



“I Quit... But Forgot to Tell You!”

The Disengaged Worker

By Terri Kabachnick

As customers we've been waited on by people who quit, but never left. As employees we've been managed by bosses who quit, but managed to stay. As managers we have managed people who physically attend, but mentally pretend.

Disengaged workers are costing U.S. based organizations in excess of \$250 billion as noted by a 2002 Gallup poll. This price tag includes co-worker and customer dissatisfaction plus loss of loyalty on both sides. Who wants to work with a person who performs only enough to get by?

Engaged Employee, Strong Asset

First, consider what it means to be an engaged employee: involved, occupied, committed, meshed, participating, for me translates to “unavailable to anyone else”. When a person is fully engaged in their work, their energy and focus is a laser directed on outcome and satisfaction. Results become rewards, producing a euphoric feeling of high self-esteem, control over one's destiny, and approval from others. They become a company's strongest asset, one that cannot be stolen.

Disconnected, Detached, Disheartened

Why do people become disengaged in the workplace? No applicant takes a job with a plan to fail. No employer hires with the intent to fire. Both want to succeed. So what happens?

Our company conducted an on-line survey of front-line workers, supervisors, managers at the store, district, and regional levels, and executives. From this research, we have found that the issue behind disengaged workers could be occurring for several reasons.

- Disagreement on what behaviors, attitudes, and values were needed for the job, leading to qualifications based on what exists rather than what is possible. This is like allowing the performance of a second-string team to become the benchmark for top performers on the first team. Often top performers in one company would be only average if placed in the same position in another company.
- An individual who became a “good employee” was expected to remain at that level without much feedback, recognition, or involvement.

- Lack of accountability and effort from managers whose responsibilities include employee retention, development and satisfaction.

Engaging the Disengaged

It's not about healing disengagement, it's about prevention. It is critical for managers to be sensitive to and aware of every employee's job satisfaction status. By the time active disengagement becomes apparent, the damage is done. Look at these statistics: Poor performance by co-workers is the number one reason that dedicated and caring—engaged—employees leave their jobs. However, if disengagement has already set in, a thorough assessment must be completed before any solution initiatives are prescribed. Management needs to know the exact root of the disengagement and define the focus of improvement.

Motivating Engagement

Understanding each person's unique abilities, skills, motivators, and work styles is the key to engagement, along with a managing style that focuses on the real individual rather than a manager's perception. Motivation, or engagement, comes from loving what you do. You love what you do when you're in the right position and growing.

People want to achieve at their highest level of potential. They want to be seen in the best light. They want to be fully engaged. Your people are your most important asset and therefore your responsibility. Help them love what they do and they are yours—fully engaged.

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