



## Dear Friend, Horror Movies

I've never been a big fan of scary movies. Okay, I did go on occasion back in the day...mostly to be social. However, I never was what you'd call "a fan". You see, it just always seemed strange to me to intentionally go somewhere so that they can scare your socks off. And, you've got to *pay* for it too??? Go figure!

When I think of it, though, there is one clear benefit to horror on the silver screen. It ends. You live through the madness for an hour and a half or so. Then, the lights come up, you step over all of the popcorn you spilled on the floor when what was happening on the screen made you jump, and you go back to reality. Ah!

Unfortunately, for far too many folks, going to work each day is akin to stepping into the theater and not just watching, but participating in, a never-ending horror movie. Sometimes, the set is a workplace filled with the type of suspense that leaves you with a case of the jitters. Other times, it's a scene filled with the walking dead -- people whose bodies are there but who, on the inside, long ago joined the ranks of the dearly departed.

It's the latter workplace that's the subject of this month's **EA Insights**. Let's take a look at employee engagement. In this instance, though, I want you to focus less on *how* you accomplish it and more on *why* it matters...from a *business* perspective.

So, grab your popcorn. I promise I won't make you jump!

All the best,

*June*

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## The Business Case for Employee Engagement

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If you're like me, you've been bombarded lately with articles about *Employee Engagement*. Seriously, this has gone beyond a "Flavor of the Month" theme; we've closing in on "Topic of the Decade" here.

Now, lest you misunderstand where I'm going, let me quickly state my position. I believe that employee engagement efforts are critical. (*Okay, was that clear?*) However, my beef with much of what appears in my inbox, or the calls I get from prospective clients, is that much of the interest is largely about the warm-and-fuzzy and devotes little attention to *why* employee engagement should matter to a business owner, executive, or even an employee. And, although I'm rarely accused of having a warm-and-fuzzy deficiency, as a business owner and consultant to many organizations, the last thing I want to see is wasted time, energy, and money on employee engagement efforts that go nowhere. (*And, yes, the consultant did just write that!*) Seriously, it saddens me to look around and see that far too many of these initiatives fall flat. But, I think the reason they frequently *underwhelm* is that they tend to have a disproportionately high concentration on the people interests (*very important*), but they give short shrift to the business interests (*equally important*). And, if the truth be told, it's often the latter that gets the executive energy going, the resources they control flowing, and ultimately makes the difference between the engagement initiative's success and its fizzle.

So, let me offer my *business*-related bottom line.

**Employee engagement matters to a business because not focusing on it COSTS you boatloads.**

That's it...plain and simple. Now, let me explain why that's the case. Here are five *business* reasons why employee engagement should matter to every person in an organization, but *especially* to leaders.

### Reason #1: Not focusing on employee engagement has a QUALITY cost.

Half-hearted effort shows itself in the quality of your product or service. It doesn't matter if we're talking widgets, tree-trimming, bookkeeping, or health care. There is a direct correlation between a staff member's mindset, or his level of attention, and the resulting product or service quality.

Does quality matter? You'd better believe it does! Who willingly buys a

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### "Quotes"

*"High performance workplaces are business driven, employee and team-centered. They drive innovation, creativity, collaboration, transformational change and organizational learning across the business ecosystem."*  
~Tom Austin

*"Continued focus on (employee) turnover is of critical importance, because of the direct relation of turnover to improvements in labor costs and guest satisfaction."*  
~Peter Dunn

*"We conducted our first employee opinion survey two years ago. \*\*\* We got some really good, critical feedback."*  
~Joe Gallagher

*"It wasn't that many years ago when almost everyone in the ... Department had a fair amount of longevity[.] We would only get a new employee about every two years."*  
~Mark Gallagher

*"It's all about the level-and sincerity of employee appreciation. Workers who feel taken for granted will not stick around when they have other choices."*  
~Joyce Gioia

*"A happy employee will lead directly to happy customers."*  
~Chris Hammond

*"[O]ne of the keys to employee satisfaction is performance-based advancement and rewards. Workers should be treated as individual professional public servants, not as bureaucrats[.] We tend to give everyone the same raise whether they're a fantastic worker or a mediocre worker."*  
~Clay Johnson

*"Those who cannot work with their hearts achieve but a hollow, half-hearted success"*

product that will fall apart? Who willingly purchases a service that doesn't satisfy the need? If you're *not* producing or offering something that people are buying, you won't be in business for very long.

Accordingly, a focus on employee engagement makes good business sense for quality reasons. Folks who care -- about the company, the product, the work, the team, the client -- invest themselves in performing with excellence. And, that has a positive bottom-line effect.

### **Reason #2: Not focusing on employee engagement has a CUSTOMER SERVICE cost.**

People who have emotionally checked out, though their bodies are at work, don't serve others well. I often tell the story in customer service sessions about my trip to a well-known store, which shall remain nameless. Another patron was wandering around in search of a particular product. He finally found a salesclerk, strolling through the department, and asked his question. The response? "*Oh, I don't know. You'll have to find somebody who works in THIS department.*" She took off; his eyes and mine met; and, with a heavy sigh, we both just shook our heads.

A lack of employee engagement is seen perhaps most clearly in the service arms of an operation. The lack of accountability, interest, helpfulness, resourcefulness, or ownership becomes the trademark of such an environment. But, before we cast the entire blame on those front-line scoundrels, we must realize that people who feel that *they* are being undervalued and disregarded may find it difficult to extend value and regard to a company's customers. Thus, employee engagement efforts matter because, in order to pass on a sense of caring and concern -- the type that draws customers to the business and keeps them coming back -- staff members must first experience such care and concern themselves.

### **Reason #3: Not focusing on employee engagement has an ENVIRONMENTAL cost.**

Have you ever encountered a workplace that was just down-right dysfunctional? It may have been constant squabbling, or backstabbing, or lack of cooperation, or silence, or some combination of these and/or other issues. Nonetheless, just the thought of going in each day caused a sense of dread and, by day's end, *drained* doesn't even begin to express your state. Ever been there?

When such an environment exists, and those in charge fail to give earnest attention to culture correction and staff engagement efforts, they intentionally or unintentionally endorse the atmosphere. They cement dysfunction as the norm. It becomes the culture; it becomes the expectation; and, like it or not, it becomes the reputation.

What's the cost? The cost here may be slightly more difficult to quantify than the others, but there's still a visible effect. You see it in negative attitudes that once were periodic, or that used to be confined to a particular person or team, but that now are longer lasting or more widespread. You see it in greater difficulty accomplishing results with certain people or departments. You see it in people who are perpetually lethargic and unenthused. You see it in culture survey results, exit interview feedback, and online reviews about the company. And, it takes a toll on the organization and all within in.

### **Reason #4: Not focusing on employee engagement has a TURNOVER cost.**

What are the natural reactions for many people to a situation like the one set out in Reason #3? They run for the hills or, if they're in positions of authority, they may try to clean house (assuming things haven't spread too far). Either response involves turnover...probably more than the company would choose to have. And, turnover, even when necessary, carries a cost.

It costs to bring an employment relationship to an end. It costs to have an open position. It costs to fill an open position. It costs to bring a new staff member up to speed and integrate him into the operation until he becomes thoroughly acquainted with his position. And, these are all costs that could be avoided, or at least mitigated, by prioritizing engagement.

### **Reason #5: Not focusing on employee engagement has a TIME cost.**

A toxic workplace is a huge time drainer.

From a management perspective, consider the countless hours spent in trying to figure out how to tap into what motivates the disengaged team member. Add up the meetings devoted to coaching, counselling, training, and reprimanding. And, please don't miss the time attributed to listening to the complaints of colleagues, customers, or others burdened by their interactions with the disengaged team member, or the time these individuals must take in redoing the offending party's work. Just think about the TIME! What more could you and others accomplish if you could invest that time elsewhere! If only....

It's widely accepted that employee engagement efforts make good *people* sense. However, they also make good *business* sense. A failure to focus on employee engagement carries a cost. It chips away at an entity's bottom line in terms of quality, service ability, work environment, turnover rate, and wasted staff and management time. And, although engagement programs require resources, when structured strategically, operationalized appropriately, and tracked for impact consistently, the positive return on the investment becomes quickly visible.

Want help measuring the current level of employee engagement in your company...making the business case for an engagement investment...overcoming disengagement? Don't spin your wheels. Call on **Executive Advantage**. Let us partner with you to improve the environment and your bottom line. [Contact us today](#).



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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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*that breeds bitterness all around."*  
~Abdul Kalam

*"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 hope that [they] take a good hard look at the results of today's ranking and make the connection that an engaged workforce is necessary to an effective department[.]"*  
~Colleen Kelley

*"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

*"Profits are related to customer retention. Customer retention is related to employee retention. Employee retention may or may not be related to benefits, but benefits could be part of the package that causes people to stay and -- by the way -- engage in discretionary effort. \*\*\* If you go into any organization that's customer-facing, you can tell in 5 minutes when the employees are feeling abused. They retaliate on the customers."*  
~Jeffrey Pfeffer

*"Half-hearted effort becomes habit and saps a champion."*  
~Pat Riley

*"The dependency of organizations on the engagement and productivity of its workforce makes attention to human capital during organizational change a critical priority."*  
~Allan Schweyer