

Reengaging the Disengaged: Improving Your Personal Engagement Quotient (Part 2)

Engaged workers are a rare find.

When they are in the workplace, they are a boon to the organization. They are a joy to have in the company.

What do engaged workers look like?

In the study conducted by ISR, committed employees are those prepared to go the extra mile for their employers and to put in the maximum effort for the good of the organization.ⁱ

They are personally involved in their work.

They have ownership of the organization's vision and goals.

Their personal values are aligned to the organization's values.

They deliver on performance.

They make self-improvement a way of life.

Most of all, they enjoy working with people and make the organization a better place to work in.

On the other hand, disengaged employees are disloyal and driven by self-interest.

What are the symptoms of disengaged employees?

1. They become depressive sloggers. They clock in late and check out on time. They drag their feet to work. They die a slow death of boredom.
2. They have little sense of dignity and pride in their work. They treat work as a chore. Their only or sole motivation factor for work is money. They are not committed to learning or improvement. In fact, they see training as a waste of time and resources.
3. They are self-defeating. They are constant complainers and irritants in the workplace. Their morale is low. Their work performance is always deteriorating and they will lose out eventually to their colleagues.
4. They develop ungratefulness. They will find fault with their company, their bosses and their company's policies. Good intentions by management are misread, misunderstood and deliberately twisted. They become critical about work and cynical about life.
5. They sour relationships in the work place. Very few people enjoy working with a whiner. They tend to be fault-finders and enjoy focusing on the negatives. They expect others to perform but not themselves. Because of their self-serving attitude, they destroy teamwork.
6. They will not advance in their career or survive in their job. When their bosses do not advance their career, they become more disillusioned, and finally, they ship out. In short, hungrier, more hardworking, more positive people will soon replace them.

What happens when we are inclined to becoming disengaged? How do we manage to increase our personal engagement quotient?

1. Reexamine and realign your values

First, we need to ask, “What’s really important?” If we are driven by money, then we will only work because of it. Other people will only be perceived as functional beings or are seen either as competitors or customers. For such workers, their only loyalty and engagement is to the Almighty Dollar. They will then become very self-serving and existential.

For true engagement, our values must include integrity, respect for people, pride in our work, and healthy relationships. In our highly competitive world, it is important to realign our values.

2. Rekindle your passion

Remember the first day of our work?

Recall the passion we had when we came into the organization: the excitement, the joy and the wonder. We had great dreams. But somewhere, somehow we have lost the passion. Rekindling our passion involves recounting what makes us alive, what motivates us in our profession, what we really enjoy doing, and what are our successes and what make us successful.

3. Retool your competencies

In this fast pace environment, the competencies we have acquired in school are insufficient to help us through. I was told that IT knowledge and skills would become obsolete within six months. Unless we keep learning, we will not be able to thrive in this constant changing environment. We must be committed to unlearning, learning and relearning. There is a constant need for us to retool our competencies. Past performance, former knowledge, and old skills will not guarantee new successes.

4. Relearn your experiences

Not only must we keep up with our professional and leadership competencies, we must learn from our success and failure experiences. Too often, we go through experiences in life but we don’t learn from them. History keeps repeating itself because we don’t learn from history and make the necessary changes to rewrite the future.

5. Reenergize our team by managing differences

People are all different. Too often, we do not know how to manage differences and thus relationships become difficult. When that happens, we are unduly stressed and can become disillusioned with our bosses and colleagues. Learning how to manage differences is an important skill to reenergize our motivation. Differences do not break a team but how we manage them will.

Effective management of differences involves five perspectives:

Acknowledge: Ability to realize constantly that people have real differences. The key word is constantly.

Accept: Ability to recognize and accept the strengths and weaknesses of self and others.

Accommodate: Ability to adjust to differences and moderate one's own behaviors for the greater good.

Affirm: Ability to recognize and affirm the worth of individuals and their contributions and to manage their weaknesses.

Applaud: Ability to share in the joy of success and sorrow of failure together.

6. Rejuvenate yourself by taking strategic pauses

Our lives often seem like are over-packed suitcases bursting at the seams. In fact, we are constantly aware that we are perennially behind schedule. There is a nagging sense that there are unfinished tasks, unfulfilled promises, and unrealised potentials.

There is always something we have not done, someone we have not spoken to, write to, or visit with. There are too many papers to read, projects to complete, deadlines to meet. Our lives are stretched to the limit and somehow lack focus and direction. Does this sound familiar? Is this where we are?

We need take strategic pauses to reevaluate our direction, rekindle our passions and retool your skills.

7. Readjust your expectations

Competition is at a cut-throat speed. The only predictability is unpredictability. CEOs are constantly under pressure by shareholders. Leaders, in turn, push their managers. Managers pulverize their staff. We must moderate our own expectations. Failed business strategies, frayed nerves, more work for less pay, differing opinions and discouraging colleagues are going to be the order of the day. We have to build resilience to overcome these difficulties.

8. Reassess yourselves by being open to feedback

Openness to feedback is important to help us reengage. Engaged workers recognize their own weaknesses and failures. They are cognizant of their own folly. That is why they are open to feedback. And they assess them appropriately. Even though they may disagree with the feedback, they deal with it graciously. As someone says, "Minds, like parachutes, work better when they are open."

9. Recover from conflict

Unresolved conflicts can be demoralizing. Those who hold grudges and bitterness tend to be disengaged. Unhealed relational wounds can fester and devour us. They do not know how to move on. Sometimes, they allow bitterness and hatred to reside in their hearts and spread to their next place of work. As a result, they become suspicious and cynical. Effective conflict management is essential to staying engaged. Engaged workers know what, when and how to fight constructively. They have learned to do conflict recovery.

10. Resign from your job or organization

Finally, when all the above has been said and done and still do not work for you, the last resort may be to resign from the job. Sometimes, it has to do with job fit, organization fit or boss fit. When we find ourselves dragging our feet to work most days, perhaps it's time to take stock and make the change.

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ⁱTeo, A. (2003). Study of Employee Commitment International Survey Research. Reported in The Business Times. Singapore.