
- Empathizes
- Advances employees
- Has a desire to help the employee succeed
- Puts employee plans and goals ahead of his or her own
- Advocates for the employee
- Commits to employee success
- Protects employees
- Seeks opportunities for advancing employees
- Builds employees capacities
- Sees individual potential and helps employees grow and learn
- Informs employees
- Facilitates problem solving
- Gives generative feedback
- Encourages employees
- Believes in employees
- Teaches and mentors employees
- Connects with employees
- Shares feelings
- Develops relationships of mutual trust and obligation
K is for Knowledge. Interpersonal knowledge is a key to relationships. We begin to learn more about other people and can respond in ways that create and invite more engagement based on the other person’s needs, values, beliefs, experiences, culture, personality, etc. It helps to have knowledge of how to build relationships but even more important is the knowledge we gather as we fully connect with each other. It can be very engaging to notice something is amiss for one of our employees without them saying a thing.

Strong relationships are based on knowing the other person. Do we take time to “know” and do we retain that knowledge of employees’ interests, motivators, and uniqueness to further develop both the relationship and engagement at work? Interpersonal knowledge is greatly heightened by acknowledgement, as we show or express recognition or appreciation and gratitude. Notice the word now is contained in the larger work knowledge — gather and act on your knowledge now and in the moment of relationship.

Get BACK to work. When we tell people to get back to work we are usually suggesting that they get on task. We need to achieve results and we need to understand that work is also social. You can enhance engagement for your employees and yourself by putting your backbone into it. Be fully who you are. Demonstrate the power of caring. Build your knowledge base of employees to acknowledge each employee as the unique person they already are.

Resources

1. Rodd Wagner and James K. Harter, 12: The Elements of Great Managing


5. Bill George and Peter Sims, True North.
5. Foster Recognition

When we split the word recognition it can be seen as to think again (re-cognition). We need to rethink what recognition means in workplaces beyond long service pins, toasters, donuts, and minimal encouragers such as, “good job.”

- Recognition can be strategic to assist in achieving results and advancing the enterprise.
- Recognition can be personal such as noticing when someone is struggling with a task yet reluctant to ask for help.
- Recognition can be social and make use of internal or external social media tools similar to LinkedIn, Facebook, and Twitter.

Brun and Cooper in *Missing Pieces* stated:

> the leading challenge to modern organizations is to increase the time that managers spend with their employees." they also go on to state, “people work each day. Therefore, you should as much as possible recognize their achievements on a daily basis.

Recent studies by Gallup, the Corporate Leadership Council, Towers Perrin and others illustrate that recognition is highly correlated with improved employee engagement. Recent AON Hewitt research on the status of employee engagement globally tells us: worldwide, employee engagement is at 56%, which indicates a workforce indifferent to organizational success or failure. The largest engagement drop is in how employees perceive performance management. Employee are asking for recognition for their efforts, better communication about company direction, and an improved link to how individual employees can contribute to the organization.
We must look at both the intent and impact of recognition. Toasters and gift cards can be effective when the intent is to express caring made tangible, not as an obligatory duty of a manager. We must also look at impact. Is recognition well-received, does it make a difference, or is it seen as managerial tokenism? Our recognition needs to be fair and it needs to be real. Gary Chapman and Paul White have written extensively about the 5 languages of appreciation at work: words of affirmation, acts of service, tangible gifts, physical touch and quality time. Roy Saunderson, from the Recognition Management Institute has been a very strong advocate for “real recognition.”

Without recognition our workplaces are void of the human element. Are you fully letting employees know that you see them, you are thinking about them and you both recognize and appreciate them? Authentic recognition is so much more than an annual gala or occasional gift card for good behavior. Recognition is social, strategic, and powerful. Recognition is the “re-thinking” of engagement in our everyday interactions and recognition for progress creates a strong multiplier for the motivation and engagement of knowledge workers.

Employees are over-surveyed and under-engaged. Added to this is the lack of recognition in surveys due to the extensive use of anonymous surveys. At one level, anonymous surveys are telling employees we don’t want to know who you are. If it is not safe to write your name on a survey given by the people who employ you I believe we have less of an engagement problem and more of a safety and recognition problem. We need to recognize disengagement not as a punishable offence but as a trigger for a conversation.

The symbol used in the employee engagement pyramid for recognition resembles the Eye of Horus an Egyptian symbol associated with power, good health, and action. We must engage with recognition while we fully recognize engagement. Recognition can power an organization and contribute to employee well-being. We must fully open our eyes and senses to both recognize and appreciate the people we work with.

Recognition is the inside center of the pyramid of employee engagement. It is central to engagement at work. We must help employees recognize

- what they need to engage with to achieve key results,
- their level of performance from excellence and mastery to deficiency and gaps,
- the power of progress as a motivator and the importance of minimizing setbacks,
- that organizations are based on relationships and community,
- the power of moments at work and the ability to flow into the moment of work,
- personal and working strengths as elements of engagement and contributors to wellbeing,
• authentic meaning at work giving us greater purpose, connection, and engagement,
• the vital role engagement can play in enhancing wellbeing and how key it is to engage purposefully in wellbeing for ourselves and others,
• that work can both consume and contribute to mental, physical, emotional, spiritual and organizational energy.

Resources


6. Master Moments

Engagement resides in the moment. Learn to master moments from high quality connections to powerful touch points. When we balance challenge and skills we enter the flow zone as we dwell and work within the moment. In addition, focusing our work within the moment alleviates work stress.

Here are six ways to engage the moment:

1. Access 1% of the 20,000 opportunities for engagement.
2. Be a micro-manager, really!
3. Reach out and TouchPoint somebody.
4. Transform IQ into HQI to power up the organization.
5. Dwell in the moment to banish stress.
6. Intersect challenge and skill to find flow.

According to Nobel Prize-winning scientist Daniel Kahneman, we experience approximately 20,000 individual moments in a day. Each “moment” lasts a few seconds and each offers an opportunity to engage. Within a moment we can fuse with our task at hand for full engagement or reach out beyond ourselves to appreciate and recognize others. Even at just 1% fulfillment we would experience 200 powerful and engaged moments every day.

Generally, being a micromanager is not perceived to be an admirable quality in a manager or a helpful connection to the manager or work for the employee. But what if we manage our moments and focus on our moments of interaction. Micro moments can make a big difference. Engagement, to be effective, must be reduced to the verb of engage and when we fully engage the moment seemingly miraculous things begin to occur. Instead of the energy sapping interaction of micromanagement based on
command and control of trivial details become a manager of the micro moments of work by enhancing connection, input, interaction, authenticity, and co-creation.

Managing moments of interruption is the Campbell chicken soup for the organization as it originates from the former CEO of Campbell soup, Doug Conant. Doug used TouchPoints to transform Gallup’s dismal engagement scores at Campbell Soup into some of the best scores Gallup has seen. Doug believed the moment of interruption is the real work of management. Each of the many connections you make has the potential to become a high point or a low point in someone’s day. The point of getting in touch is that each touch point has the opportunity to “establish high performance expectation, to infuse the agenda with great clarity and more energy, and to influence the course of events…TouchPoints take place any time two or more people get together to deal with an issue and get something done” (page 2). Our interruption interactions are not distractions but rather the real work of management. In the moment of engagement action resides in the interaction.

Jane Dutton, from the Ross School of Business and Positive Organizational Scholarship movement, believes that there is tremendous power in our connections and interactions and we must guard against corrosive connections that corrode motivation, loyalty, commitment and engagement. Rather, we must enhance high-quality connections or interactions marked by mutual positive regard, trust, and active engagement on both sides. A cornerstone of high quality connections is respectful engagement characterized by being present to others, affirming them, and communicating and listening in a way that manifests regard and an appreciation of the other person’s worth. Even small acts of respectful engagement infuse a relationship with greater energy. An ongoing stream of high quality interaction by people within an organization may be the single most powerful way to renew and contribute to an organization’s energy to achieve results. It takes energy to initiate a high quality interaction but we find a return or recharge of energy through the interaction.

Alan Watts, a Zen-like thinker from the 1960’s, once said:

If you make where you are going more important than where you are there may be no point in going.

Stephan Rechtschaffen stated in Time Shifting “there is no stress in the present moment.” Rechtschaffen advocated for time awareness — living fully in the moment. The practice of timeshifting recognizes that every moment has a particular rhythm to it, and that we have the capacity to expand or contract an individual moment. One way to shift what’s going on in our world is not to try to rush to do more, but to allow ourselves to go deeper into that moment. Timeshifting is our ability to shift gears, to shift our rhythm to meet that moment and be present in it. We waste great chunks of time by thinking about what we’ve just did and what we’ve need to do next, instead of
what we’re doing now. Much of our stress comes from regret and dread. Rechtschaffen offered a number of practical tips to improve our moments at work:

1. Get to meetings early so you can compose yourself before the others arrive.
2. When the phone rings, let it ring one extra time to “get centered.”
3. Practice “mindfulness” by doing just one thing at a time, giving it your full attention.
4. Pause after you finish one task before beginning another. If possible, make it last for several minutes.
5. While waiting for an elevator, think about the present instead of succumbing to the rush and anxiety of tasks still waiting.

Work in the moment by working on tasks that balance challenge and skills level. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s book Flow is over 21 years old yet offers timeless perspective and advice on how we approach a state of merging fully with work. He has found that we experience more flow in work than our leisure time and suggests we frequently overlook the richness of the experience that engagement offers us at work. Many of the current game developers have studied flow very closely to ensure their games are designed to help players experience flow. We need to do the same in our workplaces. Some of the key characteristics that promote flow at work are:

- Clear goals - expectations and rules are discernible and goals are attainable and align appropriately with one’s skill set and abilities.
- Concentration - a high degree of concentration on a limited field of attention.
- Lack of self-consciousness - the merging of action and awareness.
- Timelessness - one’s subjective experience of time is altered.
- Powerful feedback - successes and failures in the course of the activity are apparent, so that behavior can be adjusted as needed.
- Balance of ability and challenge - the activity is neither too easy nor too difficult.
- Sense of personal control over the situation or activity.
- Intrinsic rewards so there is an effortlessness of action.
- Full absorption into the activity, narrowing of the focus of awareness down to the activity itself.

Resources


3. Edward Hallowell: Crazybusy: Overstretched, Overbooked, and About to Snap! Strategies for Coping in a World Gone ADD
4. Tom Rath and Donald Clifton, *How Full is Your Bucket?*

7. Leverage Strengths

Engagement is strong stuff. When you know your strengths, live your strengths, and leverage your strengths in the service of others you will have increased engagement, happiness, and wellbeing. To bring out the strengths of others we must be aware of our own strengths. Powerful managers “spot” employees’ strengths and make strength training and strengthening routines a daily endeavor.

Here are five pathways to strengthen your engagement and work.

Heed the advice of Peter Drucker. Peter Drucker was a prolific management writer who focused intently on strengths at work in his final years. In 1999 in an article in managing our own career Drucker said we have to place ourselves where we can make the greatest contribution to our organizations and communities. And we have to stay mentally alert and engaged during a 50-year working life, which means knowing how and when to change the work we do. It may seem obvious that people achieve results by doing what they are good at and by working in ways that fit their abilities but Drucker believed very few people actually know—let alone take advantage of—their fundamental strengths. He challenged each of us to ask ourselves and hold conversations with others at work about:

- What are my strengths?
- How do I perform?
- What are my values?
- Where do I belong?
- What should my contribution be?

Accept yourself, don’t try to change yourself, Drucker cautioned. Concentrate on improving the skills you have and accepting assignments that are tailored to your
individual way of working. If you do that, you can transform yourself from an ordinary worker into an outstanding performer. Today’s successful careers are not planned out in advance. They develop when people are prepared for opportunities because they have asked themselves the above questions and rigorously assessed their unique characteristics.

Follow Martin Seligman’s strong path towards happiness and wellbeing. If Drucker is the dean of management then Seligman is the dean of psychology and leader of positive psychology. Seligman is a cautious academic, former head of the American Psychological Association, and a true difference maker. He was instrumental in turning psychology toward a balance of the positive and the negative. Starting with Learned Optimism and then moving to Authentic Happiness Seligman created a constructive and positive foundation for psychology. In regards to strengths, Seligman was involved in creating was the VIA Strength Survey of Character Strengths – measuring 24 character strengths. VIA is an abbreviation for values in action. The survey has a universal perspective, it can be applied both inside and outside of work, and it is available at no cost. Research has demonstrated that is you know your top 5 strengths, use them on a daily basis, and leverage them in the service of others you will have a much higher level of happiness and wellbeing.

Gallup along with your strengths and don’t forget your winning combination is 40-22-1. As an organization Gallup has been at the forefront of helping individuals and organizations bring strengths to work. The third question in their famous Q12 survey of employee engagement is: At work, I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day. This was a question of strength and Gallup also found that if a manager ignored an employee’s performance there was a 44% chance that employee was disengaged; if a manager only talked about gaps and weaknesses there was a 22% chance the employee was disengaged; and if a manager talked to an employee about performance from a strength based perspective there was only a 1% chance that employee was disengaged.

Marcus Buckingham and now Tom Rath have created powerful and popular books and resources for strength based work. Their primary strength-based assessment is StrengthsFinder 2.0. You can take the online assessment after purchasing one of their books related to strengths at work and entering the code at the StrengthsFinder website. Gallup does an impressive job of creating helpful information and resources to learn more about your strength and how to put them to work. They offer a number or resources in addition to StrengthsFinder 2.0 to get the most from your strengths.

Marcus Buckingham worked with Gallup and is now a popular independent strength based speaker, writer, and coach. He has recently developed another strength assessment tool for work in Stand Out - designed to help you find your edge and win at work. His assessment is okay but his best contribution was in the book Go Put Your
Strengths to Work and the video, Trombone Player Wanted. Buckingham encouraged us to find out strengths not in an assessments or inventories but by paying very close attention to what we looked forward to doing each day at work, what fully engaged us at work while we were there, and what gave us our greatest sense of satisfaction. In other words, we looked at what engaged us to determine our strengths and then we maximized these activities and roles to enhance our engagement. There was no need for an inventory or test. I think his delightful video series on Trombone Player Wanted was a great way to help a team build strengths by watching the videos together, having conversations about the applications and implications of what he said, and holding each other mutually accountable for bringing their best to work each day.

The University of Michigan’s Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship developed the Reflected Best Self Exercise to use stories collected from people in all contexts of our life to help us understand and articulate who we are and how we make contributions when we are at our best. These stories collected from people who know us can strengthen and connect us to others, help us experience clarity about who we are at our best, and refine personal development goals so that we can be at our best more often. I think the strength of this approach is the social element and as opposed to the anonymous feedback of a 360 evaluation it offers triggers for further discussion and elaboration from the people who let us know what we are like when we were at our best. Many of us have blind spots or lacunas about our strengths and the Reflected Best Self Exercise can fill in those gaps or holes.

Here are six suggestions for getting stronger at work.

- Ensure you go beyond taking a test and saying you’ve “done that strength thing.”
- Don’t reduce strengths to a list of 5 attributes.
- Be mindful of what truly engages you and work backwards from engagement to strengths.
- Notice other people’s strengths and give them lots of strength based feedback.
- Develop a daily structure or reminders so that you don’t lose your strengths in the flurry of demands and activities.
- Be disciplined about your strengths and turn your strength based work into the foundation of your work.

Resources

1. Peter Drucker, Managing Oneself.

2. Martin Seligman, Flourish: A Visionary new understanding of Happiness and Well-being
3. Tom Rath, *StrengthsFinder 2.0*

4. Marcus Buckingham, *Go Put Your Strengths to Work*

5. Marcus Buckingham, *Trombone Player Wanted* (Video)
8. Make Meaning

For work to sustain and enrich people it must be meaningful. Those who have a why to work can bear almost any how and a sense of meaningful work instills a strong and rich intrinsic motivation. Progress, when it is meaningful, can be one of the best events of our day.

Paul Fairlie recently published an article on meaningful work and engagement in *Advances in Developing Human Resources*. He listed the common dimensions of meaning: having a purpose or goal, living according to one’s values and goals, autonomy, control, challenge, achievement, competence, mastery, commitment, engagement, service to others, self-realization, growth and fulfillment. Fairlie conducted research on meaningful work with 574 respondents. He offered six implications for human resource development practice including deeper discussion and social connections, changing mindsets, and management education on models of human meaning. He concluded that meaningful work was a unique predictor of engagement, “meaningful work characteristics are an overlooked sources of employee motivation and engagement within organizations.”

Here are eight ways to create meaningful work:

1. Trump how with why
2. Build abundant leadership whys
3. Stretch meaning, shrink money
4. Get Pink with autonomy, mastery, purpose
5. Master your mojo
6. Reframe your values as promises
7. Lead on purpose
8. Double your WAMI at work
Viktor Frankl concluded that the meaning of life is found in every moment of living and that life never ceases to have meaning. To move his framework to the workplace, if you have a why to work you can bear almost any how. Not everyone is engaged in meaningful work, but everyone can be. Organizations, leaders, managers, and employees must learn how to co-create meaningful workplaces. Part of making this happen is helping workers to perceive and experience the greater purpose in their work. In the workplace, meaning is co-created between the organization and individual. It is not something we give to another person — meaning must be built through authentic conversations about the why of work.

David and Wendy Ulrich wrote *The Why of Work: How Great Leaders Build Abundant Organizations that Win*. The authors frame the book around down-to-earth and meaningful questions about identity, purpose, motivation, relationships, teams, work culture, contribution, growth, learning, resilience, civility and happiness. They encourage us to ask:

- What am I known for?
- Where am I going?
- Whom do I travel with?
- How do I build a positive work environment?
- What challenges and interest me?
- How do I respond to disposability and change?
- What delights me?

*The Why of Work* is a practical book for leaders who are looking to instill meaning. As the authors state in their preface:

*Leaders are meaning makers: they set direction that others aspire to; they help others participate in doing good work and good works; they communicate ideas and invest in practices that shape how people think, act, and feel. As organizations become an increasing part of the individual’s sense of identity and purpose, leaders play an increasing role in helping people shape the meaning of their lives.*

Money matters but so does meaning, completion, competition and motivation to instill caring at work. Dan Ariely offered an insightful 4 minute video on work and meaning on the Big Think site. He outlines how motivation and engagement are created through meaning. Here is a short snippet from the transcript:

*Sure, we care about money and it’s nice to get paid, but there’s also a whole range of other things that we get—a need for achievement and completion,*
competition with other people, and a sense of progress and a sense of meaning…I think the relative importance of money is getting smaller and the relative importance of those other things could get…could get much larger…The first lesson is that we need to recognize how important meaning, completion, competition, motivations are in getting people to care and to work hard, and we need to try to encourage those…we need to do things that don’t undercut those human motivations.

Daniel Pink wrote the popular book, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. Meaning and motivation according to the research Pink gathered is created through autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Pink stated that purpose maximization is taking its place alongside profit maximization as an aspiration and a guiding principle. We need to use profit to reach purpose, lessen the emphasis on self-interest, and help people pursue purpose on their own terms. Pink believe this may not only rejuvenate our businesses and organizations but also remake our world.

Marshall Goldsmith offers *MOJO* to find meaning. Mojo means working with 3 elements:

1. Identity (Who do you think you are?)
2. Achievement (What have you done lately?)
3. Reputation (Who do other people think you are? What do other people think you’ve done lately?)

We find professional mojo by what we bring to an activity. This includes motivation, knowledge, ability, confidence, and authenticity. Our personal mojo is developed by what the activity brings to us. This includes happiness, reward, meaning, learning, and gratitude.

Mike Morrison’s, the former Dean of the University of Toyota, wrote a slim book on *The Other Side of the Card: Where Your Authentic Leadership Begins*. He stated that one side of our business card has writing and the other has meaning. The meaning is created on the blank side of the card. The book offers a number of short exercises to fill the white space of our work with meaning. One element of the book that really stood out for me was to reframe values as promises. Values are often nice sounding statements that are frozen in a framed wall statement while promises are something we keep. Ensure that your values don’t stagnate on the wall, think of them as promises, and then do all you can to keep the promises you make.

Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer have done research demonstrating how important minimizing setbacks and maximizing progress is for engaged work. In the January 2012 *McKinsey Quarterly* they outline how leaders kill meaning at work. This occurs by
dismissing the importance of subordinates’ work or ideas, destroying a sense of ownership by switching people off projects teams before work is finalized, shifting goals so frequently that people despair that their work will ever see the light of day, and neglecting to keep subordinates up to date on changing priorities for customers.

The article includes a plea for executives to instill meaning in others and find their own sense of meaning:

you are in a better position than anyone to identify and articulate the higher purpose of what people do within your organization. Make that purpose real, support its achievement through consistent everyday actions, and you will create the meaning that motivates people toward greatness. Along the way, you may find greater meaning in your own work as a leader.

Michael F. Stager encourages us to find our WAMI (work and meaning inventory) at work. People work for many reasons – some are obvious (I am paid to work), some are not as obvious (work is where my friends are). Research evidence and case studies testify to the reality that understanding how people approach work and what they get from it is vital to learning how to achieve the best possible outcomes for individuals and organizations.

Meaningful work is a good predictor of desirable work attitudes like job satisfaction. In addition, meaningful work is a better predictor of absenteeism from work than job satisfaction. The Work and Meaning Inventory (WAMI) assesses three core components of meaningful work: the degree to which people find their work to have significance and purpose, the contribution work makes to finding broader meaning in life, and the desire and means for one’s work to make a positive contribution to the greater good.

Here are five meaningful considerations.

- Create meaning rather than searching for it. Making meaning is a creative and co-creative process.
- Work with meaning while achieving meaningful results.
- Actively engage with some of the sources listed here to enhance your own meaning and help others create their meaning.
- Have wide eyes about your work so that you can see and experience the greater purpose in what you do.
- Remind yourself that meaning is a process not an event. You don’t simply find meaning one day, you engage in meaningful work every day.
Resources


2. Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*.


4. Dan Pink, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*

5. Marshall Goldsmith, *MOJO: How to get it, how to keep it, how to get it back if you lose it*.


9. Enhance Wellbeing

We need to create wellbeing inside of work. There are things we can do outside of work to promote wellbeing but how we foster and enhance well-being within work is becoming increasingly important. We must eliminate toxic workplaces poisoned with a lack of respect or mutuality. We must create a profound wellbeing where people leave work enlivened and enriched rather than depleted and deadened.

Here are five prescriptions for wellbeing at work

1. Enliven the five elements of wellbeing.
2. Establish permanent wellbeing.
3. Mind your work
4. Establish and maintain psychological and social safety
5. Bring the wellbeing manifesto to life

Tom Rath and James Harder in *Well Being* state that wellbeing is a combination of

Our love for what we do each day, the quality of our relationships, the security of our finances, the vibrancy of our physical health, and the pride we take in what we have contributed to our communities. Most importantly, it’s about how these five elements interact (p. 4).

About 66% of us are doing well with at least one of these elements but only 7% of us are thriving in all five areas. This leaves much room to improve wellbeing at work by working on our career wellbeing, social wellbeing, financial wellbeing, physical wellbeing, and community wellbeing.

Martin Seligman approaches well-being with the caution of a scientist and the optimism of someone who developed the approach of learned optimism. In *Flourish*, Seligman
went beyond happiness work to examine flourishing and offered practical suggestions on how to instill wellbeing. His perspective of wellbeing also has a foundation of 5 elements, different than Gallup, and structured around the mnemonic PERMA. PERMA stands for: positive emotions, engagement, relationship, meaning, and achievement.

Can we strive for permanent wellbeing? Positive emotions and the pleasant life contribute to our wellbeing and happiness. Engagement creates wellbeing with powerful connections to work, belonging and serving. Relationships, one of the 10 blocks of the pyramid of engagement, in study after study is found to be one of the most salient contributors to wellbeing. Meaning, the most recent block examined in this series on the pyramid of engagement is vital for health. Achievement has been a new insertion in Seligman’s approach to authentic happiness and wellbeing. Seligman examined his own love of playing bridge and realized how much achievement plays a role in wellbeing. Achievement fits well with the top three blocks of the employee engagement pyramid: results, performance, and progress.

Mindfulness can be a powerful yet subtle pathway to wellbeing. Jon Kabat-Zinn defined mindfulness as “paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally.” How well do you show up to the moment? We may reduce high levels of stress attached to the past and the future by being where we are. As Stephan Rechtschaffen declared in Time Shifting, “there is no stress in the present moment.”

A recent Harvard Business review blog post by Holly Labarre quoted Pamela Weiss:

If you want to transform an organization it’s not about changing systems and processes so much as it’s about changing the hearts and minds of people. Mindfulness is one of the all-time most brilliant approaches for helping to alleviate human suffering and for bringing out our extraordinary potential as human beings.

Mindfulness seems so subtle, almost anemic for wellbeing, but for a world gone crazy busy it can keep us well, centered, aware, connected, and present. We often seem to be searching for dramatic data-driven tools when this subtle and powerful tool is always available to us, embedded in us, and just a moment away.

We have focused and improved physical safety at work. We need to keep all employees safe. In addition we need to ensure that our work and workplaces are infused with psychological and social safety. Safety is created through mutual purpose and mutual respect. It means we care about each other and we care about what each other is interested in. This must be genuine and it is more than a fuzzy warm feeling. People perceive a lack of safety in seconds and this subverts our ability to achieve results, build relationships and be well at work.

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A lack of safety saps wellbeing at work and creates ineffective conflicts and confrontations. We seem to have a bigger safety issue than engagement issue at work. It feels unsafe for most workers to be honest, direct, and respectful about engagement. An unintended consequence of the anonymous survey in engagement is that we are telling employees we don’t want to know who they are, thereby making employees invisible. Robust engagement needs a name and a face. Management also justifies anonymous surveys because they don’t believe workers will be honest unless they are anonymous. We need to stop thinking of disengagement as a punishable offence and instead use it as a trigger for meaningful conversation about work.

Based on fifteen years work as an employee assistance counsellor and 25 years teaching counselling psychology at the University of Manitoba here is a 33 point manifesto and guide to better wellbeing at work:

1. We must find wellbeing inside of work and not wait until we are outside of work at the end of our day or in retirement.
2. Hope is a misguided future perspective taking us away from where we can really make a difference, right here – right now.
3. There is no stress in the present moment so strive to be where you are.
4. Self-esteem is an evaluative trap that snares you like cheese snares a mouse with the snap of the trap. Accept yourself don’t evaluate yourself.
5. Life comes before work and work/life balance is not static it is a dynamic balance.
6. Wellbeing is only a concept until we engage in well doing.
7. Ignorance is more important than knowledge in fostering and enhancing wellbeing. We begin by not knowing.
8. People don’t actually hear most interpersonal feedback unless they feel safe and safety is the only way to overcome most of our problems.
9. Genuine caring trumps professional competence in almost every relationship.
10. Achieving happiness is a shallow and insignificant approach to living.
12. Powerful questions we ask our self are the ideal WD40 for a brain clogged by an amygdala seizure.
13. Wellbeing is strong stuff. We must know, live and leverage our strengths in the service of others.
14. It take energy directed towards wellbeing to get energy and when you are depleted this is a real hindrance to experiencing wellbeing.
15. Relaxation is the anemic aspirin of stress management and can actually cause stress.
16. What lessens your stress today could be a major contributor of stress tomorrow.
17. There are no algorithmic certainties of wellbeing only heuristic probabilities of success.
18. In life and work you are going to fumble, fail, and fall. You are human. It is not about avoiding falling down it is about how you pick yourself back up again. Recite the following statement: I am not okay, you are not okay and that is okay.
19. Placebos are examples of caring made tangible.
20. Employee wellbeing is not a soft skill just as accounting is not a hard skill. Wellbeing embraces fluid skills when the fixed parts of our life are in need of repair.
21. Reality is overrated, living through positive illusion, not delusion, is powerful and practical.
22. Wellbeing is more than a personal endeavor it is a social phenomenon.
23. Only you are responsible for your own wellbeing but others are accountable for your wellbeing just as you are accountable for their wellbeing.
24. No one can upset you once 90 seconds have passed.
25. Compliance is the anemic by-product of power.
26. We do not resist change we resist coercion and the gravity of the familiar is what holds us in place.
27. If life throws you a lemon — duck, determine where it came from, think about what you can do about it and only then contemplate making lemonade.
28. Positive thinking must be changed into a more authentic constructive thinking. Lots of bad things do happen and positive thinking may be a gloss over the rich, albeit ruggedness, of human experience.
29. Bad is at least twice as salient as good in most situations so we must tip the scales of good for good.
30. Most of what we know really isn’t so.
31. Contradiction is only troublesome if you are locked into rigid thinking and a fixed mindset.
32. Wellness tips like these without personal evaluation and experimentation can create a misguided tyranny of tips leading towards more stress. Follow the Buddha’s wisdom, be a lamp unto yourself.
33. Take a long shot. Charlie Chaplin once said, “life is a tragedy in close up and a comedy in long shot.” How long does it take you to get a long shot on yourself, others, and situations?

Resources


4. Stephan Rechtschaffen, *Time Shifting: Creating More time to Enjoy Your Life*

10 Enliven Energy

The raw material of engagement is energy. It takes energy to engage and authentic engagement contributes to our energy. Energy comes in a variety of forms: mental, emotional, physical, organizational, and spiritual. We must strive towards mastery of all our energies.

Here are five ways to be instill energy for employee engagement

1. Power up your engagement through energy
2. Energize through high-quality connections
3. Mobilize energy and avoid traps
4. Walk for just ten minutes
5. Ask the number one energy question of yourself and others

In the past 10 years there has been a stronger focus on mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual energy. Although this is a relatively new focus for the workplace these four energies have been a strong part of the traditional medicine wheel used by First Nations People for hundreds of years.

Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz wrote about the 4 energies in *The Power of Full Engagement* in 2003. This was one of the best early books on engagement. They made strong energy declarations

> Energy, not time, is the fundamental currency of high performance.  
> Performance health and happiness are grounded in the skillful management of energy.

Loehr and Schwartz argued that to be fully engaged we must be physically energized, emotionally connected, mentally focused and spiritually aligned with a purpose beyond
our immediate self-interest. They stated that physical capacity is the quantity of energy, emotional capacity is the quality of energy, mental capacity is the focus of energy, and spiritual capacity is the force of energy. We need lots of high quality energy to provide us with focus and force to achieve results. Loaded with suggestions, research and practical practices this book can help you transform and leverage your energy for full engagement.

Jane Dutton from the Ross School of Business and a leader in positive organizational scholarship has done a lot of research and writing on energy in organizations. Energy is the sense of “being eager to act and capable of action.” Dutton offers an evidenced based pathway to foster and enhance organizational energy through the strength of high-quality connections at work. Energy is a limited but renewable resource and managers can contribute immensely to energy creation. High-quality connections not only energize others and ourselves, they have a significant impact on well-being and lessen or eliminate corrosive connections. Everyday interactions build upon respectful engagement, task enabling, and trust can bring dynamic vitality to engagement and organizational results.

Heike Bruch and Bernd Vogel outlined how leaders can boost their organization’s energy and ignite strong performance. Organizational energy is the force behind an organization or team works. The organizations must mobilize its emotional, cognitive, and behavioral potential. There are four states of energy based on intensity and quality: corrosive energy, resigned energy, comfortable energy, and productive energy. In productive energy, we see high levels of passion, mental agility, and effort aligned with organizational goals. Energy states are predictive of numerous gains in performance, productivity, efficiency, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. To maximize organizational energy, organizations must guard against three energy draining traps: over complacency, eroding corrosion, and never ending acceleration.

Robert E. Thayer wrote an insightful and well-researched book on energy and mood: Calm Energy: How People Regulate Mood with Food and Exercise. He conducted in-depth research on how we control mood and how often we control mood through food. Thayer demonstrated in a number of studies that a more powerful way to control mood and energy was by short periods of brisk walking — after just 10 minutes of brisk walking energy was significantly increased for one hour. We much replenish our energy during the day and short periods of brisk walking or short periods of napping offer quick pathways to rejuvenating work.

Ask yourself and others the primary energy question. Donald H. Graves spent a year studying the relationship between energy and teaching. He wrote an informative book on the energy to teach. In essence, he travelled around America asking teachers one basic question. This may be the key question you can ask yourself and others to provide an open ended pathway to an energizing conversation.
What gives you energy, what takes it away, and what for you is a waste of time?

Of course, we must bring our responses to life by making changes and taking action.

Resources

1. Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz, *The Power of Full Engagement*
2. Jane Dutton, *Energize Your Workplace: How to Create and Sustain High-Quality Connections at Work*
3. Robert Thayer, *Calm Energy*
4. Heike Bruch and Bernd Vogel, *Fully Charged*
5. Donald H. Graves, *The Energy to Teach*
Employee Engagement Pyramid Power

David Zinger, M.Ed., has devoted his career to employee engagement. He wrote two books on work, 1800 blog posts on work, and founded and hosts the 5000 member Employee Engagement Network – a global community built to increase employee engagement around the globe.

Bring the power of the pyramid of employee engagement to your workplace, organization or conference.

Mr. Zinger offers customizable sessions ranging from one hour keynotes and half day or full day sessions to a 100 day program for managers.

Build the pyramid of engagement in your organization today to get moving, get results, get relationships and get engaged!

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