

3 Key Things That Will Boost Your Engagement Now

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It's just sad that 87% of people aren't engaged at work.

It's sad for the people.

It's sad for the organization

And it's sad for the people who must work with those who are not engaged.

People actually like to work, otherwise they wouldn't volunteer in such large numbers. They volunteer while they have full-time families and they volunteer after they retire.

Think about it:

- Why do people do work for free, of their own free will, and yet are not engaged in their real jobs where they do get paid?
- What is missing from those paid positions?

People also love to play games in their spare time – video games, board games, various forms of card games, sports games.

The games can go on for hours and they can be competitive or cooperative and people find them great fun. Work should be more like a game – something that is fun to do.

Work has all the elements of a fun game – at least most work does if it was structured properly.

But even if you're not ready to set up the workplace as a gaming environment (the topic of another set of blogs), there is really no reason that a much larger percentage of people couldn't become engaged if only leaders did three key things.

1. Make Sure the Work Is Meaningful

People want to spend their time on something that will make a difference, something they think will make the world a better place, or something that will help their organization succeed in that world.

They don't want to be just a cog in a wheel.

It's up to leaders to define goals that are meaningful to people. Increasing earnings or net profit is not meaningful—they're just measures.

Connect the goals back to your mission. Your mission spells out how you are going to change the world, what the purpose of the organization is. Every goal should somehow move that mission forward.

Forget the acronym about SMART goals. Focus instead on making goals meaningful. Improve the customer's experience in

completing our sales process. That's something people can connect to. And they can feel good if they accomplish it because it makes someone else's life better.

Take a look at the goals you set up:

- Are they motivating?
- Do they touch the heart as well as the mind?
- Do they connect to the mission?

2. Make Sure the Work Is Achievable

I don't know who came up with the idea of stretch goals but it was one of the worst ideas, ever.

People want to be successful – that's what a culture of success is all about. It's a place where people can feel satisfied because they are achieving things.

People don't want to run around a hamster wheel—they want to cross the goal line (which is why sports are so popular). You expend some effort, you train, and maybe you can be successful.

You don't have to be successful every single time, in fact, it's important that there is some challenge in the work, but not so much that people feel hopeless before they even begin.

All too often the boss assigns something to a direct report that he or she knows is not achievable – the timeline is too short, the technical challenges are too big, the budget or resources allocated are too small, or the person already has more than

they can get done on their plate and so there is no way they can take on another assignment.

Combine that with a culture in which the direct report is not allowed to say no or to negotiate the portfolio of work they have already been assigned or is being assigned and you have work that is not achievable and that is a heavy burden on anyone with a conscience.

They know from the start they are going to fail and setting someone up to fail is cruel. You've robbed that person of the fun they could have at work – of the satisfaction and engagement they could feel, and when someone is engaged and having fun doing the work, they do a better job.

There is an art to setting the right goals, with the right amount of complexity. But not too much otherwise it's unmanageable. And not too little, otherwise it's dull.

That's how games are designed.

If you go to play a game that you know you will win every time without thinking, it quickly becomes boring. If you go to play a game that you know you will never win and not only will you lose, but you will be punished for losing, that sounds like self-inflicted torture to me

3. Lead Collaboratively

Work isn't fun when leaders spend too much time boosting their own egos, amassing power and stomping all over the people who are lower down in the food chain.

This creates a toxic environment for anyone trying to actually get something done. There are too many hoops to jump through, too many people to appease before that meaningful work can get done.

Leadership should be there to support the meaningful, doable work getting done, not get in the way of it.

Leaders need to leave their egos at the door and let go of using their position as a weapon to get what they want by imposing their will over others.

There is a better way and it's a collaborative approach to working.

Most leaders lead directly – they tell others what to do. These others aren't children, they are adults. They have supposedly been hired because they have some expertise. But instead of supporting and nurturing that expertise, they second-guess it; they micromanage. Or they bark out orders that the person doesn't really understand and then leave them to flap in the wind.

There are more enlightened leaders – they think they are leading collaboratively. They asked for their direct reports' opinions. They listened carefully. They considered all sides of the issue and then they made a decision. They explained the decision to their 'subordinates' and answered any and all questions.

Great, right?

It's better than the other examples, but it's still not collaboration.

Collaboration is when the team makes the decision together, not the leader. Collaboration is when the leader really lets go of the power and after proper training in the right tools and techniques, turns over his power to the team.

Scary thought, right?

Well, think about why you might think that.

Are you afraid to let go of control? *Most leaders are.*

They are actually addicted to control – to trying to control others. Being controlled feels terrible and it sucks all the fun out of work. There is no engagement when one is being controlled – it's the opposite of engagement.

But it doesn't need to be that way.

- Stop focusing on profits and focus on purpose and how the organization is there to serve something or someone beyond itself.
- Set people up to succeed rather than to fail.
- Don't over-allocate resources because that makes the goals unachievable – people have too much to do.
- And let go of control and learn to lead collaboratively.

Easy peasy, yes?

No – it's very difficult but not impossible. It just takes commitment and effort – the effort to learn new skills, new tools,

new approaches. That's the new game of leadership, and it can change the world.

It's up to you, and you, not your direct reports, to make that change. They're mostly fine the way they are, it's you that's the problem.

The question is – are you up to the challenge?

Paula Martin is a Master Level Certified Matrix Management Consultant™ (CMMC™—MOL), and the CEO and Chief Creative Officer of the Matrix Management Institute. She is the developer of the MM 2.0™ Operating System, and the author of the Matrix Management 2.0™ Body of Knowledge, the Matrix Management Reinvented book series, and more than 10 other books on topics related to Matrix Management and Managing Projects in a Matrix.

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