

# Employee Engagement

Get a grip on it

Recent studies by both Watson Wyatt and Gallup showed that employee engagement is a leading indicator of financial performance. The studies independently concluded that companies that actively manage engagement can expect to significantly improve their financial performance. This document presents a five-step plan to improve employee engagement outcomes.

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## Employee Engagement:

*A five-step plan to improving results.*

Recent studies by both Watson Wyatt and Gallup proved that employee engagement is a leading indicator of financial performance.

The studies independently concluded that companies that actively manage engagement can expect to significantly improve their financial performance.

### So what exactly is engagement?

Gallup identified three levels of employee engagement:

- **Engaged employees** work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.
- **Non-engaged employees** have essentially “checked out.” They sleepwalk through workdays. They put in time but don’t approach their work with energy or passion. Essentially, they’ve retired on the job — they just haven’t told you yet.
- **Actively disengaged employees** aren’t just unhappy at work; they’re busy acting out their unhappiness. On a daily basis they seek opportunities to undermine what engaged co-workers accomplish.

### The Bottom Line:

The August 2009 Gallup Employee Engagement Index reported that only 33 percent of workers are engaged in their jobs. Further, Gallup says 49 percent of workers are not engaged, and 18 percent are actively disengaged.

Based on their Employee Engagement Index, a survey of nearly 42,000 randomly-selected adults, Gallup researchers estimate that disengaged workers cost U.S. businesses as much as \$350 billion a year.

In a subsequent study in January of 2010, Gallup researchers found that companies in the top 10 percent on employee engagement bested their competition by 72 percent in earnings per share during 2007-08.

For companies that scored beneath the top quartile, earnings fell 9.4 percent

### The Good News?

If you judge your level of employee engagement to be low, there is something you can do about it.

Employee engagement is manageable.

We recommend a five-step plan to managing your employee engagement to achieve maximum impact:

#### 1. Get a Grip On It

Measure the extent to which your employees are engaged, and use the data from this internal survey as a performance-improvement benchmark.

Include in your survey, variants on such questions as:

*“What gets in the way of your doing your job?”*

*“What does leadership do that gets in the way of your doing your job?”*

*“If you could change one thing about our organization’s collective behavior, what would that be?”*

These questions and others like them give you feedback about the communication-effectiveness of both departmental and senior leadership. Answers to these questions are also widely-regarded as bellwethers of engagement for the employee and her/his work group, and should be closely analyzed.

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In addition, surveys show that companies do a less than satisfactory job of empowering their employees to perform basic tasks – ***ironically, often the tasks they were hired to perform.***

If these issues exist in your organization, an engagement survey will not only surface them---it will create the implicit expectation that corrective action will be taken, and will tell you where skills-training is needed to create the confidence that leads to greater employee engagement.

Deploy these surveys annually, with 'hot-spot' surveys taken quarterly in those departments with the lowest levels of engagement to assure that your eventual corrective action plan is finding traction.

### 2. Get A Proven Plan

Employee engagement affects financial performance, affects customer perceptions, and affects the performance of everyone in the organization. For this reason, improving employee engagement should be treated as an organization-wide imperative and we recommend that a Project Manager be assigned to this initiative.

The Project Manager should be provided the appropriate resources, authority, and responsibility to map an Organizational Transformation Plan and carry it to completion.

The Plan should encompass a comprehensive state-of-our-company review, authored against an example of world-class employee engagement at another organization.

It will also ensure that middle-managers are taught:

- The skills to deal with negativity in order to turn around skepticism, poor morale, and chronically unproductive staff.
- Coaching models that bring about changed behaviors in difficult people, strategies that pay off in increased teamwork, and a more effective/efficient/peaceful work environment.
- Best Practices for having a positive influence on disruptive team-members.

We recommend that the Plan be continually endorsed by the Senior Leadership Team, to both validate the importance of employee engagement in your organization, and to reinforce the authority of the Project Manager's directives.

Under leadership from the Project Manager, teams are formed to study and interpret the engagement survey. Action plans grow organically out of their findings. Engaged in determining their own destiny, people feel a sense of accomplishment.

### 3. Get Your Staff Empowered

The key to high performance and satisfaction—at work, at school, and at home—is the deep need we all have to direct our own lives, to learn and create new things, and to do better by ourselves and our world.

Employee passion is created when the Plan lives and breathes these ideas;

- Our work has meaning.  
*When's the last time you talked about 'meaningful work' in your organization?*
- Progress at work.  
*"Personal progress" outranks "salary."*
- Collaboration.  
*There's strength in teamwork.*

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- Autonomy.  
*People want to direct their own lives.*
- Growth.  
*Share the wisdom of the group, and its success stories.*
- Task variety and cross-training.  
*They're two ways employees become more valuable.*
- Clear performance expectations.  
*No "mixed messages" allowed.*
- Feedback.  
*Given on a regular, positive basis.*
- Workload balance. Work/Life balance.  
*Fairness!*
- Connectedness with leaders.  
*When's the last time you had coffee with a troubled employee?*
- Connectedness with colleagues.  
*Workers will stay when friendships are built.*

This check-list often reveals uncomfortable truths. It takes courage to welcome change to fundamental organizational beliefs and values which, although comfortable, may hinder progress.

### 4. Get Communication-Savvy

Expect that your engagement survey will highlight opportunities to improve management/supervisory communication.

Review and examine your internal rules and communication processes, to allow the greatest-possible degree of discretionary decision-making by an employee. This often involves helping front-liners create a common language that frees them to challenge and re-structure any system that restricts or prevents an employee's perception of what defines the delivery of superior customer service or winning teamwork or more efficient job-flow.

Additionally, typical comments received on employee engagement surveys trumpet the glaring disconnect between what management says and what management does. This message-gap can brew a poisonous draught of negativity if management does not make it a practice to communicate effectively, and act (routinely!) in alignment with the behaviors that endorse the fullest engagement of employees.

Changing communication patterns does not happen easily. It requires guidance and an acute awareness of how we're being perceived, and how we can be better connect with our associates.

For upper leadership, it requires visibility.

It requires that the boss get out of her/his office and 'make the rounds' during every shift, and get to know staff on a personal level. During these informal exchanges, numerous opportunities are presented to clarify organizational strategy, thank employees for work well done, dispel rumors, and ask questions related to customer service and process improvements.

Most importantly, this visibility shows that 'our management is accessible and ready to listen'.

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### 5. Get Coaching from an Experienced Consultant

Managing employee engagement is an organization-wide initiative. As such it benefits from hiring an external coach to keep the Project Manager, Senior Leaders, department-managers, and employee constituencies all on the same page philosophically, operationally, and logistically.

An experienced external coach has the skill to navigate organizational culture and politics, to assure that the improvement process is continuous and accountable.

With guidance from a coach, a clearly-communicated message to all employees that their engagement and participation in the life of the company is invited and respected will involve even those sitting too long 'on the fence.'

Such sustainability is engineered into the design of your engagement plan when a consultant partners with you. Hiring an objective coach to guide you through this process will prove a boon to organizational growth.

### About Custom Learning Systems

Through our work with hundreds of corporate clients, we have created a method that transforms organizational culture, vastly increasing employee involvement and engagement.

Grounded in a formal process---and with a focus on the elements that contribute to ongoing organizational learning and success----we adapt each coaching engagement to the specific needs of the client.

We know that individuals adapt and change their behavior, not because of 'content' or 'programs,' but because an environment is created where people are encouraged and free to learn and grow.

We coach you to demonstrate your commitment to and concern for employee engagement and welfare.

We advocate, counsel, and teach you how to:

- Build employee trust
- Empower employees to deliver amazing customer service
- Encourage reflection/personal insight to develop managerial strength
- Widen the sharing of knowledge
- Free people to ask questions and to constructively confront, to break down perceived communication barriers
- Value continual learning.
- Engage the wisdom of groups
- Grow employees via stretch/developmental assignments.
- Acknowledge and enhance employees' perception of job importance
- Assure clarity regarding job expectations.
- Offer continuing career advancement opportunities
- Open doors for regular dialogue with leadership.
- Take responsibility for high-quality work relationships
- Synthesize and make the organization's vision and values come alive
- Train employees to look for opportunities in crisis---and respond with agility

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- Establish the habit of sharing stories---including those that show how the company has learned from its mistakes
- Teach your people to be unafraid to ask for help.

### **At the end of the day, it's about “a passion for the work at your company”**

Our experience and research has shown that when employees are engaged they're willing to go the extra mile, to be good organizational citizens, to endorse the organization and perform above the expected norm.

### **For more information, or a personal consultation:**

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