

The Age of Engagement

a manifesto by Ken Wright

Author of "The People Pill"

The Age of Engagement

Background:

We had the Industrial Age where success was determined by management, knowledge and experience. Businesses avoided risk, technologies were slow and simple, and employees were glad to have a job and managers managed employees as a group. More recently we have been in the Information Age where all information and knowledge was readily available, technologies were fast and complex, yet the skills of our managers, now called leaders, did not keep pace with the expectations of employees. In this age employees were looking for respect and opportunities to grow. The successful businesses in this age focused on leadership, skills and attitudes.

The 21st century is The Age of Engagement, where businesses that focus on engaging their employees and customers produce superior bottom line performance. Engagement starts with enhancing leaders emotional intelligence skills (EQ) creating the ability to connect with employees head to head and heart to heart, it's all about feelings! Employees are looking for bosses and organizations that care about them. They want to feel part of the vision, be able to see themselves as adding value and have their input sought and respected.

A great leader's job is to get results and do it in a way that makes your organization a great place to work – a place where people enjoy coming to work instead of taking orders and hitting this month's numbers.

In other words, inspire the spirit in people , ignite it, and keep the flame fuelled – you will have extraordinary blessings of success as well as fulfilment and satisfaction in all you do together.

From Breakthrough Leadership, HBR , DEC 2001 "YOUR MOOD MATTERS."

This was cutting edge material in 2001. Now in 2009 many leaders are yet to realize the significance of emotional intelligence on culture and results.

Excerpts from the article.....

'The message sent by neurological, psychological, and organizational research is startling in its clarity. Emotional leadership is the spark that ignites the company's performance, creating a bonfire of success or a landscape of ashes. Moods matter that much.' Daniel Goleman

'Leaders must help their followers discover what they are good at. Leaders enable self knowledge'

'The leader's moods and behaviours drive the moods and behaviours of everyone else'

'High levels of emotional intelligence, our research showed, create climates in which information sharing, trust, healthy risk taking and learning flourish.'

'Emotional intelligence is carried through an organization like electricity through wires. The leader's mood is literally contagious, spreading quickly and inexorably throughout the business.'

'A leader needs to make sure that he not only regularly is in an optimistic, authentic, high energy mood, but also that, through his chosen actions, his followers feel and act that way too. Managing for financial results, then, begins with the leader managing his inner life so that the right emotional and behavioural chain reaction occurs.' 'A good mood does not have to be high pitched and nonstop – optimistic, sincere and realistic will do.'

"IF YOU WANT TO CHANGE AN ORGANIZATION, YOU HAVE TO LEAD A CHANGE OF HEART – through connecting, motivating, learning & acknowledging"

Amanda Gore

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I feel that engagement principles put an exponential spin on “EQ”, emotional intelligence. Engagement intelligence – I call “EQ2” – as it combines the head’s EQ knowledge with the heart’s humanity.

Truly engaging people – employees and customers – I feel is the number one headache facing leaders. And it hurts. Really hurts.

IQ gets you the job, EQ gets you promoted, EQ2 maximizes results!

How Important is Engagement?

- A meagre 21% of workers Worldwide believe they are engaged at work
- Disengaged workers aren’t just unhappy at work – every day these people undermine what their engaged co-workers accomplish
- Disengaged workers cost economies billions. In USA \$328B per year and in little old Australia over \$25B per year
- Engaged workers produce 28% more than disengaged workers
- As many as 87% of workers Worldwide leave their jobs when they fail to make an emotional connection with their boss

Statistics from Gallup

What is Engagement?

Engagement is the cultural fit: “The beliefs, attitudes, behaviours , norms and practices of people within an organisation, particularly the leaders, determines the level of engagement. Highly engaged teams are energised, enthusiastic and passionate about their business, love engaging customers and exceeding expectations”

Engagement is a powerful force that governs the organisations “way of life”.

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Engagement is a universal force that connects people and drives the business.

It shapes the way the organisation treats the customer

It determines the organisational performance level

It controls the organisations response to change

It channels human energy and spirit into business activities

It dictates the organisations evolution through stages of development

The traditional notion that a company is run by a group - "top management" or by an individual - "the boss" belies the power of engagement. Leaders who have EQ and engagement skills (EQ2) bring their team along the engagement path. They really care for their people. This care is felt, respect & trust is built and results flourish.

Even in a business where top management are not seen to be engaging, a team leader can still create an engaged team and their results are largely determined by the passion generated by their engaged team. Numerous studies have proven this – the number one driver of engagement is the direct relationship with one's line leader. To engage one's team without having an engaged top team can therefore be achieved but results across the company are transformed when engagement starts at the top and is inculcated throughout the entire organisation.

In an extensive survey by Hewitt Associates, Double Digit Growth Companies (DDG) had significantly higher engagement results (60% plus) comparative to Single Digit Growth Companies (SDG) who generally had results of less than 40% engagement.

An engaged team are proud, passionate and high achieving. If their engaged leader is replaced by a disengaged leader the "tribe" will rule through group pressure that establishes group behaviour norms. This leader will need to change fast or will not last.

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The more common scenario is a leader who does not know how to engage his team. In this situation the leader cannot connect, loses respect, is not trusted even though in his mind it is the team's fault that objectives are not being met.

In these instances the teams top achievers are at risk, they will be looking around for other opportunities. Employees leave leaders not companies.

Thus engagement is a universal force that connects people and drives the business.

The importance of engagement is that it governs the behaviour that surrounds all business initiatives and actions. To reach optimum success in business you need to succeed in engaging your team and customers.

“People will forget what you say, they will forget what you do, but they will never forget how you made them feel.” Carl Buechner

Can Engagement be Measured?

You have to be able to measure before you can change. Engagement measurement is possible by surveying the perceptions of team members . Since engagement establishes the behavioural norms for success or survival within the organisation, their perceptions of their environment becomes their personal measurement of their engagement. Teams/Divisions need to have their level of engagement assessed and combining surveys from respondents within the different teams/divisions and discounting fringe elements provides a realistic picture of the engagement quotient for the organisation.

Engagement is driven by the leaders, particularly the line leader; when engagement is high the following five S's are evident amongst team members:

**Employees leave
leaders.....Not
companies.**

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- Skills**
- My role is mentally stimulating
 - My skills are being used effectively
 - My leader works with me in developing my skills
- Strong**
- Employees have strong links with their leaders & co-workers
 - Line leader shows understanding, care and values team members
 - Employees feel the business is positioned well for future success
- Say**
- Employees sing the praises of the company to prospective customers
 - Employees introduce prospective new employees
 - Employees are proud to tell others they are part of this company
- Strive**
- Employees know what the company expects of them
 - Employees are involved in setting goals, actions & strive to achieve
 - Employees develop themselves, striving to be the best they can be
- Stay**
- Employees feel a community, family environment
 - Retention interviews are utilised to find out how we feel about working here
 - Retention is great. People love working here, our biggest issue is developing the lower performers as they refuse to leave their family!

The key is to find your engagement baseline and work to enhance it.

Can Engagement be Changed?

Since engagement is manmade and learned it can be changed. Humans are not born with behaviours and habits that make them productive, accountable or quality conscious. The important thing is to be able to **identify the existing level of engagement and apply specific strategies for improvement to those elements most destructive to success.** Engagement can be changed and managed by those who are trained and skilled in harnessing the positive force of engagement to drive business success.

Looking at the above five S's as evidence of an engaged environment it will be readily evident where your organisation currently is positioned. If you currently see your group falling short of these ideals the good news is we have programs with a moderate investment that will have your leaders creating followership, earning respect – not demanding it, and have engaged individuals and teams wanting to excel.

Some Simple Ways to Lift Engagement

In many cases, compensation and benefits are not the key motivators of engagement. It is always more about how their leaders make them ***feel***.

Making them feel great could be by developing them, advancement opportunities, recognising them and in general making them feel valued and appreciated.

Management By Walking Around: Leaders need to build trust and respect, by being involved out on the floor a leader will really get to know what is happening and gain respect as they show that they value and appreciate everyone's contribution.

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Ask Your Team: It is amazing the ideas and initiatives that will be uncovered by asking for input from your team. FEAR is particularly rampant in the current economic climate, and I feel that it is driving the vast majority of leaders in the wrong direction.

I would estimate 75 to 80 percent of leaders are about fear – fear of the bottom line. The first thing I would recommend to those people – and, I would say, 90 percent of them don't do this – find out from your people what can be done to turn the business around.

Be honest with them. Say: 'We're in trouble; if we continue to do what we're doing, we're going to have to cut back on staff and things like that. I just want to ask you people, what you think we should do to increase revenue or reduce expenses?'

I suggest asking the same three simple questions that I put to 400 staff when taking over leading a financial services business:

How can we increase revenue or reduce expenses?

How can we enhance the customer experience?

How can we increase staff morale?

I received about 300 replies. I handwrote back to each of those 300 people and thanked them. There were a lot of suggestions that we put into place immediately. Many people are natural cynics – but then when they see you actually follow through and also personally acknowledge their ideas, that's when the real improvement starts to kick in.

Aside from the stream of great ideas it generated, and the flow-on benefits to the bottom line, I consider that exercise on its own boosted morale by 20 percent.

Hold a team meeting and pick their brains. I'm not so naïve to say that every business in this economic climate can be saved by going out and talking to their teams – but I would think 70 percent of them could be substantially enhanced.

If you use the intellect of the mass, it's amazing what you can come up with.

**Be careful what you ask
for....You're likely to
get it!**

**...the number one thing
that people crave is
recognition.**

Recognition: In my opinion the number one thing people crave is recognition. This is absolutely true in the workplace. A simply articulated, from the heart and unrehearsed "Thank You" can go a long way to motivate employees and build loyalty. It's often said that "actions speak louder than words" ensure your actions and words are the encouraging ones as these will motivate and have a tremendous effect on morale.

I have always practiced the simple act of sending hand written cards, as CEO I sent over 100 each month, to top achievers, rookies doing well, team members having a tough month because of external influences like moving or sickness in the family and when they show that you really know what is going on and they are heartfelt they are treasured. Think about any heartfelt cards you have received from bosses in the past.....do you still have them? I know I do!

Retention Interviews: Many businesses conduct exit interviews, that is like shutting the door after the horse has bolted! Conduct retention interviews with your valued people and find out what you should continue doing, stop doing and start doing.

Achievers Breakfasts or Lunches: Have a monthly get together where your top people, and most improved from all areas in the business are invited. This makes them feel special and creates an opportunity for you to hear from them how they are feeling about any current issues.

Overcoming Fear of Failure: To combat fear of failure, share any of your failures with your team and ask for suggestions on how you could have solved the problem or handled the situation differently. You may learn something important, and in the future your team won't be afraid to share their failures with you.

**Recognition is
inexpensive...Yet a great
investment.**

An Achievements Box: Create an achievements box and have everyone fill it with slips describing significant wins: customer service stories, great sales results, projects completed, personal accomplishments..... Read these out at weekly team meetings, people forget the positives if you fail to relive them.

Really Connect With Them and Discover Their Dreams: Connect with all levels of your team – walk the floor; 6x5 minutes **daily** ‘sit on desk’ chats, and coffee chats are a great way to connect with your people and discover their dreams – when you discover their drivers or dreams help them to achieve them.

Wall of Fame: Create an honour board where you post team members personal bests. Be creative, I had the old vinyl 45 records with their personal best and a photo on them....and when they beat that PB they physically “broke the record” at a team meeting and we then put their new record up on the “Wall of Fame”

Create a Fun Atmosphere: Look for ways to create a fun atmosphere in the office: morning teas to celebrate success; divide into teams and have lunchtime or end-of-day games like a golf-putting competition or throwing tennis balls into a rubbish bin; have theatre nights or bowling nights; have meetings outside the office; rotate 25 percent of staff to start an hour later on Mondays.

Be innovative in your recognition, it doesn’t have to cost a lot of money, involve the family as well. You will see HUGE results from sending notes home to partners with movie tickets and recognizing their support.

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The Engagement Audit

The challenge, in demanding times, is to keep in tune with customers' needs whilst displaying speed, flexibility and innovation. To achieve this lofty goal leaders need to remain confident, calm and focused and have an engaged team.

In my opinion it is very important for businesses to measure engagement to obtain a baseline position and then actively work at creating engagement practices within their business. The Engagement Audit is a survey designed by me and available from www.Engage4Results.com This instrument measures the perception that each person has of their leaders AND the organisation he/she works in. It measures true engagement behaviour and determines whether it supports or undermines the achievement of business goals. Questions are framed in such a way that they gather information about the external influence that is exerted on individuals and how this affects their decisions and performance within the organisation.

Ken Wright began his career at 16 in Banking, and became the youngest bank manager appointed at Westpac Banking Corporation. He later went on to become CEO of Westpac Financial Services in 1993, whose profitability grew by 425% under his guidance and leadership. And in 2000, he joined Aussie Home Loans, Australia's leading non-bank lender, and he used his leadership capabilities to achieve similar results!

Now, in his own business Engage4Results Ken has gained a reputation as "The Engagement Expert" by helping businesses engage their people to maximise results. His recently released book on engaging people "The People Pill" won Gold in the leadership category of the 2008 Axiom USA Business Book Awards, ahead of publications by Seth Godin, and Peter Drucker.

Ken can be contacted by e-mail ken@engage4results.com