

Managing Up and Employee Engagement

In our May newsletter, I mentioned that we were in the process of writing an article about the often-neglected, yet important area of managing up. The article combines findings from our years of experience in coaching, training, 360s and employee engagement surveys, together with a survey recently conducted with a number of our clients. To view the shorter version titled "The Importance of Managing Up" and recently published by the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA), click [here](#).

Recent published statistics about the state of employee engagement (see article below) are not, in our opinion, good news. In addition to a high level of disengagement in companies, there appears to be a buildup of employees who are just "showing up," neither disengaged nor actively engaged - not an encouraging trend. We believe this "neutral" group will benefit most from an environment in which leadership and management actively encourage managing up. The expected result:

- These employees become motivated.
- They thrive under the guidance of more enlightened management.
- The principles of employee engagement kick in - morale jumps and performance and productivity improve.

If you'd like to talk to us about employee engagement and managing up, please give us a call. We can help with the diagnostic surveys and the training.

Are your Employees Engaged?

If three recent surveys are any indication, a significant percentage of company employees are not. In a Conference Board survey conducted last summer, about 51 percent of employees indicated that they were engaged, down 19 percentage points from 1987. Gallup's Employee Engagement Index last August reported that 33 percent of workers were engaged, 49 percent were not engaged and 18 percent were actively disengaged. And more recently, the Towers Watson's 2010 Global Workforce Study indicated only 20% were engaged.

Employee engagement is an employee's emotional and rational commitment to the organization as well as his/her willingness to expand discretionary effort, willingness to go beyond the call of duty. Disengaged employees have essentially checked out and even worse, act out their disengagement

and undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish. Simply stated, disengagement translates into low morale, low productivity, poor performance and reduced profitability.

It's easy to blame the problem on the recession, but there's more to it than that. The Towers Watson study also called out some disturbing statistics concerning employees' attitudes toward company leadership, which continues to be the top driver of employee engagement:

- Only 38% think their leaders have a sincere interest in their well-being
- Only 47% think their leaders are trustworthy
- Only 42% think their leaders inspire and engage them
- 61% question whether their leaders deal effectively with poor performers
- Only 42% think senior management encourages development of talent

While some studies show many employees are ready to bolt from their companies as soon as the economy turns around, other studies indicate that an increasing number of them are beginning to sacrifice job advancement for security. In other words, they'll stay around if they feel "safe." Either way, the possibility of losing your high potentials or having a large group of employees neither engaged nor disengaged - simply showing up, doing their jobs and putting in nothing extra - is not a formula for future success.

What can you do?

Find out where you stand! In our opinion, senior leaders need to measure the level of employee engagement in their organizations sooner rather than later. Recently, we conducted a follow-up employee engagement survey for a client 18 months after an initial survey indicated problems in a number of key areas. During this period, we worked with line management and HR to:

- Improve internal communications (frequency, transparency, cross-functionally and vertically down through functions)
- Accelerate training programs across a variety of management and technical areas
- Upgrade the performance management system with a sharper focus on developing objectives and improving documentation to support the evaluation process
- Phase out managers who, simply put, had been there too long or were wrong for the job.

The initiatives worked and were reflected in significantly higher engagement ratings.

We suggest you consider undertaking an employee engagement survey. Please feel free to discuss this with us. We can provide standard templates as well as customized approaches.