

# Employee Engagement Isn't Really **The Goal**

| Key tips to create a healthy workplace culture



 By Paul White

Employee engagement has become a core concept in human resource management – and rightfully so. Numerous research studies have demonstrated positive results for organizations when employee engagement is high – reduced staff turnover, increased productivity, improved customer ratings.

However, I want to propose to you that employee engagement isn't really what you want to focus

on. Because if you focus primarily on employee engagement, you will likely “miss the target.”

*Why? Because employee engagement isn't a behavior, or even an attitude. Employee engagement is a result that flows from other targeted behaviors.*

Let me give you an example from daily life. A lot of us, myself included, often want to lose weight. We want

to weigh less than we do now. But that is not really our true goal – just to weigh less. Why? Because there are a lot of different ways to lose weight, some of which aren't healthy. You can starve yourself, not eat and not have the energy you need to function well. You can go on some kind of cleanse where you drop all your water weight along with essential nutrients and become dehydrated or have your electrolytes become unbalanced.

The goal is really that we want to be healthy – to not have high blood pressure, or high cholesterol, or be obese and unable to move around well. And we know that certain kinds of weight aren't healthy— a high proportion of fat versus muscle. So, while when we talk about “losing weight,” our actual goal is to be healthy. And research (as well as common sense) tells us the way we need to do be healthy is to eat moderate amounts of healthy food, to drink water, to exercise regularly, and get good rest. These habits will lead to good health – and that process usually results in losing weight.

Employee engagement is similar. Focusing on getting our employees “engaged,” is really a result (not a behavior), and you can wind up chasing employee engagement and not really getting what you want. In fact, I recently heard an HR professional directly telling a group of employees and supervisors: “I want you to get more engaged. Engage!” I'm not sure what they were supposed to do – try to create a feeling?

*What you really want are positive behaviors in the workplace.* You want people to show up for work; to arrive on time; to follow instructions, policies and procedures; accomplish the tasks they are supposed to do; and get along well with others. When these behaviors occur, then employee engagement begins to rise.

To be successful, leaders must focus on the building block behaviors of a healthy workplace, which include employees knowing the purpose of what they're doing, how their tasks tie to the vision and mission of their organization, and team members need to know that they are valued and appreciated for what they do. If these factors aren't a part of daily life, no matter how

good employees feel, you're not really getting to the goal that you want.

Take a look at the behaviors that underlie employee engagement and develop processes to train and increase these actions. One important theme should be noted: often employee engagement surveys show that organizations have a hard time moving the degree to which people feel valued and appreciated. Often some improvement in other behaviors is seen but feeling appreciated remains low.

Why? Often because HR professionals try to use employee recognition activities to increase individuals' feelings of being valued – but employee recognition wasn't designed to accomplish that goal. Only when authentic appreciation is communicated in the ways individually meaningful to each person do team members report feeling truly valued (you can't just do the same action for everyone.)

To create a healthy workplace culture, don't chase employee engagement blindly. Focus on developing the right behaviors and attitudes within your team members, and employee engagement will follow naturally.



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