



EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: WHAT YOU CAN DO AS A SUPERVISOR

BY JOHN E. TROMBLEY | THE VILLAGE FAMILY SERVICE CENTER

I imagine employee engagement has been an issue since Early Man first started to work together for survival. Let's listen in on a conversation between Geek and Grog...

"Yo, Grog. You ain't pulling your weight in this hunter-gatherer thing we got going here. Whazzup?"

"Duh. Grog unhappy. No do this no more, Geek. Big teeth try eat Grog today. No fun, y'know?"

"Well, Grog, you don't hunt and gather with the rest of us guys here, YOU don't eat. What's it gonna be? Eat or be eaten, eh?"

I can imagine Grog grunting something under his breath, sighing, slowly standing to his bare, mud-caked feet and dejectedly trudging out of the cave, dragging his club behind him through the dirt.

Fast forward to yesterday:

"Hey, Gary, I've noticed your lack of enthusiasm in working with the team these days. What's going on, man?"

"I don't know, George. I mean, I like my team and I even love the work, but ... I don't know. It just isn't fun anymore, y'know?"

If it was as simple as moving the needle on the "Fun Meter," increasing employee engagement wouldn't be that tough. Just make things more "fun" and we'd fix everything, right?

But there are a lot of degrees of engagement and a bunch of things that impact it. "Fun" isn't the only component in the equation, or even the most important one.

According to 2013 research by Gallup, 70% of workers lack engagement in their jobs. Leadership IQ paints a brighter picture in a 2019

Engagement, on Page 2

Engagement, continued from page 1

study, stating 41% are engaged vs. 30%. Where Gallup sees three levels of employee engagement (engaged, not engaged, actively disengaged), Leadership IQ identifies seven categories of engagement based on an advanced statistical tool called k-means cluster analysis.

Leadership IQ founder and CEO Mark Murphy justifies the difference saying, “The reports that disengaged employees comprise two-thirds of the workforce are deeply flawed because those numbers fail to account for employee motivation.” His research shows that another 36% of employees are motivated but don’t like their companies and aren’t happy with their day-to-day work experience.

And that’s an area for immediate supervisors to pay attention to because no one can directly influence an employee’s daily work-life experience like they do.

When supervisors create a safe, respectful, healthy working environment, they can help move the engagement needle from 41% up to 77%. Imagine how much “fun” work would be when the vast majority are motivated to give 100% effort and are committed to the organization. Talk about job security!

But first you must know what’s making your otherwise motivated employees unhappy, and the best way to do that is – drum roll – ASK! A great way to ask everyone is through an annual employee engagement survey that effectively identifies the sticking points and provides comparative data over time. After all, you need to know if what you’re doing to improve things actually works.

CAUTION: Be ready to act on the feedback you receive. If you don’t follow through in a timely manner or choose not to share the survey results with your employees, you’ll violate trust and things will “go south.”

Which brings us to another point: Don’t ask questions about issues that you can’t (or won’t) fix. That just produces frustration and angst.

While taking positive actions based on your survey’s data, keep this in mind:

- 1. Communicate purpose:** People need to know the mission and have a clear understanding of what the organization proposes to accomplish.
- 2. Identify connections:** People need to understand how their work impacts and combines with the work of others to accomplish the mission.
- 3. Answer “Why?”:** What we do and how we do it is important, but the why provides context and motivation. Understanding why helps us determine what to do in the absence of specific guidance. Understanding your company’s Core Values is a good place to start.
- 4. Explore your direct reports’ career path with them:** According to a 2017 Quantum Workforce study, “Engagement Favorability” increases to 82.6% when supervisors discuss their direct report’s career path on a monthly basis. People want to know that they have an opportunity to grow and develop, how to get there, and that their supervisor supports them along the way.

THE THREE TYPES OF EMPLOYEES ACCORDING TO GALLUP

- 1 ENGAGED** employees work with passion and feel a profound connection to their company. They drive innovation and move the organization forward.
- 2 NOT ENGAGED** employees are essentially “checked out.” They’re sleepwalking through their workday, putting time – but not energy or passion – into their work.
- 3 ACTIVELY DISENGAGED** employees aren’t just unhappy at work; they’re busy acting out their unhappiness. Every day, these workers undermine what their engaged coworkers accomplish.

Gallup.com

5. Avoid complacency: Gartner’s Global Talent Monitor research noted the percentage of employees who were actively searching for new job opportunities dropped from 25% in the first quarter to 12.5% in the second quarter. Unfortunately, it’s not because supervisors are suddenly ramping up their efforts to increase engagement. Instead, employees cite concerns about an economic cool-down as their motivation. On the positive side, those employees have also reported a commitment to increasing their own efforts to engage in their work in order to solidify their roles in the face of possible cutbacks. Again, as a supervisor you can’t afford to be complacent because when the pressure is off, disenchanted employees won’t stick around.

The moral of the story: How and what you do and say as a supervisor has a direct impact on employee engagement. If you’re not engaged, neither will your direct reports be. If you ARE engaged but realize your leadership skills need sharpening, be proactive about growing your self to be the best leader you can be.



John E. Trombley, MMgt

John Trombley is The Village Business Institute’s Consulting & Training Manager and serves as an Organization Development Consultant and Trainer. He has a bachelor’s degree in psychology from the University of Alaska, Anchorage, and a Master of Management degree from the University of

Mary, Fargo where he serves as an adjunct faculty member.

He is a motivational speaker with over 18 years of experience in providing training programs and consulting services in a wide variety of organization development scenarios. John is registered with the Supreme Court of the State of Minnesota as a Qualified Neutral mediator under ADR Rule 114, and is also certified in Internal Investigations by the Council on Education in Management.

Previously, John served as a Command Pilot, Squadron Commander and senior staff officer in the USAF and Air National Guard, and retired as a Lieutenant Colonel with over 6,200 flying hours.

THE *value* of CULTURE

BY ROBERT JONES
EAP Trainer | The Village Business Institute



What is the most valuable aspect of your organization? Often people respond with their building, technology, the service they provide, or the proprietary secrets that set them apart. Some may even say the people. All these things are good – and in many respects are keys to success – but they are not the most valuable aspects of the organization. The most valuable aspect of your organization is **culture**.

The culture of an organization is the foundation of how its leadership sees people. It is the basis from which decisions are made, and it is the key component to maintaining a successful organization. “Culture” has become one of the latest buzzwords in the lexicon of organizational development, but organizational leaders may not fully grasp the idea of culture.

The strength of an organizational culture does not reside in a ping pong table in the breakroom, the monthly potluck, quarterly staff meeting, or the office layout. According to Daniel Coyle, author “The Culture Code,” the key to building a strong culture is to create **a feeling of safety and belonging**. Coyle identifies three qualities of belonging that strengthen the culture of an organization.

The first quality is when **energy is invested in the exchange**. This is the idea that communication flows between the leadership and the frontline staff in a manner that people feel informed and, more importantly, the frontline people have a sense that they are being heard. This is key, because if an individual feels that his or her input is valued, it will be much easier to obtain buy-in for the organizational agenda. Leadership at any level that inhibits or attempts to control the exchange of information creates silos and barriers that inhibit the creation of a sense of belonging, because this lack of exchange creates rumors and innuendo that breeds mistrust.

The second quality for creating belonging outlined by Coyle is **the need to value employees**. The fastest way I know to identify an organization that does not value employees is when I hear the phrase “everyone is replaceable.” I recognize that this is a true statement, but it is not an accurate one, because while everyone can be replaced, their experience and perspectives cannot be replaced. Believing that employees are replaceable can inhibit the sense of belonging employees feel; nothing is worse than negating an employee.

Employees can be negated in two ways. The first is not giving credit where credit is due. As leaders, we need to recognize all people and the work that everyone does to keep the organization above water. The second way to negate an employee’s value is to devalue his or her experience. From the moment we are born the various interactions we have shaped how we perceive the world around us. When a leader chooses to decide unilaterally without having a conversation with those who will be most affected, that leader is negating the experience of a potential subject-matter expert. As employees, we know that we don’t always get to make the final decisions, but we do want someone to demonstrate to us that our perspective is valued.

The final quality outlined by Coyle is **signaling that there is a future in the relationship being fostered by the organization and the employee**. Developing culture takes a long-term plan and recognizing that culture is not going to change overnight. Which is why the first two qualities lead to the final. If as an employee I know that I am valued, and I am going to be able to be an active member of this organizational community, I am going to be able to build a relationship not just with the people I work with but also with the organization. For the individual, this creates a sense of belonging which in turn fosters a culture.

I have met people who think the idea of feeling valued and having input as well as relationship is just a result of a “snowflake” mentality. If that’s your attitude, let me ask you a question: Did you wake up this morning, pour yourself a cup of coffee, and say, “I hope nobody at work treats me with dignity and respect. I hope people ignore me, and I hope that I am not valued.” In the dozens of trainings that I have led addressing an issue like this, no one has ever answered yes to these questions. We all want people to acknowledge the value we bring to the organization.

Culture is about creating an environment where people feel safe and valued. Where communication is open, and the only thing being negated is rumors and innuendos. Being a part of a healthy culture is about knowing that I can be vulnerable, admit a mistake, share ideas, and challenge others as well as be challenged in a healthy manner.

Culture is not about being told what an organization is like but experiencing what it is like **to be a part of an organization**.