

It's time: Let's stop the employee engagement crisis

Of approximately 100 million people in America who hold full-time jobs, only 30 percent say they're engaged and inspired, according to Gallup Inc. The other 70 percent fall into two groups: those who just show up, do their work and go home (50 percent) and those who are actively miserable and seeding discontent (20 percent).

Allow me to put this in perspective. Let's assume your company matches the national average, and two-thirds of your workforce doesn't qualify as truly engaged at work. Now imagine you're in a boat race against your three biggest competitors. Let's say you each have 10 employees in your boat. So keeping the Gallup statistics in mind, this means you have three people rowing like crazy to win that race. Approximately four are taking in the scenery, maybe taking a few photos, perhaps simply chatting away the time. That leaves three in the back who trying to sink your boat.

Assuming your competition is working to create more engaged employees, do you think you will win the boat race? You might not even finish.

Here is a simple and effective definition for engagement, one that is difficult to refute and easy to understand: An engaged employee is both motivated and committed to acting in the best interest of your company.

The unfortunate reality is that having a workforce filled with disengaged employees is like having a debilitating disease. A debilitating disease interferes with the activities of daily living. Doesn't a disengaged employee interfere with the activity of daily work? Yes, that person does. It is impossible to maintain a work environment in which the majority of employees are engaged, inspired and at their most productive unless you are willing to deal effectively with those who are not engaged.

Just this week I was on a flight to Nashville and experienced both engaged and disengaged employees—two flight attendants with completely different attitudes and behaviors. One was friendly and nice and greeted each passenger: "Hi, how are you? Welcome. We are glad you chose to fly with us." The other attendant was grouchy, did not smile, was rude to a passenger whose



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bag would not fit under her seat, and told me I couldn't use my wireless mouse during the flight (which is ridiculous, and we all know it—especially since I've used it on all of more than 400 flights I've taken over the last few years). This grouch even got in an argument with the other flight attendants about bag space, embarrassing them and leaving all of us customers feeling awkward at best. What do you think the customers remember most from this flight, the cheerful flight attendant or Mr. Grouch?

The number of disengaged employees is at crisis proportions, and we all suffer from it in bad customer experiences. Let me share a little secret that will help you become a more trusted manager who creates a more motivating and engaged environment. The secret is that 1 percent or less of your success will come from training employees on your company's values and brand; 99 percent or more of your success will be determined by the ability of managers to remind the workforce.

Here are three "reminding" techniques you can use as a manager to begin creating more engaged employees while helping those not engaged to know that they don't fit in. If you do these three things well, you might even be able to encourage them to "test out the job market." Maybe they will take jobs with your competitors and help you to start winning the race.

These three things are a stepping-stone for emerging from the engagement crisis into a culture where employees are engaged (motivated and committed to act in the best interest of your company).

Make the experience part of the conversation—every day! Make sure the company experience is part of the conversation at least one time per week. Make a point to

find an example of a good experience that occurred internally among employees or with customers. You can even use examples in which a less-than-ideal experience is delivered to discuss as opportunities to improve. If every manager keeps an eye out for one example a week, you will have plenty of examples to mention. Make a point of talking about these examples every day.

Talk with customers about their experience. Have an in-depth conversation with a customer about the experience he or she has had with your company. Do this at least once a month. Ask customers specifically what they liked or didn't like about their most recent experiences. Then share the feedback with your team. Doing so will help them understand the impact they have on the lives of others.

Know the metrics that matter most. Determine the revenue-generating and cost-reduction or avoidance metrics that a great experience can affect most. Think about metrics such as customer retention, average sale, profit margin, employee turnover and quality issues, to name a few. Knowing these metrics and sharing them with your workforce will help employees make the connection between their actions, the customer experience and the impact on your company's success. Focusing on measurable results proves you are a manager who cares about bottom- and top-line growth.

For an exercise on determining your company's most important metrics, visit www.engagedbook.com/metrics.

It's time to stop this engagement crisis. As a manager, you are the first line of defense. It is your job to manage the experience and create the environment where employees can become engaged and demonstrate that they are motivated and committed. Live the brand.

Gregg Lederman, CEO of Brand Integrity Inc., is a professional speaker on the customer experience, leadership and culture change. He is an adjunct professor at the University of Rochester's Simon School of Business and the author of "Engaged! Outbehave Your Competition to Create Customers for Life." Read more from Gregg at www.gregglederman.com.