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# The elements of engagement

You might be asking yourself how do we target disengaged employees? What impact might this have on the business? Gatehouse Programme Director, Chris Atkinson, explores the elements of employee engagement and reveals one sustainable competitive advantage that may be the answer to your questions.

Culturally in the UK, many organisations lack life. Many of your people are actively disengaged because they find work boring, obvious, unchallenging or delivering no tangible benefit. Your people and culture represent the only unique advantage over your competition. The truth is, to keep our people inspired, we need to deliver and work in more engaging and creative ways.

## The concept of engagement

The business world has had many 'buzzwords' over the years. Concepts like empowerment, wellness or proactivity and many others have become a form of management slang that has mostly lost any practical meaning. Many companies still regularly talk about these concepts, but sadly very few people have a real sense of what behaviours or skills are needed to support them.

With this in mind, it would be understandable if the huge growth of interest in the word and concept of 'engagement' was to be met with some scepticism. Is this just the latest in a string of words that will fall into our management vocabulary fated to lose any real meaning in years to come?

In short, absolutely not!

Engagement as a concept is noticeably different to historical buzzword terms, largely because of the incredible research that has been done to support the idea. Take a moment to consider the size and scale of the following studies:

## Gallup 2013: Employee Engagement Drives Growth.

Gallup's most recent meta-analysis on employee engagement accumulated 263 research studies across 192 organisations in 49 industries and 34 countries. In total, Gallup studied 49,928 business/work units including 1,390,941 employees.

*Organisations with an average of 9.3 engaged employees for every*

“ Our businesses need to focus on simple development for managers, leaders and trainers. We need to teach them how to truly energise and enthuse people through their communication. ”

*actively disengaged employee in 2010-2011 experienced 147% higher earnings per share (EPS) compared with their competition in 2011-2012.*

#### **Aon Hewitt 2011: Trends in Global Engagement**

Engagement research from 2008 to 2010 includes 6.7 million employees and represents more than 2,900 organisations.

*Organisations with high levels of engagement (65% or greater) continue to outperform the total stock market index and posted total shareholder returns 22% higher than the average in 2010. On the other hand, companies with low engagement (45% or less) had a total shareholder return that was 28% lower than the average.*

#### **Gallup 2008: Employee Engagement**

Study of data collected from more than 5.4 million employees representing 620,000 workgroups in 16 major industries and more than 70 sub-industries in 137 countries worldwide.

*Engaged organisations have 2.6 times the earnings per share (EPS) growth rate compared to organisations with lower engagement in their same industry. The ratio of engaged to disengaged in “World Class” companies 8:1, “Average” companies 1.5:1*

It follows that as you read this a further barrage of new psychometrics are being developed to test for ‘engagement’ levels. Doubtless staff engagement surveys are being redesigned and rewritten. Most

likely the training industry will also see the growth of programmes aimed at enhancing employee engagement. This inspires some thought-provoking questions:

- ▶ How do we target the disengaged?
- ▶ Can we pre-empt the issue with more effective induction sessions?
- ▶ Can ‘training’ really even affect this issue? What courses are available?

Instead of these questions, let’s consider these far more relevant alternatives for a moment:

- ▶ Where and when does engagement happen?

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- ▶ Who is responsible for creating employee engagement?

### The fundamental element

The truth is, 'where it happens' is *everywhere* and *everyday*. Ultimately, 'engagement' is something that characterises the relationship between an employee and their organisation. Far from the commonplace assumption that therefore engagement is an organisational and cultural issue (i.e. high level and strategic), actually the truth is far simpler and more profound. The fact is that the responsibility for creating engagement *must* lie firstly with the day-to-day leadership and management that employees experience. Those people who make requests, assign workload, define

roles and responsibilities; the individuals who stand in front of your people and give direction, training or guidance.

Challenge yourself to consider how effective your managers are at communicating and creating desire, enthusiasm and energy in people to deliver results? Instead of a focus on training for front-line employees or engagement strategies, our businesses need to focus on simple development for managers, leaders and trainers. We need to teach them how to truly energise and enthuse people through their communication. It is their responsibility; in fact, it always has been, long before the concept of employee engagement was ever coined. ■

### Biography \ Chris Atkinson

Chris Atkinson leads Gatehouse's Elements of Engagement development programme for line managers and leaders. An experienced international trainer, he specialises in employee engagement, organisational culture and inspiring leadership. Qualifying for Dale Carnegie in 2001 he became their youngest trainer in the organisation and is now ranked in the top 5% of trainers in the UK and top 15% worldwide. Recently, Chris has spoken at events worldwide and has worked closely with a number of leadership organisations including Lloyds Banking Group, General Motors and Adidas.

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