

Why the Lopsided Look at Employee Engagement ???

By: Kevin Sheridan, CEO, HR Solutions

For years, the research on Employee Engagement has centered on how *managers* and *organizations* can build higher levels of Engagement in the workplace – a continued focus on what Best Practices can be employed to make a workforce more Engaged. Simply put, the responsibility and accountability is forced on Management to create Engaged workers.

Does this imbalance and one-sidedness seem a bit odd and off-center? Of course it does. While it is certainly virtuous and valuable to have Management accept ownership for Employee Engagement, it has also formed a myopic mask over where at least half of the ownership should lie – with the employees themselves.

Thus, it is as if the sole focus is on what Management should do, which has created an unfair, misguided paradigm, where the employee is figuratively leaning back in their chair pointing to Management and commanding, “Engage me!”

This lopsided perspective was well described by one of HR Solutions’ clients in healthcare, Mr. Rick Lovering, Vice President, Human Resources and Organizational Development at AtlantiCare in New Jersey:

“I know of no other healthy relationship that rests on a pillar of one-way responsibility and communication. My relationship with my spouse is a two-way street. My connection with my children rests on two-way rights. My association with my church shares joint ownership. One’s relationship with their community should be equally a joint stewardship. Why should it be different with the Employer/Employee relationship?”

Indeed, a very good point. Why would we want to set up the Management/Employee relationship as a one-way street—destined to either fail or produce half-hearted outcomes?

The one-sided ownership can become even more pronounced and challenging given major generational differences in the workforce. For example, Millennials have been raised to believe that they are special. They grew up being told by parents, teachers, and coaches they can be anything they want to be, and they now live this message. Memories of receiving ribbons, trophies, and plaques for coming in **13th place** have prompted this generation to thrive on praise, and they expect to receive recognition even when they do not perform well.



“Engage me with a promotion and a clear career path.”



“Come on, Engage me by being a better Manager.”



“You will make me more Engaged by teaching me to be proud of the company and its mission.”

“I can become more Engaged with better benefits.”



Much akin to love, Engagement cannot be demanded. However, Management and organizations can certainly foster an awakening, where some employees can newly recognize that they can manage and influence their own Engagement levels. As importantly, many of the employees considered to be Actively Engaged would never think of shunning ownership for a portion of their Job Engagement.

Correcting the Imbalance

By first accepting some ownership for one's own Engagement, what can the employee do to enhance their own Engagement level? Employees can consider the following 11 tactical tips:

1. **Adopt a more positive "can-do" attitude typically seen among those workers considered Engaged, who seem universally appreciated by both peers and Management.** Try to eschew the chosen victimhood typically exhibited by the Actively Disengaged and, to some extent, the Ambivalent, "Quit and Stay" or "Clockwatching" employee.

This *choice* is much like the quote, "Luck is where preparation meets opportunity." Attributed on the Internet to everyone from Vince Lombardi to Denzel Washington, this sage quote illustrates the point:

Why not make your own luck, as opposed to waiting for it to find you?

2. **Accept some ownership for being proud of where you work.** Certainly companies can employ measures which build employee pride in the organization, a centerpiece driver and measure of Engagement. With that said, an employee can also participate in fostering that pride. For example, the employee might participate in, or lead, a community outreach or volunteer program potentially sponsored by their employer. As another example, the employee could volunteer to act as a sounding board for job candidates considering employment at the organization.
3. **Ask for clarification if instructions from your supervisor are somehow unclear.** This method is preferred over the behavior of complaining when one feels they are not given clear instructions.

4. **Set yourself up to be recognized.** Often, managers and supervisors can be prompted to publicly recognize an employee for a job well done if the employee simply asks for feedback:

"How do you feel I did on that project?"

"Did my work fulfill what you were looking for?"

5. **Request a career planning meeting with your manager.** Structure the dialogue such that your job duties are tailored for: what you do best, what you are eager to learn, and ultimately, how this can be aligned with your career growth and personal objectives.
6. **Get to know your Senior Leadership.** Attend their Town Hall meetings. Ask questions of them and get them to know you, personally and professionally.
7. **Actively participate in, and contribute to, decisions that affect your work environment.** Get involved!
8. **Ask for feedback about your work performance and act on it.**
9. **If you don't have the tools/resources to perform your job effectively, ask for them!**
10. **Believe in yourself and in your ability to contribute to the organization's success,** no matter what your job function.
11. **Seek learning, knowledge, and satisfaction from your co-workers** and most of all, don't forget to instill FUN into your everyday work activities. Co-worker satisfaction is the unsung hero of retention.

It is not an accident that each of these strategic tips for employees centers on either a measure or driver of Employee Engagement, as measured by most Engagement Surveys, including HR Solutions' popular Sweet 16® Survey.

Prompting Employees to Own Their Engagement

Rather than floating along with conventional wisdom, HR Solutions' Research Department has created an innovative means for employers and managers to correct the imbalance and let employees have a peek at their own Engagement levels *and then do something constructive and proactive with the information.*

HR Solutions offers an innovative option prompting employees to own their own level of Engagement. It is called PEER™, the Personalized Employee Engagement Report, which has never been done before, with patent protection being filed last year by HR Solutions (Patent Pending). Beta tests of PEER™ were a

resounding success, with fully 65% of the employees surveyed choosing to receive their completely confidential report. PEER™ not only reports the employee's level of Engagement (Actively Engaged, Ambivalent, and Actively Disengaged), based upon the employee's responses to certain Engagement-related items in the survey, but also makes useful subject-specific suggestions to the employee on how he or she might enhance their Engagement level.

The beauty and strength of this new option is that organizations can now work Engagement from both sides of the Employer/Employee relationship; thus, sharing accountability for Engagement and yielding far more meaningful outcomes.