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"Quotes"

"I am responsible. Although I may not be able to prevent the worst from happening, I am responsible for my attitude toward the inevitable misfortunes that darken life. Bad things do happen; how I respond to them defines my character and the quality of my life. I can choose to sit in perpetual sadness, immobilized by the gravity of my loss, or I can choose to rise from the pain and treasure the most precious gift I have...life itself."

~Walter Anderson

"Disengaged workers don't have traction. They're not accomplishing the same amount of work that they used to. The person has pulled his or her heart out of the work."

~RenA@e Arrington

"Continued focus on [employee] turnover is of critical importance, because of the direct relation of turnover to improvements in

Dear Friend,

The Exodus

Recently I was talking with a friend, who was lamenting about her job. Now, the comments didn't have to do with her actual role. (She loves what she does.) It was the work environment.

The description that unfolded was of an organization experiencing an unusually large exodus of people -- old-timers, newcomers, and those in-between. It certainly is not what you'd expect in the midst of an economic downturn that hasn't convincingly turned "up" yet. Moreover, besides the folks rushing the doors, my friend also painted a picture of frustration among those who remain.

As much as I wanted to chalk this conversation up to being just the opinions of a single person or just the tale of one broken workplace, deep within I knew that wasn't the case. From talking with friends and clients, and from working with a range of companies on a daily basis, it's clear that "Houston, we've got a problem."

So, with this edition of *EA Insights*, let's take a look at the issue of employee engagement. Where do we stand? Why does it matter? How do we positively affect it?

One thing's for sure -- you can trust that we'll continue writing about, and assisting companies with, this issue...because disengagement impacts everyone!

All the best,

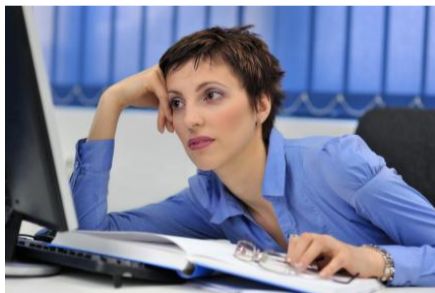
June

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Are You in a Disengaged Workplace?

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Fewer than one-third of American workers are engaged with their jobs.



I don't know about you, but I find that statement incredible. However, that is exactly what was shown by a recent Gallup survey of a cross-section of American workers. (Gallup Consulting; *State of the American Workplace: 2008 - 2010* (2010).) Of the roughly 9,000 people surveyed, only 28% could be characterized as "engaged" at work.

Interestingly, these results were as true for the manufacturing industry, as they were for people laboring in sales, service, professional, transportation, or clerical fields. And, they were as true for those in management and executive positions as they were for people at different career levels.

Think about that for a moment. If your team is made up of you and two other people, it's possible that only *one* of you has a positive emotional attachment to your workplace. Only one of you is consistently motivated to produce for your company and the people you serve. Stated differently, only one of you comes into work each day enthusiastic about what lies ahead and what can be accomplished. However, that one person, each day, faces two others who, at best, are going through the motions or, at worst, are actively disengaged. Wow, how encouraging is that?

Why does employee engagement matter?

Although we could brainstorm all day and arrive at a whole list of employee engagement plusses, in many respects it boils down to two, intertwined reasons.

Disengagement impacts the bottom line. When folks "check out" emotionally at work, it has an effect on the quality and the quantity of what they produce. Let's say you're a long-standing customer at an establishment, but recent visits have been different -- servers aren't as friendly, the product has diminished in quality. Tell me, how likely are you to return? Now, consider the financial impact from the inside. If you own or manage an operation with 2-in-3 disengaged staff members, how does that translate to productivity, and how does productivity link directly to revenue and profit?

You see, engaged employees (at whatever level) put forth a meaningful effort and take pride in their work. They offer quality service to customers. They represent the company enthusiastically and well. They contribute to meeting organizational goals and, as much as they are able, positively impact results.

Disengagement affects the work environment. Quite simply, disengaged employees make it harder for their engaged colleagues. Their attitudes (negative or indifferent) cast a pall over the environment. Their inaction or poor performance shifts work unfairly to others. They raise the level of difficulty for supervisors. And, when they are the supervisors, either they model and spread disengagement to others, or they frustrate those whose enthusiasm or interest they view simply as an annoying reminder of what they lack.

The result may be a disease that infects those around them, or it may be what prompts others to flee. Either way, the disengaged take hold of the work environment. If unchecked, what they have will cost the company in any number of ways by overtaking others or by repelling those who don't want to function in that type of setting.

How can employee disengagement be combated?

Confront it immediately. Guess what? It's not a secret. Whether openly acknowledged or not, everyone figures out when a co-worker has checked out.

So, if you're the supervisor of a person who's becoming or has fully disengaged, sit the person down and talk about it. Very few people begin a job with a negative view of the work or the people. So, find out what's changed. Is the person still challenged? Is there an obstacle to getting the job done? Does the person understand where the company's going and where he fits? Is there some interpersonal matter that has contributed to the situation? See if you can pinpoint the issue(s).

Now, responsibility doesn't rest solely with supervisors. If your mantra has become the line from that old Washington Post classified section commercial, "I can't take this...not another day!", then don't wait for someone else to recognize the signs for you. Admit to yourself that you're miserable, and do some soul searching to try to figure out why (and don't blame it all on someone else).

Devise a plan of attack. Whether you're working with someone else or tackling your own angst, come up with some positive steps to bring about a better outcome.

One reason many people become disengaged is because they feel stuck... they feel as if they've stopped moving. Developing a clear, realistic plan for going forward is an important first step toward reversing that feeling of immobility.



So, if you're the person who's experiencing disengagement, look back at the underlying reasons. Which of them do you have control over? Figure out how you can respond to those matters positively, whether or not you have the support of anyone else. That may mean an attitude change, an expectation change, a relationship

change, a role change, and possibly even an employment change.

If you're in a supervisory role, support that co-worker to create a plan for making the necessary adjustments. Determine how you can encourage the turnaround in a way that complements the needs of the individual, the requirements of your company, and the budget. Assign roles for the person and you/the company in carrying out the plan. And, think ahead to next steps in the event that there is no positive improvement.

The bottom line is that employee disengagement affects everyone. Because of that, everyone has a part to play in stemming the tide.



labor costs and guest satisfaction."

~Peter Dunn

*"What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up -- like a raisin in the sun
Or fester like a sore --
And then run? Does it stink like rotten meat
Or crust and sugar over -- like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags -- like a heavy lead."*

~Langston Hughes

"If the employees come first, then they're happy.... A motivated employee treats the customer well. The customer is happy so they keep coming back, which pleases the shareholders. It's not one of the enduring Green mysteries of all time; it is just the way it works."

~Herb Kelleher

"I was an accomplice in my own frustration."

~Peter Shaffer

"It is hardly possible to build anything if frustration, bitterness and a mood of helplessness prevail."

~Lech Walesa

About Executive Advantage

At **Executive Advantage**, we are committed to providing results-based business and management consulting, leadership development, and coaching support. We partner with business leaders to build healthy, well-functioning organizations, where goals are met and people thrive. We also partner with individuals to create professional (and personal) lives with clearer direction, improved results, and greater balance.

To learn more about **Executive Advantage**, contact us **online** or at **(301) 280-5950**.

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