

Engagement - by Anne Howard

Earlier this year, I was invited to do a presentation for the Calgary Chapter of the Canadian Association of Family Enterprises (CAFÉ) on Employee Engagement. In preparing for the presentation I discovered a considerable amount of material on the subject. This morning on checking World At Work and the Society of Human Resource Management libraries that volume of material has grown to roughly 1200 and 1100 articles, books, webinars, etc. respectively. And, they are just a couple of the resources with information on engagement.

What is Engagement?

The Canadian Oxford Dictionary defines engagement as *concern, commitment and active participation in issues, etc.* Engagement is a deep intellectual and emotional involvement that drives us to extend our effort towards achieving a dream.

In respect of the workplace, engagement can be described as the degree to which employees are emotionally and intellectually attached to their work and its purposes.

Why is Engagement important?

The reality of today's workplace is that the organization; its managers, supervisors and co-workers really have no way of knowing who is giving their all or who is just coasting along. So, why does it matter if someone coasts along expending 50% of their potential and producing as much volume and an equal amount of value as another who works at 100% of his or her potential?

As my 20 something nephews say tongue in cheek whenever someone brings up the past, *Back in the day*, when the work people did was active, visible to others and the outcomes were tangible goods, there was little question as to who was working hard and giving all they had to give to the work.

Today, with more than half of Canadian workers involved in service sector work we can no longer say, a person working acceptably hard can produce X widgets in any given day. Nor can it be easily said "this work is scrap"—a beautiful example of that is the accidental development and delivery of the phenomenally successful Post-It note to market.

Engagement is important because when it exists in people, creativity, innovation and high levels of productivity exist. Engaged people produce phenomenal results. On a personal level engagement contributes to the expansion of potential. On the organizational level engagement makes success possible.

What does it take to obtain Engagement?

In the last few years we've seen the rise of benchmarking, a clear sign that organizations are seeking to find a way to establish expectations for the performance results of their employees.

While benchmarking has some merit, it does not create the potential for exceptional results individually or organizationally.

Studies have shown that people are happier and more satisfied in fair, flexible and healthy workplaces. Happiness and satisfaction do not necessarily create the potential for exceptional results. Quite the contrary, some of the most exceptional results in history have occurred when people have been profoundly unhappy and dissatisfied with their situation.

People choose to give their concern (head), commitment (heart) and effort (hands) to someone or something. People become engaged when:





- they believe in the value of the goal
- they believe they will benefit from the achievement of the goal
- they know what they need to do and want to extend their energy and effort in that way
- they believe the other people involved are committed to the same goal
- they trust the leaders and believe they care about the goal and the people working toward it

When considering what it takes to create the organization where all of those factors exist, it is easy to understand why organizations (whether a family, a sports team, an educational institute, a community, or a business) with fully engaged members are difficult to achieve and even more difficult to sustain.

My next newsletter will be about HOW organizations, in particular business organizations, build that environment.