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The Exodus

Recently I was talking with a friend, who was lamenting about her job. Her 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. 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 opinion of 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?

And, know that we'll continue writing about it and assisting companies with it because disengagement impacts everyone!

All the best,

June

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC



Are You in a Disengaged Workplace?

June Melvin Mickens
Executive Advantage, LLC

Quotes

"Positive and engaged brains are a company's greatest assets. More than time and even more than productivity, people must be happy."
~Shawn Achor

"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

Only roughly 1/3 of American workers are engaged with their jobs.

I don't know about you, but I find that statement incredible. When I first shared this topic with readers in 2011, a Gallup survey of a cross-section of American workers had recently found that only 28% could be characterized as "engaged" at work. (Gallup Consulting; *State of the American Workplace: 2008 – 2010* (2010).) In the years since then, the number has only risen to roughly 33%. Yes, progress...but not much!

These results were as true for people in for-profit, nonprofit, and government. And, they were as true for people in management and executive positions as they were for people at other career levels.

Think about that for a moment. If your team is made up of you and two other people, only *one* of you has a positive emotional attachment to your workplace. Only one of you is motivated consistently 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, each day that one person faces the other two who, at best, are going through the motions or, at worst, are actively disengaged. How encouraging is that?

Why does employee engagement matter?

Although we could brainstorm all day and arrive at a whole list of employee engagement pluses, 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. How likely are you to return? Now, consider the financial impact from the inside. If you own or manage an operation with two-in-three 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 the disengaged *are* the supervisors, they either model and spread disengagement to others, or they become frustrated by those whose interest and enthusiasm is an annoying reminder of what they lack.

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

How can employee disengagement be combated?

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

So, if you're the supervisor of a person who's becoming or already has disengaged fully, 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

turnover to improvements in labor costs and guest satisfaction."

~Peter Dunn

"Employees need to understand the organizational challenges an employer has. By understanding these challenges and the changes in the workplace, an employee can take responsibility for the impact he or she has on that workplace."

~Kevin Gagan

"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

"Are your office policies in sync with employee needs and desires? Knowing what keeps your employees happy will not only increase productivity and morale, but will also make employees less likely to quit."

~Neil Lebovits

"Engaged, enthusiastic, and loyal employees are pivotal drivers of growth and health in any organization."

~Patrick Lencioni

"The anger and frustration among all employee groups...was evident throughout

company's going and how he fits? Is there some interpersonal matter that has contributed to the situation? See if you can pinpoint the issue(s).

Now, all of the responsibility doesn't rest 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.

So, whether you are on that disengaged staff member or a leader seeing the need to jumpstart your team, it's time to act. Call on us at **Executive Advantage**. It really is possible to turn the tide and make engagement the theme each day. Contact us today.

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*the voting process.
In the end,
...management
failed to convince a
majority of the
work force that the
proposal was
appropriate or that
they could be
trusted to honor
their
commitments."*
~Bobby Pace

*"For Sweetest
things turn sourest
by their deeds.
Lilies that fester
smell far worse
than weeds."*
~William
Shakespeare

*"I think when
you're very
dedicated to
something and
you're engaged
fully, you become a
giver."*
~Russell
Simmons

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

*"I was an
accomplice in my
own frustration."*
~Peter Shaffer

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.

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