



Think of employees and team members you've worked with over the years. Some were consistently engaged in their work; others not so much. What differences did you see in the two types? What actions, attributes and attitudes separated one group from the other?

The Gallup Organization has been conducting massive global studies of engagement since 2000. Their results put employees into three categories: engaged, not engaged and actively disengaged. Despite a great deal of focus on this topic in the last fifteen years, there has been no significant change in the survey results.

Gallup found that organizations with an engaged workforce are more productive, have higher quality outcomes, lower employee turnover, better customer satisfaction, and high revenue. So, it's certainly a goal to work toward. But always keep in mind that engagement is a fragile plant – you have to consistently nurture it for it to thrive.



About the Author

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Today's Challenges

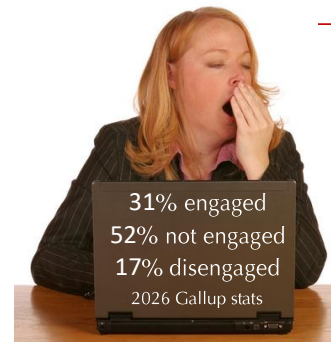
A committee of experts gathered by the Conference Board came up with this definition:

Employee engagement is a heightened emotional and intellectual connection that an employee has for his/her job, organization, manager, coworkers or customers that, in turn, influences him/her to apply additional discretionary effort to his/her work.

Author Paul Marciano explains, *Employees who are motivated but not engaged will work hard when there is something in it for them. Engaged employees work hard for the sake of the organization and because it gives them a feeling of fulfillment.*

The most toxic folks from the Gallup study are the **actively disengaged** employees. They aren't just unhappy at work; they act out their unhappiness. Every day, they undermine what the engaged workers accomplish.

What conditions or factors make employee engagement more challenging today?



31% engaged
52% not engaged
17% disengaged
2026 Gallup stats

As you think about engagement in your org, be honest about the working conditions. Today's organizations are asking more and more of their employees: more hours, more connectivity, more initiative, more commitment ... AND we want them to be engaged?

Is your company living your core values – including everyone in leadership? Do you **truly** make work/life balance a priority – and possible?

Inside Out ...

In earlier years, organizations needed compliant workers who did what they were told. They purchased this compliance with wages and benefits, bonuses and perks. Companies used extrinsic rewards – tangible benefits coming from outside the employee. Deep thinkers like Maslow, Drucker and Deming suggested the more lasting approach is tapping into intrinsic motivation that comes from the work itself.

You don't get engagement with external rewards. The Blessing White report on employee engagement pointed out yet another example of the Law of Unintended Consequences:

Engaged employees plan to stay for what they give;



the disengaged stay for what they get.

Researcher Kenneth Thomas identifies four intrinsic rewards:

- meaningfulness** → *feeling you're doing something worthwhile*
- choice** → *ability to use own judgment*
- competence** → *sense of accomplishment from doing good work*
- progress** → *feeling you're advancing toward the purpose*

Consider the opportunities your team members have to pursue these internal rewards. At the same time, don't ignore pay and benefits. Your compensation must not only be fair – it must *feel* fair to the employees. If it is seen as unfair, pay can become a distractor ... and a major de-motivator.

What Needs to Change

Almost every new employee shows up on the first day, eager to work and fully engaged. Something changes as the person settles into the job. What happens? How does that energized new team member become disengaged?

Many organizations try to figure this out by looking closely at line workers. We can best influence engagement not by focusing on employee behavior, but by dramatically changing the behavior of leaders, managers and supervisors.

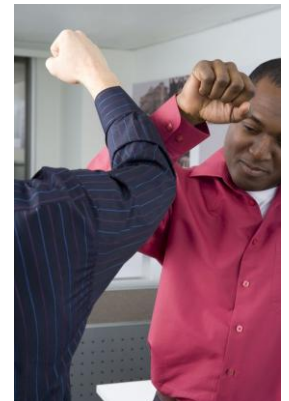
In their pivotal 2006 article, Crim & Seijts stressed, *Employee engagement is a direct reflection of how employees feel about their relationship with the boss.*

How would your team members respond to the Gallup Q12 – twelve questions used to measure employee engagement?

1. Do you know what is expected of you at work?
2. Do you have the materials and equipment you need to do your work right?
3. At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?
4. In the last seven days, have you received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does your supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about you as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages your development?
7. At work, do your opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of your company make you feel your job is important?
9. Are your associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work?
10. Do you have a best friend at work?
11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to you about your progress?
12. In the last year, have you had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

Employees are willing to give their all when they are well-treated, appreciated. And the ability to unlock that potential is a competitive distinction ... It's their decisions, their actions, their attitude that really make the difference.

- Gamal Aziz
President & CEO
MGM Hospitality



Plant the Seeds ...

Creating an “Engagement Program” may produce some results in the short term. The problem with formal programs is they get stale ... and today’s cynical workers see it as just another passing HR fad. To really influence engagement, you need to work at the organizational culture level.

Help everyone with leadership responsibilities examine their assumptions and actions. Provide them with tools and resources to plant the seeds of engagement. When these seeds are consistently translated into everyday behaviors – and the right people are in the right positions throughout the organization – engagement will grow.

Remember that, like any fragile plant, engagement needs to be constantly nurtured. Don’t start this journey unless you’re in it for the long haul. Engagement surveys may actually decrease engagement levels if no action comes out of the process. Creating an Engagement Program that you drop later will simply validate employees’ cynicism.

The coaching model that builds engagement is not a tool in the supervisor’s kit. True coaching is done every day in every interaction with a team member.



The Seed of RESPECT

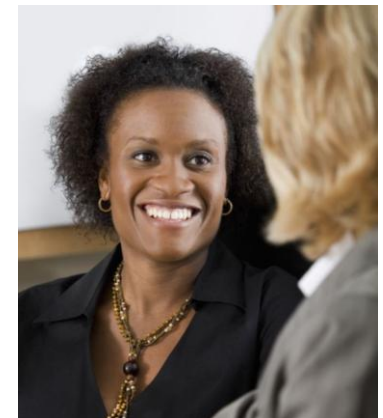
Mutual respect forms connections between people and is the foundation of engagement. We can’t convince people that we respect them by telling them. The only way to convey respect is through what we DO in every interaction.

Leaders are critical because they set the tone for what happens in the organization. What is the impact on employees when they see or experience disrespectful behavior from anyone in leadership? Below is the start of a list of specific ways a manager, supervisor or team leader could demonstrate respect for team members ... add your own to expand the actions:

- 🌱 Get to know each team member as an individual
- 🌱 **LISTEN**
- 🌱 Remember what’s important to this person
- 🌱 Consciously flex your style so you can be heard and understood by *this* person
- 🌱 Value their experience, expertise, and perspective
- 🌱 Provide opportunities and challenges so they can use their knowledge and skills
- 🌱 Express **sincere** appreciation for **efforts**, not just for accomplishments

The way you see people
is the way you treat them,
and the way you treat them
is what they become.

- Goethe



The Seed of VISION

Feeling part of a worthwhile mission where your efforts make a difference is a strong seed for engagement. Every team member needs to understand the company's strategic goals and the purpose behind their tasks. To be engaged, employees must see how their work fits in and contributes.

- ⊙ Communicate a clear vision of the future
- ⊙ Use simple, vivid, familiar, powerful language
- ⊙ Define goals, objectives and priorities
- ⊙ Don't just focus on *what* – emphasize *why* and *how*
- ⊙ Link daily tasks to the big picture
- ⊙ Share information on progress and results

If an employee sees a task as worthwhile, s/he is more likely to find it personally rewarding, feel internally motivated, and be committed to doing it well. Continually connecting daily tasks to the vision, mission and **values** reminds team members they aren't just making a living; they're making a difference.



We choose to go to the moon.
We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win.

- President John F. Kennedy

The Seed of TRUST

There are two essential aspects to trust in the workplace. Managers need to **trust** their employees – and the leaders need to **be trustworthy**. Trust is the most fragile of all seeds. Once broken, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to reestablish.

Examples of leader behaviors that **build trust** ...

- ... doing what you say you're going to do
- ... telling the truth
- ... communicating openly and directly – saying what you mean and meaning what you say
- ... working to understand others' perspectives and ideas
- ... welcoming and **using** feedback from others

An important lesson in life is realizing that – in every interaction with another person – you are either strengthening or weakening trust.

What can supervisors and managers do to demonstrate that they have trust in their team members?



Trust is the lubrication that makes it possible for organizations to work.

- Warren Bennis

The Seed of SUPPORT

Most employees welcome support. The trick is finding what is supportive for this individual. One size does not fit all when it comes to support. What are some simple ways to show support? A starting point is to ASK the individual.

→ _____

→ _____

→ _____

There can also be a broad range of situations that call for support. What is stressful and overwhelming for one team member is no big thing for their co-worker. Seasoned staff and supervisors must be careful not to judge others' reactions or dismiss individual feelings.

A couple of practical steps to take are ...

PREPARE and PREDICT → talk openly with your team members about the physical and emotional drain of the work they do – discuss common stress reactions and have conversations about coping approaches – be honest and open about upcoming heavy workloads or special projects – people can cope with almost anything if they know what they have to cope with – uncertainty or dishonesty are the real stressors

NORMALIZE → let each person know: *whatever you're feeling is normal for you* – tell them to not judge or criticize themselves for reactions – it simply means they are real human beings dealing with the real world



Recent research reminds us that – as important as **emotional support** is with its messages of caring and concern – leaders also need to provide **instrumental support** – concrete, tangible aid during tough times. Get some temp workers in, adjust deadlines, provide tools and resources, jump in yourself to help with tasks.

The Seed of INVOLVEMENT

We can't expect employees to be fully engaged and have a sense of ownership if they have no opportunities to participate in the planning and organization of the work. Involving team members also taps into a major motivator for many human beings – that feeling of being in on things. We want to know what's happening and we want to have a say in decisions that affect us.

Increase employee involvement by creating opportunities for team members to ...

- ✓ offer input in setting goals and policies
- ✓ make suggestions for improvement
- ✓ participate in decision making
- ✓ control the flow and pace of their tasks
- ✓ accept responsibility for projects or job chunks
- ✓ provide feedback to leadership

Whatever processes you put in place, make sure they are effective and dynamic. A suggestion box on the wall gets stale pretty fast – and is a waste of space if no one reads the suggestions or acts on them. If leaders are not ready or willing to hear employees' ideas, it is better not to ask in the first place. Few things are more toxic to engagement than being asked what you think and then having your ideas dismissed, belittled or ignored.



You need to find ways of including people in the decisions that directly affect their work and the organization's overall objectives. The workers must be able to challenge the status quo, take risks, and learn from their mistakes by finding solutions through teamwork.

-- Raimi-Akinleye Abiodun

My Personal Action Plan

Write down one key point for each seed and one **specific** action you will take to retain and apply this information back on the job.



Respect: _____

Vision: _____

Trust: _____

Support: _____

Involvement: _____

Share one of your planned actions with a friend or co-worker who can be your Accountability Partner – checking your progress periodically.

Resources to Learn More

-  Abiodun, Raimi-Akinleye. *Leadership Behavior: Impact on Employee's Loyalty, Engagement and Organizational Performance*
-  Amabile & Kramer. *The Progress Principle: Using Small Wins to Ignite Joy, Engagement and Creativity at Work*
-  Ayers, Keith. *Engagement Is Not Enough*
-  Haudan, Jim. *he Art of Engagement*
-  Marciano, Paul. *Carrots and Sticks Don't Work: Build a Culture of Empl Engagement with the Principles of RESPECT*
-  The Gallup Org. *First, Break All the Rules*
-  Thomas, Kenneth. *Intrinsic Motivation at Work: What Really Drives Employee Engagement*
-  gallup.com ... *What is Employee Engagement and How Do You Improve it?*
-  shrm.org ... *The What and Why of Employee Engagement*
-  Bob Kelleher: *Emp Engagement - Who's Sinking Your Boat?*
-  Daniel Pink: *Driving Employee Engagement*
-  TED: *This is What Makes Employees Happy at Work*



Of all the decisions a manager makes, none is as important as the decisions about people because they determine the performance capacity of the organization.

- Peter Drucker