

Building Engagement In Work Organizations - by Anne Howard

In the [Autumn newsletter](#) I discussed what engagement is, why it is important and what is required to obtain it. The challenge for organizations is HOW to build an environment where people give their heads (concern), hearts (commitment) and hands (effort) to the organization.

If an organization is going to consciously work toward creating an environment or culture where the factors that contribute to employee engagement are present, that culture must be one where everyone can be included. A question that arises is how the different members of today's heterogeneous workplace respond to the factors that contribute to engagement.

I thought it would be interesting to invite representatives of the different generations to talk about what they think. Following are Sarah's (Gen Y) thoughts about what is important if you want to obtain engagement from your employees. The passion the question about engagement produced is exciting.



"I accept that there are a lot of negative views out there towards my generation, particularly those of us who are in the workforce. So I recognize my predisposed disadvantage even writing this article for you. I won't butter it up for you at all; I am a 23 year old typical product of the Generation Y. Yes, I work to support my life outside of work and I am there to collect a pay cheque. Yes, I will email you instead of getting up and walking over 3 cubicles.

Yes, I surf the internet and text all day long. Yes, I think I should advance faster than you did. Yes, I am not engaged in my work. No, I will not apologize for it.

At first I really struggled with the idea of writing a piece on employee engagement. How could I possibly write an article on employee engagement when I am not engaged whatsoever in my job? I mean truly, here I sit, at work writing an article for a newsletter. Then it hit me in one of those wonderful ah ha moments! I am the perfect person to write about engagement!

Let me tell you how I could be engaged, because ultimately like every other 23 year old girl that is all I want.

Let me give you a little background on my life. I am a tremendously engaged person; I get ridiculously caught-up in everything I do. In the last year I have been simultaneously working fulltime, attending school fulltime, taking boot camp 3 days a week, and playing triple A fastball. Somehow I still find time to squeeze in time with my family and friends, get about 7 hours sleep a night and have yet to drive away my boyfriend of 6 years. I am deeply involved in all aspects of my life. So how exactly is it that I am not engaged in my work?

Personally I think engagement ignites from within. I associate it with personal drive or a willingness to work even. It's that feeling in your stomach knowing you can make and are making a difference. I think if you show up to work and you want to work there is no way that you won't become engaged.

Now, I have that drive, that little spark is in me and I am more than ready to work, believe me, I beg for work nearly every day. Like starting any fire however, the spark won't last long unless there is a source of fuel.

Have I found that fuel in the company goal? No. Let's take a look at my company's mission statement: "To provide a patient-focused health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans." That truly sounds fantastic and I love that I am a part of that goal; but where do I fit in? How is it that I am involved in that goal sitting in front of this computer, praying that my phone will ring? There's an answering machine and a sign that do my job when I'm not here. I can quite literally be replaced by a sign. What I am saying is, I need to know that I am valued and involved otherwise I will not be engaged.



Have I found that fuel in my coworkers? No. There are a lot of coffee breaks in my office. The coffee breaks last longer than the work time. I know this for a fact, as my desk is in the kitchen. Also during that work time, when I enter their cubicles to ask if they have any projects I can assist them with they are usually surfing the internet, playing solitaire or "journaling about [their] feelings during this difficult transitional phase our organization is in." They seem to enjoy doing nothing. I can't stand doing nothing. Since my job takes 8.5 valuable hours out of my day, at least give me something to do. Please don't waste my time and don't be okay with wasting your time otherwise I will not be engaged.

Have I found that fuel in my boss? No. In true Generation Y form, I have, in my mind, grouped my boss into the mentor category with parents and teachers. From my boss I need support. I need encouragement. I need to know that he is there to pick me up when I fall. I have recently graduated from school with all the drive in the world. I am still learning. I am still developing as an employee. This is the perfect opportunity for you to involve me in your company and engage me so that I don't walk out and go to the company down the street to become their 30 year employee. Instead of taking me under his wing and assisting me in evolving into an employee that could last with this company for decades, my boss ignores me. I don't even get a return "hello" in the mornings as he breezes past my desk. The few weekly interactions that we do have – when I am begging for something to do – involve me being brushed off and told to go sit back down. He doesn't say this because he is busy but simply because "if there is no work then there is no work." This is no way to ignite that fire. Mentor me! Help me grow! Engage me!

So, yes, I work to support my life outside of work because if I didn't I would do have nothing in life to be engaged in. Yes, I work to collect a pay cheque; I need to pay for school that I attend to further my education, so that I can get a better job where I am involved. Yes, I email you instead of walking over to talk to you, because it annoys me greatly that you too are doing nothing. Yes, I text and surf the internet all day long, I am not disrupting my work and I need to keep myself busy for those long hours I'm at my desk. Yes, I think I should advance faster than you did. I have drive, I am determined, I am educated and I have a strong work ethic. Yes, I am not engaged in my work, but I am internally motivated. Finally no, I will not apologize. I will not lose my drive and desire to work, I will not give up my values and I will not compromise who I am to fit in with the culture of this organization. I firmly believe that someday, somewhere I will find a career that engages me.

I will absolutely agree that there are generational differences but I think deep down we all want the same things. Engagement comes from a combination of the same fundamental values for everyone. We need to have drive, we want to feel valued, to feel involved, we want to know that our time isn't being wasted and the people around us aren't wasting theirs, we want to have support, and to be mentored and at the end of the day I think we all long to be engaged."

Sarah's passion about this issue highlights the potential Gen Y brings to our workplaces and how easy it would be to capture that energy.

Stay tuned for more about this topic – It is important, Manpower research indicates that "companies who rank at the top in terms of employee engagement have twice the total return to shareholders over companies who rank as merely average." The Spring 2009 newsletter article will provide a Gen X response to the engagement question, the Fall 2009 a Boomer response.