

**Engaging Management:**

**THE END**

**Put an End to Employee Engagement**

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*What we call the beginning is often the end  
and to make an end is to make a beginning.*

*The end is where we start from.*

*~ T. S. Eliot, Little Gidding*

**We need to put an end to employee engagement.** I can imagine I hear a cadre of managers cheering at the suggested end of another task on their bulging to-do list while another group of managers look quizzically at the statement because they are just launching employee engagement efforts in their organization after receiving dismal survey results paired with the strong business case for engagement. Employee engagement needs to end by being woven into the fabric of work so that it does not fade away or be abandoned when managers are cajoled by management consultants to jump on the latest and greatest new bandwagon.

**Begin with the end.** Stephen Covey's recommended that we develop the habit of beginning with the end in mind in his popular book, **The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People**. This chapter will help you develop the understanding and approach to end engagement well. There will be an outline of the current state of employee engagement, a definition fused with a model of engagement and twelve steps you can take to ensure engagement ends well.

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**An engagement surge.** There has been a surge of interest in employee engagement. As founder and community manager of the **Employee Engagement Network** I have witnessed a rise in membership from a small group of about 10 in February of 2007 to over 4200 by September 2011. Every day in social media an author, consultant, or leader is extolling the benefits of employee engagement while tweets, blog posts, white papers and workshops proliferate. Much of the former work on motivation, branding and change management work is being subsumed under the catchphrase of employee

engagement. Meanwhile, sceptics have also pounced on employee engagement work as a fad, bandwagon or scam (Harquail 2010).

**Successful Engagement.** In the United Kingdom, David MacLeod and Nita Clarke completed a well-written, comprehensive report on **Engaging for Success: Enhancing Performance Through Employee Engagement**. This comprehensive and informative report based on in depth interviews and analysis embraced a variety of perspectives on employee engagement. In determining if employee engagement mattered they concluded:

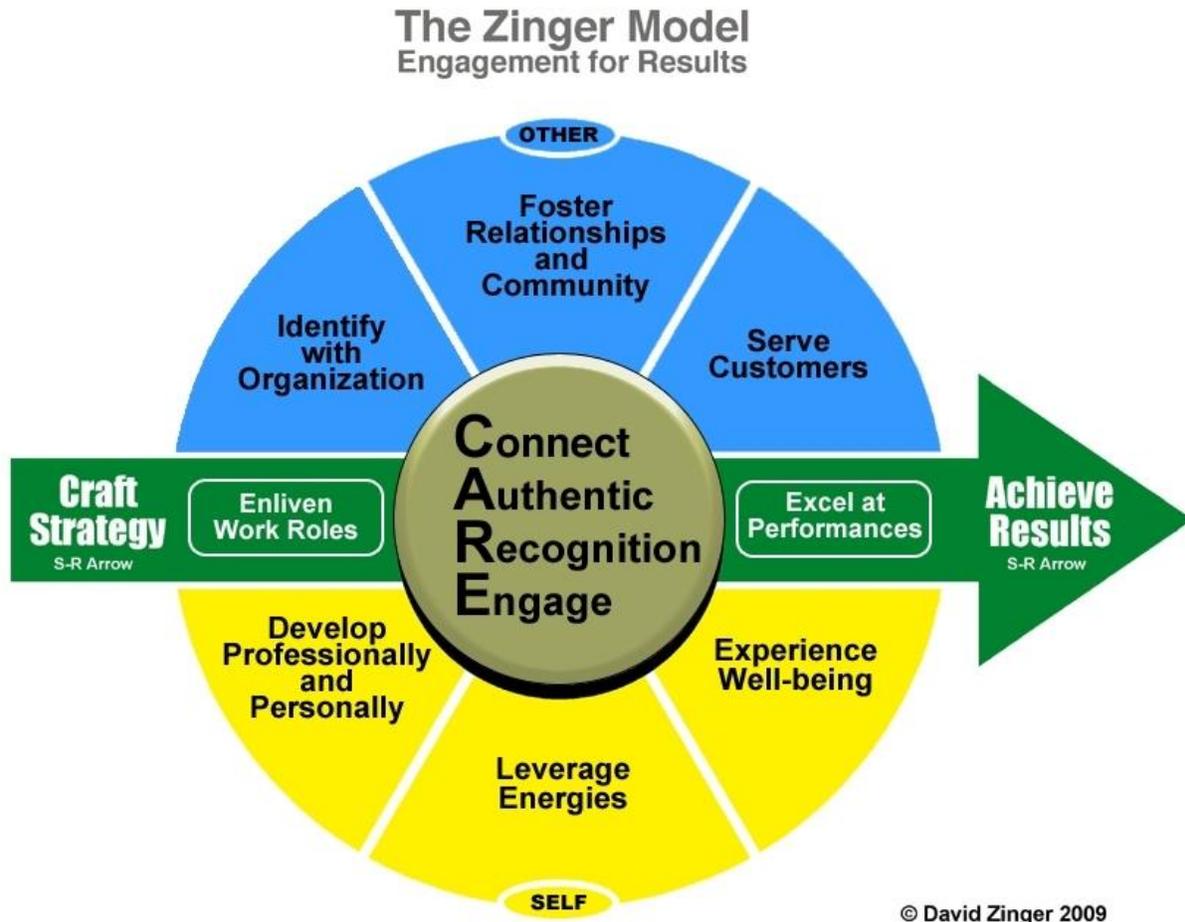
Our answer is an unequivocal yes. In the course of the past eight months we have seen many examples of companies and organisations where performance and profitability have been transformed by employee engagement; we have met many employees who are only too keen to explain how their working lives have been transformed; and we have read many studies which show a clear correlation between engagement and performance – and most importantly between improving engagement and improving performance.

This report led the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, in 2011 to form a task force led by MacLeod and Clarke to increase employee engagement throughout private industry and the government in the UK.

**A comprehensive definition.** We need a definition of engagement more aligned with the overall leadership, management, and functioning of an organization. An integrated definition would include engagement in results, strategy, and performance while also looking at community, development, and well-being. This is to ensure that engagement is not dismissed as buying donuts or having staff perform in a happy YouTube recruiting dance. One of the four drivers of engagement articulated by the MacLeod report was engaging managers who offer clarity, appreciation of employees' effort and contribution, who treat their people as individuals and who ensure that work is organised efficiently and effectively so that employees feel they are valued, and equipped and supported to do their job. Here is a definition I crafted to embrace the integration of engagement into work and management:

*Employee engagement is the art and science of engaging people in authentic and recognized connections...*

**Employee engagement** is the art and science of engaging people in authentic and recognized connections to strategy, roles, performance, organization, community, relationship, customers, development, energy, and well-being as we leverage, sustain, and transform our work connections into results.



The definition can also be visualized in the model above. The definition and model integrate employee engagement into the normal practices of management and high levels of employee engagement can be reached by practicing effective basic management.

**Don't.** Managers don't need additional engagement initiatives heaped on their plate of demands already overflowing beyond any reasonable ability for completion. They don't need to be told they are responsible for engagement of their staff and that low engagement scores are their fault. Managers don't need to fly to another initiative like moths to a light only to get burned when results are not achieved. Managers don't need another 2-day workshop taking them away from their work and then telling them they

have to do 6 new things when they return to work while their work falls further behind because they were at a seminar.

**12 Invitations.** Rather, here are 12 shifts managers can make to ensure engagement ends well. These shifts will help managers get things done through integration rather than addition while offering a sustainable approach to work. I encourage you to slowly contemplate and judiciously practice this list of invitations rather than feel compelled to follow them as a quick fix or a tyranny of tips. The art of successful management is weaving together approaches, strategies, and tactics in your own mindful management tapestry that works for your reports, organization, customers and you.

- 1. Be the employee you already are.** Fully recognize that as a manager you are an employee. There is no “them” in engagement so be cautious of creating a division between yourself and your reports. Engagement is connection and connection is frayed by holding an us/them mentality. Accentuate the “we” in engagement and minimize the me by knowing who you are as a manager is co-created by whom you manage. You don’t have to be best friends with the people who report to you. You need to foster mutual respect and interest while acknowledging that you are joined by your humanness as you fulfill different roles and functions within the organization.

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- 2. No problem.** Stop viewing employee engagement as a problem to be solved. Engagement is an experience to be lived rather than a problem that needs to be solved. Engagement is a human endeavour and engagement can enhance not only productivity but employee wellbeing, community mobilization, and career development in the workplace. Problems are something we want to eliminate while engagement is something we want to integrate by being woven into work.
- 3. Engage.** Transform the noun of engagement into the verb of engage. Engagement is not a score on an annual survey; engagement is the day to day connections all employees have with their progress, results, work, organization, customers, and peers. Look at daily actions and interactions as you concern yourself less with static state engagement and more with the everyday dynamic flow of multiple connections at work. Engagement is not something we finally achieve. Engagement is connecting daily to the key components of work.

**4. Replace imposition with invitation.** Command and control are well past their due dates. We need to see ourselves as management hosts. Hostmanship is the art of invitational welcoming based on serving, responsibility, wholeness, caring, knowledge and dialogue (Hostmanship, [www.hostmanship.com](http://www.hostmanship.com)). Managers have legitimate authority and the right to have expectations for performance. Make your requests less imposition and more invitation. Ask more and know less. Be tentative. Add more “white space” for employee input and responses. Offer compelling invitations and experience how work changes as you think of yourself as a host as opposed to a commander or guard. Of course employees can be invited to leave an organization when there is a poor fit or poor performance. Some people believe that employee engagement is exemplified by discretionary effort. I believe it is important to recognize that all effort is discretionary and that we play a role in helping all employees, including ourselves, to use good discretion in making effective and efficient work choices.

**5. Accountability on the level.** Managers are not responsible for each employee’s engagement. Employees are responsible for their own engagement just as managers are responsible for their own engagement. Yet managers are

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accountable for results and relationships so they need to check in with employee rather than check up on them. When we check in, we level with employees. When we check up we tend to exercise a power differential and employees will often feel

micromanaged. In the age of engage we need to be on the level with people and to hold them accountable by checking in frequently and powerfully to stay connected to how they are performing and how we can help.

**6. Co-create work processes.** Work is co-created. To foster full engagement we need to draw out the creativity of the worker and to get full input about the work from the person closest to the job. With one billion mobile workers we need to know that we can’t be on top of everything. If you are struggling to get everyone on the same page, ask yourself if you gave everyone an opportunity to write on that page. For example, have you considered having employees formulate the question on the next employee engagement survey? For another example of co-created work, **The Centre of Positive Organizational Scholarship** has been advocating job crafting where the nature of the job is co-created between the employee and organizations to best meet the needs of both.

7. **Strong management.** Peter Drucker in a 2005 Harvard Business Review article declared how important it was to manage ourselves and to know our strengths. Tom Rath in **Strengths Finder 2.0** declared that those who focus on their strengths every day are six times as likely to be engaged in their jobs and that if a manager focuses on employee's strengths the chance of that employee being actively disengaged is 1%. Do you know your strengths? Do you foster the strengths of those you manage? Are you leveraging your strengths on a daily basis in the service of others? Are your strengths woven into how you manage and work? Strong management is authentic strength based management.

8. **Ensure Progress.** Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer wrote **The Progress Principle**. Progress is the alchemy that transforms work into engagement.

Progress ranked higher than collaboration, recognition, and support for motivating knowledge workers. In their 2010

**Harvard Business Review** breakthrough idea they conclude:

"This brings us to perhaps the strongest advice we offer from this study:

Scrupulously avoid

impeding progress by changing goals autocratically, being indecisive, or holding up resources. Negative events generally have a greater effect on people's emotions, perceptions, and motivation than positive ones, and nothing is more demotivating than a setback—the most prominent type of event on knowledge workers' worst days."

*...nothing is more demotivating than a setback—the most prominent type of event on knowledge workers' worst days*

9. **Hold frequent conversation.** Engaged managers hold conversations rather than issuing orders. Engagement is connection and the glue of connection between people is conversation. Conversations can be as short as 45 seconds yet let the other person know you care about them and you care about what they are interested in while also offering your point of view. If you need to build your workplace conversation skills to handle variances, difficulties, and differences I recommend two books: **Crucial Conversations** and **Crucial Confrontations**.

10. **Energize through high quality connections.** Dr. Jane Dutton demonstrated that the single biggest energizer for organizations is high quality interactions. Douglas Connant, the former CEO of Campbell's Soup, outlined something similar in **TouchPoints**. Make the most of short interactions and you will find those interactions energize you, the other, and the organization. We do this even

with brief connections with others through respectful engagement, task enabling, trusting, and minimizing corrosive connections. Never miss the opportunity to engage with others in the living moments at work.

**11. Foster organizational community** Engagement has the chance to contribute to the shift we are seeing from hierarchical organization to community. Henry Mintzberg believed that managers must lead, leaders must manage, and that we are moving to “communityship”. Our work is embedded in community and engagement will be enhanced as we foster, build, and work through community. There is a strong power in a community mobilized to achieve goals that will benefit all.

**12. Practice Kaizengagement.** This has been a range of eleven potential invitations to put a good end to engagement. Do not accept all invitations at once. Engagement will end well when we take it one step at a time and our efforts are integrated rather than added. Can you say no to something you already do to say a bigger yes to engagement? Work with one invitation at a time by reading more about it, reflect on the implications and actions required, and ensure that you take action to engage. Small is the new significant when we fully stand for the significance of integrated and robust engagement at work.

*Small is the  
new significant*

## Conclusion

Let's ensure employee engagement ends well. The term, employee engagement, was necessary as a focal point to move us towards more connected and integrated work but ultimately engagement is not an extra heaped on a manager's long list of duties rather in this decade management is engagement and engagement is work.

### *Management*

*Command and control  
lose their seat  
to conversation and collaboration.*

*Organizations humanize into communities  
while impositions  
quiet respectfully into invitations.*

*Hierarchy is redrawn on the napkin  
into a matrix.*

*Leadership levels  
while management spreads.*

*Our white space decade ahead  
invites us to get more from management  
than we ever imagined.*

*~ David Zinger (2011, p. 9)*

## Today At Work...



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