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Dear Reader,

Psychologist W. Herzberg posited that remuneration which is perceived as inadequate is a demotivator - but that money in itself cannot be considered a motivator. So what keeps individuals engaged with their work? Ernie Turner shares with us some reflections emerging from his experience on this topic.

Enjoy the reading!

Isabel Rimanoczy  
Editor

Quote of the Month

*"Knowing how things work gives the leader more real power and ability than all the degrees or titles the world can offer. Good leadership consists of doing less and being more."*

*John Heider, The Tao of Leadership*

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# LIM NEWS

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## **INCREASING WORKFORCE ENGAGEMENT: THE NEW FRONTIER by Ernie Turner**

Imagine this - you have just been hired as the new soccer coach for a team with the following 'scorecard':

- only 4 members of the team are ever sure at any given time which goal is theirs and why they are playing the game anyway;
- only 2 are enthusiastic about being on the field;
- only 2 feel that they are trusted by their coach and management;
- only 2 feel that they have been adequately trained to do their job;
- only 2 understand how their role 'fits' with the other roles on the field;
- only 2 are trying to play as a team;
- and only 1 feels accountable<sup>[1]</sup>.

If you're the kind person who sees the cup half empty you might be inclined to decline the job and save yourself months of frustration and migraine headaches. Or if you see the cup half full, you would probably be excited at all the improvement opportunities facing you.

The fact is that this is a graphic picture of today's global corporate reality. And a recent Gallup Poll study<sup>[2]</sup> provides similar findings:

- 29% of the workforce are actively engaged in their work;
- 54% are not engaged;
- 17% are actively disengaged.

The 17% who are actively disengaged represents 22 million in the USA alone and accounts for over \$300 billion in costs to those companies and to society - poor service, bad quality of goods, re-work, lost customers, lost hours, sickness, sabotage, criminal behavior, getting fired, etc.

***Increasing workforce engagement*** is definitely a new frontier for improving productivity and morale. In fact, several companies today are actively investigating what they can do to make a difference in this wide open field. A few weeks ago, two of my LIM colleagues based in Hong Kong and I were invited to design and facilitate an engaging 4-hour conversation with 80 Hong Kong bankers from a global financial institution on the topic - "Nurturing Engagement in the Workplace". Using a number of large group techniques including *Open Space*<sup>[3]</sup> and *Reflection and Dialogue*<sup>[4]</sup> we had a wonderful experience exploring many related questions.

I would like to share three of the questions we discussed and just some of the key lessons we extracted.

#### **Question # 1: *What engages individuals?***

- Feeling that they add value; they are able to make a difference; they are important;

- Having a few colleagues and friends at work with whom they can relate and make meaning;
- A supervisor who is supportive, fair and clear.

A few years ago LIM designed and delivered an Action Reflection Learning leadership development program for a global bank. As part of the ROI study conducted several weeks after the program, the individual conducting the study discovered that 4 of the participants, all investment bankers, had been contacted by headhunters prior to the program and they were seriously considering leaving the bank. However, after the program they all changed their minds. When asked, "Why?" their responses were almost identical - 'because senior management demonstrated to us in this program that they valued what we thought by giving us real business challenges for us to solve as part of our development'.

### **Question #2: *What disengages individuals?***

- An ineffective supervisor - someone who doesn't listen; isn't clear; isn't fair; says one thing and does another;
- Lack of clarity - around mission, vision, strategy, role, responsibilities and norms.
- Poor alignment between performance and rewards.

A few years ago there was a survey conducted in Europe with several hundred middle managers. They were asked to identify the most important characteristics of a 'good' boss. The number 1 response was - someone who will really listen to me.

Some years ago I was working with a team leader who received feedback that she was not clear in where she intended to take her team and her organization. She listened to the feedback and prepared a vivid and very compelling picture of where she thought the team and organization could be in 3 years time if everyone were engaged. Her clarity helped turn her team around; they were committed and enthusiastic about the vision and stretch targets.

As an example of the need for clarity around norms, another team I was working with had not explicitly agreed upon its team norms. As a consequence they were behaving as they saw fit. Several team members were turned off and feeling very frustrated with 'little' things like coming late to meetings, not responding to e-mails in a timely way, using blackberries in meetings, not following through on commitments, etc. After a norm-setting session these behaviors improved dramatically.

### **Question # 3: *What are some practical things you as leaders can do to engage your people?***

1. **Listen** - take time to really hear what your team thinks and feels; find ways to create a safe environment so that they can freely speak up without fear of being ridiculed or sidelined;
2. **Communicate** - try out different ways to effectively communicate your message by identifying first what you want to say; then why you want to say it; how you need to say it so that it is heard and understood; and finally communicate what do you expect as the consequences and implications of your message;
3. **Clarify** - define what 'it' is that you're talking about before trying to reach alignment or make assignments; make sure people understand what they do connects to what others do as well as the bigger picture; and, in particular, clarify where you're going and why;

4. **Contract** - share what you expect of others and ask for their expectations of you; the more explicit you are, the fewer disappointments you'll have;
5. **Ask for feedback** - model behavior asking for feedback; it then becomes easier for others to give you feedback; this is the first step in getting behavior change;
6. **Coach** - look for opportunities to provide appreciative feedback; make offers of support; make requests; challenge with care and good intentions;
7. **Develop your people** - encourage them to take the lead, yet be ready to offer your ideas and request that they demonstrate new behaviors based upon developmental opportunities;
8. **Involve your people in key decisions** - find an inclusive decision-making process that gives everyone an equal opportunity to influence key decisions;
9. **Run effective and efficient meetings** - more time is spent in meetings than almost any other corporate activity; so find a way to make meetings efficient, effective and fun; it is possible to have all three; too many meetings are poorly planned, poorly facilitated, poorly attended and as a consequence the outcomes seldom achieved; a little science and a little art can turn meetings around and be arenas for effective shared leadership;
10. **Ask** - for help, for input, for different behavior, for time, for resources - for whatever you want; most individuals respond favorably to requests for help;
11. **Delegate** - assign roles, responsibilities and tasks thoughtfully; make sure that, if possible, individuals have the capabilities to undertake the task without a lot of stress; that they clearly know what the task is; what the resources are to do the task; the support they can expect from you; the time framework; the reporting structure;
12. **Reflect, review, refine and reward** - find time to discover what happened without blame; make refinements; learn from the experience and reward appropriately; you increase your chances of getting what you want by both measuring and rewarding.

So what good will these things do to increase employee engagement? Plenty! As John Heider's *The Tao of Leadership* teaches us - "Few leaders realize how much how little will do. Good leadership consists of motivating people to their highest levels by offering them opportunities, not obligations."



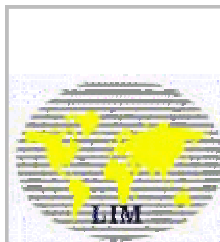
[1] Adapted from a quote in Stephen R. Covey's *The 8<sup>th</sup> Habit*

[2] Taken from *Getting Personal in the Workplace* by Steve Crabtree, The Gallup Management Journal, 2004

[3] *Open Space* is an innovative meeting format developed by Harrison Owen using a coffee break format

[4] *Reflection and Dialogue* is a tool designed by LIM that builds upon the work of David Bohm's *On Dialogue*

If you want more triggers for reflection, visit <http://isabelrimanoczy.blogspot.com>.



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