

What Kind of Leaders Do You Need?

So much has been written on the subject of leadership. In fact a search on *Amazon.com* resulted in over 16,000 books with the word leadership in the title... so by now we should know everything there is to know on the subject, and everyone in leadership role is doing a fantastic job, right?

If that was true, Gallup research would be showing a lot more than 29% of the US workforce as engaged, because isn't that what great leaders do... they get people to be excited about and committed to their organization's vision. And one thing we need to understand about the role of the leader in employee engagement... your leaders are either increasing engagement, or they are decreasing it. There is no middle ground. Everything a leader does that impacts on employees either increases or diminishes engagement.

The Truly Engaged Employee

Rather than start by looking at what kind of leaders you need, I suggest we should get really clear on what it means to be a truly engaged employee... then we can better understand the kind of leadership we need to provide.

When looking at human motivation, I think it is helpful to do it in the context of **The Whole Person Concept** or *Iceberg Model* that I described in a recent *Leadership Update*. The underlying principle in this model is that all motivation comes from within the person. More specifically, motivation comes from the *Needs* or *Values* levels of our model. In other words, people do what they do either to *satisfy a need*, or because they *believe they should*... it is consistent with their *values*.

Full *Engagement* rarely comes from just satisfying employees *needs*. Receiving a pay rise or bonus, extra benefits or even a promotion can have a temporary impact on engagement, but it doesn't last long. The *fully engaged* employee is one whose *needs* and *values* are aligned with their work and their organization.

Five Leadership Skills that Increase Engagement

After almost 30 years of research I have determined that there are five essential skills that leaders must have if they are going to succeed in increasing employee engagement. They are:

- 1. Building Trust.** Trust is an essential ingredient in increasing engagement. The first thing leaders need to know about *building trust* is that it does not happen just because you are trustworthy. People do not know how trustworthy you are until you demonstrate it by using *trust building behaviors*, and the most important of these behaviors is to trust others. *We build trust by trusting others*. This requires a basic *belief in people*... a belief that people are essentially trustworthy. After all, if you have untrustworthy employees, why did you hire them and why are they still there?
- 2. Mentoring.** The relationship between the employee and his or her immediate manager is a critical factor in how engaged the employee will be. We have to get away from the idea that Managers cannot *mentor* the people who report to them. The Gallup research is very

clear on this point. Employees need feedback... they need to know how they are performing, not just once a year at review time, and be able to discuss their needs for growth and development with a Manager who cares about them. This is a must have skill for effective leaders... to give and receive feedback, and to coach and counsel employees in a way that increases engagement and commitment.

3. **Inclusion.** Whether employees feel like an *insider* or an *outsider* also impacts on their level of engagement. Effective leaders know that everyone on their team has strengths the team needs to be successful, and they know how to get the best out of each person regardless of their ethnic background, gender, age or sexual orientation. They understand that people with different personal values can work together effectively when they commit to the same values about trustworthiness and standards of work performance.
4. **Alignment.** Engaged employees *feel* aligned with their organizations *Purpose, Values* and *Vision*. Their work is *meaningful* to them because their leader helps them see the connection between what they do and the success of the organization. The effective leader also understands that gaining their team's commitment to the organization's values increases the team's performance standards as well as their engagement.
5. **Team Development.** Effective leaders understand the potential for significant increases in performance through high performing teams. They make sure that all team members understand the strengths they and other team members bring to the team, and work at developing a process that capitalizes on all of these strengths. The leaders focus is on developing the leadership potential of each team member, and ultimately implementing a shared leadership approach to continuously improving performance that is owned by the team.

All of these skills are needed to fully engage employees... if any of them are missing, engagement will be diminished. The challenge in developing these skills is that they are dependent on each other. That is, you have to *build trust* before you can be effective at *mentoring*, and you will need your mentoring skills to be effective at *inclusion* and *alignment*. You won't have much success at getting all employees *aligned* unless they feel they are an *insider*, and to build a *high performing team*, the leader needs all of the above skills.

The reality is that these skills don't come naturally to many managers, and yet they can be learned. But extensive research by Daniel Goleman (author of *Primal Leadership*) on leadership learning has established that they cannot be learned during a single training event. Developing these skills will for many managers require the unlearning of old habits, often habits of a lifetime, and the learning of new habits. It takes time, reinforcement and practice... and a serious commitment from both the organization and the managers involved.

With all the evidence we now have about the significant increases in organizational performance as employee engagement increases, can you afford not to make the effort?

Keith E Ayers
Integro Leadership Institute